

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC
NEW PREMISES, PARKVILLE, MELBOURNE**

OCTOBER 23, 2013

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NATIONAL PRESIDENT – ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA**

I AM DELIGHTED TO BE HERE TODAY AND TO JOIN WITH YOU IN CELEBRATING THE MANY OPPORTUNITIES THIS FLAGSHIP BUILDING PRESENTS.

I WANT TO CONGRATULATE ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC ON ACHIEVING 30 YEARS OF CARING IN THIS STATE. I AM CERTAIN THERE ARE COUNTLESS PEOPLE WHO ARE THANKFUL FOR YOUR SUPPORT.

AS MAREE AND GRAEME HAVE SAID, THERE ARE SO MANY PROMISING ELEMENTS TO THIS FACILITY IN TERMS OF RESHAPING THE PERCEPTIONS OF DEMENTIA AS A CHRONIC DISEASE AND THE CARE MODELS AVAILABLE.

THIS NEW BUILDING AND CONCEPT, LIKE SO MANY OTHER WONDERFUL THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, MAY BLIND US TO FACT THAT TRANSLATING POLICY AND PROGRAM CHANGE TO THE LIVES OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA IS A SLOW PROCESS.

THAT'S NOT IN ITSELF SURPRISING GIVEN THE CENTURIES OF STIGMA AND SOCIAL ISOLATION THAT PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR FAMILIES HAVE ENDURED.

WE SHOULD OF COURSE CELEBRATE THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S AGED CARE REFORMS AND THE COMMITMENT TO TACKLING DEMENTIA, AND KEY ISSUES SUCH AS TIMELY DIAGNOSIS, MAKING HOSPITALS SAFER, DEMENTIA RISK REDUCTION AND THE FUNDING OF DEMENTIA CARE IN COMMUNITY AND RESIDENTIAL SERVICES.

BUT WE STILL HAVE FAR TO GO AS THE STORIES OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR FAMILY CARERS CONSTANTLY REMIND US.

IT'S FOR THIS REASON THAT SOCIAL ACTION THROUGH OUR FIGHT DEMENTIA CAMPAIGN AND OUR GOAL OF MAKING COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONS DEMENTIA FRIENDLY IS SO IMPORTANT.

WE NEED TO GET AN UNDERSTANDING OF DEMENTIA ACROSS TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY AND TO THOSE WHO PROVIDE SERVICES TO PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA SUCH AS CENTRELINK, BANKS, INSURANCE COMPANIES AND RETAILERS.

CREATING DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES IS ONE OF OUR PRIORITIES AND FROM WHAT I HAVE SEEN TODAY THIS CONCEPT IS ALSO BEING EMBRACED IN VICTORIA WITH THE DESIGN OF THIS BUILDING.

BEING DEMENTIA FRIENDLY IS ABOUT DEVELOPING WAYS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL INCLUSION AS WELL AS AWARENESS ABOUT DEMENTIA. IT IS ALL TO DO WITH HOW SOCIETY EMBRACES PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA TO ENSURE THEIR NEEDS ARE ADDRESSED IN BOTH THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT.

THE IDEA IS GAINING INTERNATIONAL MOMENTUM WITH INNOVATIVE WORK TAKING PLACE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND BELGIUM, AND NOW HERE IN AUSTRALIA.

WE OWE IT TO THE MORE THAN 320,000 AUSTRALIANS OF ALL AGES WHO HAVE DEMENTIA TO MAKE SURE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THAT DEMENTIA IS NOT A NATURAL PART OF AGEING. IT IS A CHRONIC DISEASE WITH A PATHOLOGY THAT DEVELOPS YEARS BEFORE FIRST SYMPTOMS APPEAR.

DEMENTIA ALSO IMPACTS ON THE LIVES OF 24,000 PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA UNDER THE AGE OF 65, YET IT IS ONLY IN THE LAST DECADE THAT THIS GROUP HAS STARTED TO RECEIVE THE ATTENTIONS IT SO URGENTLY NEEDS TO ACCESS APPROPRIATE SUPPORT AND CARE.

THE MAJORITY OF AUSTRALIANS DON'T UNDERSTAND THAT THROUGH ADOPTING LIFESTYLES WHICH ARE GOOD FOR THEIR PHYSICAL HEALTH THEY MAY BE ABLE TO REDUCE THEIR RISK OF DEMENTIA

THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND EITHER THE LINKS BETWEEN DEMENTIA AND OTHER CHRONIC DISEASES SUCH AS DIABETES, HEART DISEASE AND OBESITY.

IT IS EXCITING THAT IN RECENT TIMES WE HAVE GAINED SO MANY NEW INSIGHTS INTO DEMENTIA THROUGH RESEARCH, BUT IT IS DAUNTING THAT WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO TO ACHIEVE A WIDER UNDERSTANDING OF DEMENTIA.

RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN SOME GOOD NEWS. IT APPEARS THAT FOR A GIVEN POPULATION COHORT, THE RISK OF DEVELOPING ALZHEIMER'S MIGHT ACTUALLY GO DOWN.

FINDINGS FROM THE UK AND DENMARK INDICATE THAT CONVENTIONAL THINKING ABOUT THE IMMUTABILITY OF DEMENTIA PREVALENCE RATES MAY BE WRONG.

THE STUDIES CHALLENGE THE ASSUMPTION THAT PREVALENCE RATES OF DEMENTIA ARE CONSTANT ACROSS GENERATIONS AND THAT THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA IS SIMPLY A FUNCTION OF THE NUMBER OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE POPULATION.

OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES IN ENGLAND AND WALES, DEMENTIA RATES HAVE DROPPED BY 24 PER CENT AMONG THOSE 65 AND OLDER.

IN DENMARK THE PERCENTAGE OF THOSE AGED OVER 90 WHOSE COGNITIVE ABILITIES WERE SEVERELY IMPAIRED ALSO DROPPED BETWEEN 1998 AND 2010.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ARGUMENT IS THAT ALTHOUGH THE RISK OF DEMENTIA FOR ANY POPULATION MAY DECLINE OVER TIME – AND EVEN THAT MAY BE UNCERTAIN – THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA WILL CONTINUE TO RISE AS LONG AS OUR POPULATION CONTINUES TO GET OLDER.

BUT WHAT WE KNOW NOW IS THAT SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS OR EVEN SLIGHTLY YOUNGER COHORTS SEPARATED BY AS LITTLE AS 10 YEARS MIGHT NOT HAVE THE SAME RISK.

IT IS AN ENCOURAGING THOUGHT THAT OUR GRANDCHILDREN MAY BE LESS LIKELY TO DEVELOP DEMENTIA THAN WE ARE.

AND HOW EXCITING TO THINK ABOUT DESIGNING THE RESEARCH WE NEED, TO FIND OUT WHY THESE SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES HAVE HAPPENED.

ALTHOUGH MAJOR FACTORS COULD HAVE INCREASED DEMENTIA PREVALENCE AT SPECIFIC AGES – SUCH AS THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH DIABETES, SURVIVAL AFTER STROKES, AND VASCULAR INCIDENTS – OTHER FACTORS WHICH COULD DECREASE PREVALENCE, SUCH AS IMPROVED PREVENTION OF VASCULAR MORBIDITY AND HIGHER LEVELS OF EDUCATION SEEM TO HAVE A GREATER EFFECT.

IT'S ESSENTIAL THAT DEMENTIA IS SEEN AS A SOCIAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE AS WELL AS A MEDICAL ISSUE.

I AM SURE THAT THE AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR FAMILIES WILL QUICKLY ADMIT THAT IT'S THE IMPACT OF A DIAGNOSIS ON THEIR DAILY LIVES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS THAT IS BEEN MOST UPSETTING.

PEOPLE OFTEN ASSOCIATE DEMENTIA WITH ONLY MEMORY CHANGES AND FORGET HOW IT CAN AFFECT BEHAVIOURS, COMMUNICATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND THE ABILITY TO UNDERTAKE EVERY DAY TASKS.

WE KNOW FROM TALKING AND LISTENING TO AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA THAT SOCIAL ISOLATION AND STIGMA ARE TWO OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES THEY FACE IN EVERYDAY LIFE – AFTER A DIAGNOSIS OF DEMENTIA FAMILY AND FRIENDS OFTEN STOP CALLING AND VISITING.

A STUDY LAST YEAR SHOWED THAT 60 PER CENT OF THOSE SURVEYED INDICATED THAT IF THEY RECEIVED A DIAGNOSIS OF DEMENTIA THEY WOULD FEEL A SENSE OF SHAME; NEARLY HALF SAID THAT THEY WOULD BE HUMILIATED BY THE DIAGNOSIS.

APPROXIMATELY 1 IN 5 SAID THEY WOULD FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE SPENDING TIME WITH A PERSON WHO HAS DEMENTIA.

IT IS UNACCEPTABLE FOR PEOPLE TO LIVE IN SHAME AND BE ISOLATED FROM THEIR COMMUNITY BECAUSE THEY HAVE A MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS OF DEMENTIA.

THIS EXCELLENT BUILDING GIVES ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC A NEW AND TIMELY OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE IMPORTANT DEMENTIA MESSAGES TO THE GENERAL COMMUNITY.

I'M CONFIDENT THAT TODAY WILL MARK THE BEGINNING OF A NEW DIRECTION FOR ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC AND INDEED FOR ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA AS A WHOLE.

IT IS A POSITIVE STEP TOWARDS A DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY AUSTRALIA.

EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGY IS SUCH AN ESSENTIAL PART OF BETTER SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA AND OF UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA. IN THIS BUILDING THERE IS ACCESS TO NEW EXPERIENCES IN THE WORLD OF VIRTUAL REALITIES AND 'SERIOUS GAMING'.

I HAVE HAD MY OWN 'IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE' USING THE GAMING TECHNOLOGY THAT HAS BEEN ADAPTED FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES AS PART OF THE NEW DEMENTIA LEARNING CENTRE.

INSIDE THE CENTRE THERE IS DOUGHNUT-SHAPED LIGHTING, AND A MASSIVE 10 METRE BY 2 METRE WALL THAT CAN HAVE A SEAMLESS IMAGE PROJECTED ACROSS ITS WIDTH AND BREADTH, AN INTERACTIVE TOUCH SCREEN AND GESTURE- SENSOR TECHNOLOGY....ALL WITH THE AIM OF INCORPORATING LIGHT, SOUND, COLOUR AND VISUALS INTO A DEMENTIA LEARNING EXPERIENCE... AGED AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS WILL BE TAKEN INTO THE WORLD OF A PERSON LIVING WITH DEMENTIA; AND TO THINK LIKE A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA.

FOR INSTANCE, WHAT GOES THROUGH THEIR MIND WHEN CONFRONTED WITH A CHOICE OF DOORS?

HOW DO THEY DECIDE WHICH DOOR IS THE RIGHT ONE?

WHEN FACED WITH AN ENTIRELY WHITE ROOM, HOW DO THEY DISTINGUISH THE FLOOR FROM THE WALL? AND FROM THE TOILET? AND FROM THE HAND BASIN? IF THE FLOOR IS SHINY AND WHITE, DO THEY KNOW IT IS TILES? OR DO THEY SEE A POOL OF WATER? CAN THEY STAND ON IT OR WILL THEY SINK?

PARTICIPANTS WILL GET A SENSE OF WHAT IT IS LIKE FOR THE PERSON THEY ARE CARING FOR. THE INTENTION IS TO LEAD THEM INTO THINKING DIFFERENTLY IN THEIR APPROACH TO CARING.

AND NEXT TIME A CARER IS TRYING TO ASSIST A PERSON WITH DEMENTIA TO THE BATHROOM, THEY WILL BETTER UNDERSTAND WHY THE PERSON MIGHT HESITATE; WHY THEY MIGHT GET AGITATED; WHY THEY MIGHT TAKE A LITTLE CONVINCING TO STEP INTO THE ROOM.

THESE MIGHT SEEM TO BE INSIGNIFICANT EXAMPLES BUT THEY ARE CRITICAL IN DAY-TO DAY LIFE.

AGED CARE WORKERS TELL US THAT OFTEN THE MOST CHALLENGING TIME IS IN THE BATHROOM. IF THE DAILY ACTIVITY OF ASSISTING SOMEONE WITH DEMENTIA IN AND OUT OF THE BATHROOM CAN BE APPROACHED WITH LESS STRESS AND IN A MORE PERSON-CENTRED WAY, THE WHOLE PROCESS WILL BE MORE EFFICIENT, MORE ENJOYABLE. AND MOST IMPORTANTLY THE PERSON WITH DEMENTIA WILL BE CARED FOR WITH THE DIGNITY AND RESPECT THEY DESERVE.

IT'S MY HOPE THAT THE TRAINING I HAVE WITNESSED TODAY WILL, IN THE FUTURE, SEE SERVICE PROVIDERS LIKE BANKING, RETAIL, AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO NAME A FEW, PROPERLY TRAINED TO UNDERSTAND AND COMMUNICATE WITH PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA.

THE DEMENTIA- LEARNING CENTRE IS JUST ONE PART OF THIS DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT ON OFFER.

IT HAS BEEN NOT ONLY DESIGNED FOR EDUCATION BUT WILL BE ALSO OFFERED TO CARERS AN PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA TO PROVIDE A RELAXING ENVIRONMENT – TO GIVE CARERS AND THE PERSON WITH DEMENTIA A BREAK FROM EVERY DAY CHALLENGES.

THE CENTRE WILL ENHANCE THE VISIBILITY OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY. ITS LOCATION WILL HELP THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW PARTNERSHIPS WITH RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS WITH RELATED MISSIONS AND OFFERS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR DIRECT COLLABORATION WITH WORLD-CLASS INSTITUTIONS OF RESEARCH.

THESE INCLUDE THE FLOREY INSTITUTE OF NEUROSCIENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH WHICH IS THE LARGEST NEUROLOGICAL RESEARCH CENTRE IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE; THE NATIONAL AGEING RESEARCH INSTITUTE, THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, AND WITHIN THIS BUILDING – THE AUSTRALIAN IMAGING, BIOMARKER & LIFESTYLE FLAGSHIP STUDY OF AGEING.

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCHERS IN ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND OTHER DEMENTIAS HAVE MADE THEIR MARK WORLDWIDE AND CONTINUE TO DO AND ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC IS NOW POSITIONED TO BE PART OF 'THE BRAIN CENTRE' OF MELBOURNE.

WHEN WE ASK OUR CONSUMERS WHAT THEY WANT – THEY WANT A CURE. CLEARLY RESEARCH IS THE KEY TO THEIR FUTURE; TO THE FUTURE OF ALL OF US.

BY BUILDING ON OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA, AT NATIONAL AND STATE LEVELS, CAN BETTER COLLABORATE WITH OUR NATION'S LEADING RESEARCHERS AND OPEN DOORS FOR MORE PARTNERSHIPS.

WE WILL BE BETTER INFORMED THROUGH THESE RELATIONSHIPS AND BETTER EQUIPPED TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO OUR CONSUMERS AND HOPEFULLY INSPIRE THEM TO PARTICIPATE MORE IN RESEARCH, LIKE THE AUSTRALIAN IMAGING BIOMARKERS AND LIFESTYLE STUDY WHICH ULTIMATELY WILL LEAD TO BETTER PRACTICE IN CARE AND BETTER TREATMENTS.

WITH A HIGHER PRIORITY FOR DEMENTIA RESEARCH AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS LIKE THIS NEW CENTRE IN VICTORIA, I BELIEVE WE CAN BEGIN MOVING TOWARDS A WORLD WITHOUT DEMENTIA.

AS BOTH AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AND NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA I HAVE SPOKEN OUT ABOUT THE NEED FOR A GREATER INVESTMENT IN DEMENTIA RESEARCH, AND IT SEEMS MY WORDS HAVE NOT FALLEN ON DEAF EARS.

I WANT TO CONGRATULATE OUR NEW PRIME MINISTER TONY ABBOTT, AND THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, PETER DUTTON, FOR TAKING THE INITIATIVE AND COMMITTING TO AN ADDITIONAL \$200 MILLION FUNDING TO DEMENTIA RESEARCH OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.

ALONG WITH OUR NATIONAL CEO, GLENN REES, I'VE HAD SOME EARLY DISCUSSIONS WITH PROFESSOR WARWICK ANDERSON, THE CEO OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA (NHMRC) WHO WILL DISTRIBUTE THE RESEARCH FUNDS.

WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO WORKING WITH THE NHMRC AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT THIS MONEY IS SPENT WHERE IT IS MOST NEEDED.

WE BELIEVE IT'S TIME TO THINK IN NEW WAYS ABOUT HOW WE TACKLE DEMENTIA. THIS INCLUDES ESTABLISHING A NEW NATIONAL DEMENTIA INSTITUTE, A MAJOR INITIATIVE THAT WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THE GLOBAL EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND DEMENTIA.

IT WOULD BRIDGE DISCIPLINES AND BRING TOGETHER LEADING THINKERS FROM FIELDS SUCH AS IMMUNOLOGY, DIABETES AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE, A SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATION GIVEN THE MANY SHARED RISK FACTORS AND PROCESSES BETWEEN CHRONIC DISEASE.

WE MUST ALSO ENSURE THE NEW FUNDING IS USED TO DEVELOP DEMENTIA RESEARCH CAPACITY BECAUSE WITHOUT NEW RESEARCHERS, WE WON'T HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ANSWER THE MANY PRESSING QUESTIONS THAT WE WILL FACE IN THE FUTURE.

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN INVOLVING CONSUMERS IN RESEARCH THROUGH OUR NATIONWIDE CONSUMER DEMENTIA RESEARCH NETWORK AND UNDERTAKING KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION – GETTING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE.

WE HAVE ESTABLISHED THE ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA NATIONAL QUALITY DEMENTIA CARE INITIATIVE, WITH SUPPORT FROM THE J O AND JR WICKING ANZ TRUST AND BUPA CARE SERVICES, TO PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION IN KEY AREAS. THESE INCLUDE PROJECTS SUCH AS DOMESTIC AND RESIDENTIAL CARE DESIGN AND PERSON-CENTRED CARE USING MONTESSORI TECHNIQUES.

I'M PLEASED TO REPORT SOME OF THESE HAVE BEEN IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC AS WELL AS OTHER MEMBER ORGANISATIONS.

IT IS PLEASING TOO THAT ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC AND THE NATIONAL BODY, WITH THE SUPPORT OF ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR MICHAEL WOODWARD, HAVE WORKED SO WELL TOGETHER ON NEW RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS.

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL WE ARE ALSO PARTNERS IN THE NHMRC'S FIRST PARTNERSHIP CENTRE TO IMPLEMENT RESEARCH INFORMED CHANGES IN HEALTH AND CARE SYSTEMS. THIS IS A \$25 MILLION PROJECT OVER FIVE YEARS.

IT IS ONLY BY WORKING TOGETHER WITHIN ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA AND ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH RESEARCH BODIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS THAT WE WILL SUCCEED IN RESEARCH AND ITS TRANSLATION INTO PRACTICE.

I AM VERY MUCH ENCOURAGED THAT WITH THE OPENING OF THIS FACILITY WE HAVE MADE A POSITIVE STEP TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA AND THEIR CARERS.

BEFORE CLOSING I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR NATIONAL VICE PRESIDENT NEIL SAMUEL WHO IS ALSO VICE PRESIDENT OF ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VIC. NEIL'S TERM AS A NATIONAL DIRECTOR IS ABOUT TO END I WANT TO THANK HIM FOR THE TREMENDOUS SUPPORT HE HAS GIVEN ME AND FOR THE OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION HE HAS MADE TO OUR ORGANISATION DURING HIS SIX YEARS AS A DIRECTOR. THANK YOU NEIL.

IT NOW GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO OFFICIALLY DECLARE OPEN THE ALZHEIMER'S AUSTRALIA VICTORIA'S LEARNING SERVICES FLAGSHIP – I WISH IT WELL.

THANK YOU.