

**LAUNCH OF DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK 2013**

**PARLIAMENT HOUSE,  
SYDNEY**

**SEPTEMBER 16, 2013**

**ITA BUTTROSE, AO OBE  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT, ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA**

**I AM DELIGHTED TO BE AT THE LAUNCH OF MY THIRD DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK SINCE BECOMING NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA AND TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WELCOME DR KRISTINE YAFFE, TO AUSTRALIA.**

**HOW FORTUNATE WE ARE TO HAVE SUCH AN EMINENT AMERICAN RESEARCHER HERE FOR DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK, TO TALK ABOUT THE CRITICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CHRONIC MEDICAL CONDITIONS AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT.**

**WE VALUE THE ONGOING SUPPORT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGEING FOR DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK. WHAT WE DO NATIONALLY WOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT THAT SUPPORT.**

**THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK IS "BRAIN HEALTH: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS".**

**OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO ENSURE THAT AUSTRALIANS UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DEMENTIA AND OTHER CHRONIC DISEASES SUCH AS DIABETES, HEART DISEASE AND STROKE.**

**AND TO ALSO MAKE SURE THE MAJORITY OF AUSTRALIANS WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AND A HEALTHY BRAIN COME TO UNDERSTAND BETTER WHAT THEY CAN DO TO MAXIMISE THEIR BRAIN HEALTH.**

**I'M OFTEN ASKED WHY IT IS THAT ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA GIVES PROMINENCE TO DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION BECAUSE AFTER ALL, MANY PEOPLE MAY DO ALL THE RIGHT THINGS, BUT STILL GET A DIAGNOSIS OF DEMENTIA.**

**THERE ARE ALSO CERTAIN CAUSES OF FAMILIAL DEMENTIA THAT WILL NOT BE HELPED BY CHANGES IN LIFESTYLE.**

**THE LAST THING I'D WANT TO DO IS TO MAKE ANYONE FEEL GUILTY THAT THEY HAVEN'T DONE THE RIGHT THINGS.**

**BUT WE DO HAVE A DUTY TO INFORM AUSTRALIANS ABOUT THE EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO MAXIMISE THEIR BRAIN HEALTH THROUGH THE FIVE SIMPLE STEPS SET OUT IN OUR NEW *YOUR BRAIN MATTERS* PUBLICATION.**

**WHAT WE ARE ASKING PEOPLE TO DO WILL BE NOT ONLY GOOD FOR THEIR PHYSICAL HEALTH BUT ALSO FOR THEIR BRAIN HEALTH.**

**THERE IS SO MUCH THAT IS NEGATIVE IN PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF DEMENTIA.**

**GIVEN THAT EFFECTIVE MEDICAL TREATMENTS TO MODIFY THE PROGRESSION OF DEMENTIA STILL SEEM SOME YEARS AWAY WE NEED TO GIVE PEOPLE SOME ADVICE AND INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT IT IS THEY CAN DO TO MAXIMISE THEIR BRAIN HEALTH.**

**BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THE TOP PRIORITY IN OUR ADVOCACY REMAINS ACCESS TO SERVICES AND SUPPORT, AND FUNDING FOR DEMENTIA RESEARCH.**

**I WAS PARTICULARLY PLEASED THAT AFTER TWO YEARS OF ADVOCACY, THAT THE NEWLY-ELECTED FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MADE THE COMMITMENT PRIOR TO THE ELECTION TO INVEST \$200 MILLION OVER FIVE YEARS IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH.**

**THIS COMMITMENT WILL GIVE AUSTRALIANS HOPE THAT FUTURE GENERATIONS MIGHT ESCAPE THIS TERRIBLE CHRONIC DISEASE THROUGH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF DEMENTIA AND HOW TO MODIFY ITS PROGRESSION.**

**THE NEW FUNDING WILL PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPAND DEMENTIA RESEARCH CAPACITY AND INVEST IN NEW PROJECTS.**

**ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA LOOKS FORWARD TO WORKING WITH THE NEW MINISTER FOR AGEING AND THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGEING ON STRATEGIES TO MAXIMISE THE USE OF THESE PRECIOUS RESOURCES.**

**MANY HEALTH WRITERS AND COMMENTATORS HAVE OBSERVED THAT THE DISCUSSION OF OTHER HEALTH ISSUES INCLUDING AGED CARE AND MENTAL HEALTH WAS, TO SAY THE LEAST, BLAND DURING THE ELECTION.**

**WHILE I THINK THERE IS SOME TRUTH IN THAT, THERE IS THE PROMISE OF BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR THE *LIVING LONGER. LIVING BETTER* AGED CARE REFORMS AND AS PART OF THAT TO TACKLING DEMENTIA.**

**THE COALITION'S POLICY FOR *HEALTHY LIFE, BETTER AGEING* GIVES ME SOME CONFIDENCE THAT THE HARD WORK WE'VE ALL PUT IN TO AGED CARE REFORM OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS WILL NOT BE WASTED.**

**THE POLICY DOCUMENT SETS OUT AT A HIGH LEVEL HOW THE COALITION WILL TAKE FORWARD THE AGED CARE REFORMS.**

**THERE IS A WELCOME FOCUS ON THE PROVISION OF HIGH QUALITY OF AGED CARE.**

**THERE IS AN IMPORTANT RECOGNITION IN THE COALITION'S POLICY THAT THERE HAVE BEEN INSTANCES WHERE VULNERABLE MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY HAVE BEEN LET DOWN BY THE QUALITY OF AGED CARE.**

**IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS WE HAVE SEEN SEVEN *LATELINE* REPORTS THAT HAVE BEEN CAUSE FOR CONCERN.**

**THESE STORIES AND THE LETTERS AND EMAILS I RECEIVE ABOUT THIS TOPIC ARE DISTURBING. IT'S NOT ACCEPTABLE THAT SOME PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA ARE BEING EXPOSED TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ABUSE AND THE USE OF PHYSICAL AND CHEMICAL RESTRAINTS OFTEN WITHOUT CONSENT.**

**I KNOW THERE ARE MANY AGED CARE SERVICES PROVIDING GOOD QUALITY CARE AND STAFF WHO ARE DEEPLY COMMITTED TO WHAT THEY DO.**

**BUT THE POINT REMAINS THAT THERE SHOULD BE ZERO TOLERANCE FOR CARE THAT DOES NOT GIVE OLDER AUSTRALIANS THE DIGNITY WHICH THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPECT IN THEIR SENIOR YEARS.**

**GIVEN THE FOCUS THIS ISSUE HAS BEEN GIVEN IN THE COALITION'S POLICY, I HOPE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS, WE CAN LOOK FORWARD TO POSITIVE ACTION TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE CARE AND SUPPORT THAT OLDER AUSTRALIANS RECEIVE.**

**REGULATION FOR THE SAKE OF IT WILL NOT GET US TO WHERE WE NEED TO BE.**



**IN SPITE OF THE BEST INTENTIONED EFFORTS, IT SEEMS THAT NEITHER THE WORK OF THE AGED CARE STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION AGENCY NOR THE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM HAS GIVEN CONSUMERS THE CONFIDENCE THEY NEED IN THE SERVICES THAT ARE PROVIDED.**

**ON THE CONTRARY THERE IS OFTEN A PERVASIVE ATMOSPHERE OF FEAR.**

**IN SPITE OF THE EXPENDITURE OF CONSIDERABLE SUMS OF MONEY AND A GREAT DEAL OF BUREAUCRACY IT SEEMS THAT WE ARE NO CLEARER ABOUT THE CARE OUTCOMES BEING ACHIEVED OR HAVING THE MEANS TO PROTECT THOSE WHO ARE THE VICTIMS OF INADEQUATE CARE.**

**MANY WILL ARGUE IT'S DUE TO FUNDING DEFICIENCIES. THERE IS TRUTH IN THAT BUT I THINK THE CAUSES GO DEEPER TO A CULTURE IN SOME SERVICES WHERE THERE IS SIMPLY NO RESPECT FOR THE RESIDENT.**

**I CANNOT EXPLAIN IN ANY OTHER WAY SOME OF THE INSTANCES REPORTED ON *LATELINE* AND IN THE EMAILS AND LETTERS I'VE RECEIVED.**

**I THINK THIS WILL BE A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE FOR THE NEW MINISTER FOR AGEING. ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA LOOKS FORWARD TO WORKING WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES ARE IN PLACE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF CARE AND TO REPORT OUTCOMES TO CONSUMERS IN A TRANSPARENT WAY.**

**I BELIEVE THOSE STRATEGIES SHOULD INCLUDE:**

- **AN INDEPENDENT COST OF CARE STUDY IN RESIDENTIAL CARE TO ENSURE FUNDING IS ADEQUATE FOR THE PROVISION OF HIGH QUALITY CARE.**
- **CULTURAL CHANGE IN TRAINING TO ACHIEVE RESPECT AND PERSON CENTRED CARE.**

- **REGULATORY ACTIONS TO ADDRESS THE OVER PRESCRIPTION OF ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE PUBLIC REPORTING ON THE USE OF THESE MEDICATIONS AND PHYSICAL RESTRAINTS ON THE *MYAGE WEBSITE***
- **MAKING SURE COMPLAINTS THAT RELATE TO MEDICATION AND PHYSICAL RESTRAINTS ARE HANDLED QUICKLY AND THAT GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF PSYCHOTROPIC MEDICATION AND RESTRAINTS ARE STRICTLY OBSERVED.**
- **FINANCIAL INCENTIVES – AS IS NOW THE CASE THROUGH THE *LIVING LONGER. LIVING BETTER* DEMENTIA SUPPLEMENTS – TO ENSURE THERE IS EXTRA FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR THE MORE DIFFICULT CARE TASKS.**
- **ACCESS TO BETTER MEDICAL CARE. IN THAT CONTEXT I AM ENCOURAGED BY THE FACT THAT SOME RESIDENTIAL CARE PROVIDERS ARE LOOKING AT THE DIFFERENCE IT WOULD MAKE TO HAVE DOCTORS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES.**

FROM A CONSUMER VIEWPOINT I ALSO WELCOME THE RECOGNITION IN THE COALITION'S POLICY OF THE NEED FOR A MORE SIMPLIFIED INFORMATION SYSTEM TO ASSIST OLDER AUSTRALIANS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO ACCESS THE INFORMATION THEY NEED.

NEW APPROACHES ARE NEEDED THAT BUILD ON THE NETWORKS THAT EXIST IN THE COMMUNITY THROUGH AGENCIES SUCH AS CARERS AUSTRALIA AND ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA. THE PROPOSED *LIVING BETTER. LIVING LONGER* GATEWAY AND *MYAGE WEBSITE* CANNOT DO IT ALL AND MANY OLDER PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES WANT ON-GOING FACE TO FACE ADVICE FROM PEOPLE THEY KNOW.

ANOTHER CHALLENGE FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE TO BUILD ON DEMENTIA AS A NATIONAL HEALTH PRIORITY AREA. THE COMMITMENT TO DEMENTIA RESEARCH IS A GOOD START.

**THERE IS SO MUCH THAT IS OF IMPORTANCE TO CONSUMERS PARTICULARLY THE NEED OF RECEIVING A TIMELY DIAGNOSIS AND BETTER CARE IN HOSPITALS.**

**A TIMELY DIAGNOSIS IS ONE THAT RESPONDS TO THE INDIVIDUAL'S CONCERNS AND THE PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT OF THE DOCTOR.**

**IF THE CARE AND SUPPORT THAT PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA NEED IS TO BE ACHIEVED ACROSS THE HEALTH AND AGED CARE SYSTEMS AUSTRALIA WILL REQUIRE A NEW NATIONAL ACTION FRAMEWORK ON DEMENTIA SUPPORTED BY COMMONWEALTH STATE AND TERRITORY MINISTERS.**

**RETURNING TO TODAY'S LAUNCH, IT'S VITAL THAT IN ITS WORK ON PREVENTIVE HEALTH THE NEW GOVERNMENT RECOGNISES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LINKS BETWEEN PHYSICAL AND BRAIN HEALTH.**

**IT WOULD COST LITTLE TO RECOGNISE IN CAMPAIGNS DIRECTED AT ALCOHOL, SMOKING AND OBESITY THAT IT'S NOT JUST PHYSICAL HEALTH THAT IS AT RISK BUT BRAIN HEALTH AS WELL.**

**WE ALL KNOW, NO MATTER HOW STRONG THE EVIDENCE, HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO CHANGE INDIVIDUAL LIFESTYLES. BUT SURELY IT ADDS WEIGHT TO THE ARGUMENT THAT IT'S NOT ONLY A PERSON'S PHYSICAL HEALTH THAT'S BEING DAMAGED BY POOR LIFESTYLES BUT ALSO THEIR BRAIN HEALTH.**

**THIS SEEMS TO BE AN AREA WHERE, WITH A BIT OF IMAGINATION, HEALTH FUNDING COULD BE USED MORE EFFECTIVELY.**

**IT'S ONLY IN THE LAST EIGHT YEARS THAT DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION HAS STARTED TO GAIN SOME PUBLIC ATTENTION.**

**WE'RE STILL AT THE BEGINNING OF WHAT WILL BE A LONG PROCESS IN CHANGING COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TO DEMENTIA AS A CHRONIC DISEASE RATHER THAN AN INEVITABLE PART OF AGEING.**

**WE SHOULD CELEBRATE THE FACT THAT AUSTRALIA HAS THE ONLY PUBLICLY-FUNDED DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION PROGRAM IN THE WORLD.**

**WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGEING FOR THE SUPPORT AND RECOGNITION THEY HAVE GIVEN TO AN ISSUE THAT, ONLY A FEW YEARS AGO, WAS NOT ON THEIR AGENDA.**

**I CONGRATULATE ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA NSW AND THE OTHER MEMBERS OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA ON THE EXTRAORDINARY EFFORT THAT IS MADE DURING DEMENTIA AWARENESS K – AND INDEED DURING THE REST OF THE YEAR TO GET DEMENTIA ON TO THE POLITICAL AND COMMUNITY RADAR.**

**I HOPE YOU ALL HAVE A SUCCESSFUL DEMENTIA AWARENESS WEEK AND ENJOY THE INSIGHTFUL PRESENTATION BY OUR INTERNATIONAL GUEST SPEAKER, DR KRISTINE YAFFE.**

**THANK YOU.**