

**Speech notes for AA President
Official Conference Opening
Alzheimer's Australia 2003 National Conference**

Minister, Professor Burrows, Professor Brodaty and conference delegates – Welcome. And a special welcome to all those who have travelled from overseas and in particular the South East Asia Pacific region.

Thank you to the One Fire Aboriginal Troup for your welcome to the land.

We are all here because of our special interest in dementia. From the very personal interest of people with early stage dementia, the families and carers of those with dementia, to the professional interest of policy makers, doctors and care workers.

Alzheimer's Victoria has organised a stimulating and exciting program that has interest for all of us. We will focus over the next three days on exploring today's challenges and opening up new choices for the future.

Conferences are not an end in themselves – although those organising them might wonder if there is a life after the conference.

We want this Conference to be part of the life-blood of Alzheimer's Australia. We want it to be an opportunity where people exchange views and where we have the opportunity of understanding the priorities of the many stakeholders in our organisation.

Our goal is to build the intellectual capital of Alzheimer's Australia so that we can base our advocacy on the best information and knowledge that are available. A Conference should be a call to action and I look forward to the policy workshops and to the final session of the Conference in providing us with advice on priorities for future policy and program development.

It is a tremendous start to that goal that people with early stage dementia and carers have together produced an issues document for discussion during the Conference.

We will all hear and learn about many important things at this Conference. So I have only one message for you and that is, quite simply, that 'Dementia should be a National Health Priority'.

We all know the statistics. An important aspect of dementia is that it is so disabling. For this reason dementia is a major cause of disability burden in Australia and as a consequence loss of quality of life. Dementia will rise in importance as a cause of disability to become the largest source of disease burden in women by 2016.

We are all aware that in the wider community a view of dementia continues to focus on “senile dementia” and to regard dementia as a natural part of ageing.

Dementia should be a national health priority because we need to make the broader community aware that a positive approach is possible to this terrible condition. We know through the work of Professor Brodaty and others that quality of life can be improved by soundly based approaches to carer support.

We will learn at this Conference how psychosocial approaches can improve quality of care. We will learn about the latest developments in medical research. We now have medications that for a time and for some will improve quality of life.

We know what research can do if we set the bar high enough to demand that we want effective approaches to delaying onset or delaying progression.

We have commissioned a report from Access Economics to independently assess the case for dementia being a national health priority from an economic perspective. This report will be available later this year.

Dementia issues touch on every aspect of aged care, community care, residential care, medical services and pharmaceuticals. It is vital that dementia is not lost between bureaucratic responsibilities and divides.

A national approach supported by the Commonwealth and the States is necessary.

Lastly it is my pleasure to thank the many individuals and organisations who have supported our Conference and made it possible. I would like to thank especially our Conference sponsors:

- The two principal sponsors: The Commonwealth Government, through the Department of Health and Ageing and Pfizer.
- The platinum sponsor: The Department of Human Services in Victoria.
- The gold sponsor: Janssen Cilag.
- The silver sponsor: Silver Circle Home Support Services.
- The bronze sponsor: The Department of Veterans Affairs.
- and our Conference supporters: Sansella, Visy and Konica.

A special thanks to Graham Burrows and Alzheimer’s Victoria for making the Conference happen. I invite you all at this 10th National Conference of Alzheimer’s Australia to join us in a vision “to prevent dementia while valuing and supporting people living with dementia”.

Minister it gives me great pleasure to ask you to address this Conference and formally open it.