

Thank you Teresa for welcoming us to this important event to celebrate Dementia Awareness Month. My thanks to all of you for attending today and for your support.

I welcome this first opportunity to speak to you as the National President of Alzheimer's Australia. It is a great privilege.

As many of you would know, my commitment comes from my mother's diagnosis of dementia and the resolve of my family to do what we can to ensure that other families in the future never have to experience what we did.

It is early days for me in this role, but my ambition is to address three main priorities.

Firstly, to continue the organisation's vision of making Australia a dementia-friendly nation.

Secondly, to improve access to quality community and residential dementia care.

Thirdly, to ensure that the investment in dementia research is not only increased but used effectively into the detection, prevention and cure of the disease.

Today we are here to talk about making Australia dementia friendly.

I know only too well, from my mother's experience, the isolation and stigma associated with a diagnosis of dementia.

First her lifetime friends deserted her – they could not cope with her sometimes confusion.

A lifetime of friendship did not store up enough reserves of care and compassion to help carry her through her tough journey.

I can recall my mother at gatherings of her extended family – brothers and sisters in law and her nieces and nephews - addressing them all as “darling” because she could not remember their names or perhaps remember them at all.

The cancellation of her driver’s licence further isolated her from her normal daily activities of shopping and visiting her grandchildren.

It was so important to my mother and the family that our friends and family learnt how to communicate with our mother and did not avoid contact because of social embarrassment. It is the small things in life that matter.

There are more than 332,000 Australians living with dementia and an estimated 1.2 million people involved in their care.

That is nearly one million people who are at risk of being socially isolated and discriminated against, unless we all play our part. And by 2050 the number will multiply by three unless medical science finds some better treatments – perhaps a cure! .

A dementia friendly community is one in which people with dementia are supported to have active and meaningful lives. It is as simple as a volunteer buddy program, or staff at the local store who have an understanding of dementia.

Alzheimer's Australia has released a publication which describes some of the initiatives already happening in Australia "**The first steps to a dementia-friendly Australia**". Please take a copy today.

We believe that people with dementia must be at the centre of the development of dementia-friendly communities. We are currently engaging as a consultant a person with dementia, **Kate Swaffer** who you will hear from later, to inform the work we are doing.

We also undertook our first survey focused on the experiences of people with dementia.

I am pleased to launch the report – also available here today - "**Living with dementia in the community**".

The results of the survey have highlighted just how overwhelming the social impact of living with dementia really is - 59% of people with dementia thought that people avoided spending time with them because of their diagnosis and more than 40% of participants wished they had more social contact with people in their community.

One respondent said "sometimes my social death makes me more sad than the changes to my brain and the loss of my memories. It makes me so angry. I just want to be counted as a person again".

Another stated “I have lost almost all of my friends and the few I have I see once a year or even once every 2 years. I have one friend who I see about every 4 months”.

To tackle this social isolation, participants identified priorities in creating dementia-friendly communities, including:

- Increasing dementia awareness
- Improving access to social activities, including employment
- Access to appropriate health and care services
- And improved physical environments

This month Alzheimer’s Australia has hosted events across Australia – like this one - to raise awareness and promote local dementia-friendly initiatives. We have also launched a toolkit for communities and businesses to learn more about becoming dementia friendly. I encourage you all to visit dementiafriendly.org.au to view these new resources.

These priorities build on the great work that Ita did as president and that she is doing now as national ambassador for Alzheimer’s Australia.

I would now like to introduce our next two speakers. The Honourable Minister Kevin Andrews, the Minister for Social Services, is a late apology but his place will be taken by the Parliamentary Speaker to the Minister, Concietta Ferravanti-Wells. She will firstly speak about the government’s commitment to improving dementia care.

This will then be followed by Ms Kate Swaffer, the chairperson of the Alzheimer's Australia Dementia Advisory Committee, who will be speaking about the role of people with dementia in creating dementia-friendly communities across Australia.

Firstly please welcome, Concetta. Thank you.

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