

Launch of Parliamentary Friends of Dementia on 15th September

Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Ministers and Shadow Ministers and Senators and Members. Thank you for this launch.

Our President, Dr Robert Yeoh, is in Malaysia and sends his apologies. But we have here today our Vice-President and President of AA South Australia, Professor John Mackellar, the President of Alzheimer's NSW David Scarlett, the President of AA ACT, Kay Pritchard, the Patron of AA ACT, Sir David Smith and the Chairman of Alzheimer's Australia Research, Jerome Rowley.

We also have people with dementia and their families at this launch. It is through their advocacy that the wider community is coming to better understand the social and economic impact of this most disabling condition.

The launch of Parliamentary Friends of Dementia is a wonderful way to mark this year's Dementia Awareness Week. It is another turning point for people with dementia and their families and carers in highlighting the importance of dementia becoming a national health priority.

The major recommendation of the Report commissioned by Alzheimer's Australia from Access Economics – The Dementia Epidemic: Economic Impact and Positive Solutions for Australia – was that dementia should be made a national health priority. Preventing the onset and progression of dementia merits a whole of Government approach.

I would like to pay particular tribute to the leadership shown by Senator Marise Payne and Sharon Grierson in convening the new cross party group. I should also like to thank Senator Calvert who I believe has been instrumental behind the scenes. And thanks too to Julie Bishop who first discussed the idea with us when we met her in WA.

Significant stigma still attaches to dementia. We hope those leading political life in this country will speak openly about dementia and draw upon experiences of dementia from their own families and constituencies. We must all do everything we can to reduce the isolation felt by those living with dementia.

A few years ago we could not talk in terms of positive solutions to this terrible condition. We now know much can be done through early intervention and the use of the first Alzheimer's medications and, through well designed ongoing support for people with dementia their families and carers.

Research holds out the hope of prevention and slowing the progression of dementia. The national goals should be to improve quality of life for those living with dementia, delay institutionalization and reduce the long term growth in the total cost of dementia care.

The immediate focus of Dementia Awareness Week 2003 is to highlight the benefit of early intervention so that people with dementia and their families can plan their futures and obtain access to support services available in the community through Alzheimer's Australia and other agencies.

I should like to thank the sponsors of DAW 2003 – the Commonwealth Government as the principal sponsor: Pfizer and Janssen-Cilag for supporting us for the third year in a row: Harold Mitchell for ensuring that our limited advertising budget is multiplied many times and the Photo Imaging Council of Australia for promoting sales of photo frames in the weeks following DAW to raise money for Alzheimer's Australia.

I should like to acknowledge too Granny Kay Worrall, a 63-year-old grandmother of 9 who has a history of dementia in her family. Granny Kay is running from Sydney to Canberra to raise money for dementia research and for Alzheimer's

Australia NSW. She will arrive at Parliament House at 11 am next Sunday - on World Alzheimer's Day.

Alzheimer's Australia looks forward to working with the new Parliamentary Group. We hope that all members of the group will make contact with our state and territory member organizations and the people they support. We are proud to be a federal organisation that has retained the identity and grass roots commitment of state and territory members while developing a truly national approach to awareness, service delivery, research and policy.

Thank you again for this wonderful launch and what it represents to a consumer movement that has experienced so many positive changes in the 20 years we have been established.

Thank you

Glenn Rees
National Executive Director
Alzheimer's Australia