Media Release

Flexible services a must for people with dementia in regional NSW

The issues faced by people with dementia are compounded for those living in regional NSW because of distance and isolation leading to calls for policy makers to be more innovative and flexible to ensure services are available to meet their needs.

A new discussion paper Living with Dementia in Regional NSW, released today by Alzheimer’s Australia NSW, has found that the complex issues faced by people with dementia are made worse for people in regional areas who often have to travel long distances to access medical and support services, face long waiting periods to see a GP, have little or no access to specialists and have limited choice when it comes to aged care and respite places.

As well, the discussion paper found there were lengthy waiting periods to access home care packages and, when packages did become available, those eligible often did not receive the hours they needed due to travel costs reducing their service time.

Alzheimer’s Australia NSW CEO The Hon. John Watkins said there needs to be greater flexibility and understanding by policy makers and service providers of the types of challenges faced by people in regional NSW.

“People with dementia and carers living in regional, rural and remote NSW have a right to access good quality dementia care and support services,” Mr Watkins said.

“Governments have attempted to address these issues, however the challenges still remain.

“The good news is there are some great examples of quality care and service provision already happening.

“Services like the Mobile Respite Team – a mobile support service that can travel to people’s homes in more remote areas operating out of the Alzheimer’s Australia NSW’s Bega centre - and the Telehealth service operated by the Western NSW Local Health District Aged Care Service, which uses technology to enable local staff to facilitate consultations over the internet for people with dementia with metropolitan-based specialists, show that geographical barriers can be overcome.

“As well, providing staff training to build expertise in dementia and to be sensitive to the differing needs of people in regional areas can also go a long way to making a big difference.

“For example, The Whiddon Group, which provides residential and community care to elderly Australians across regional NSW, collaborated with the Arts Health Institute to implement the Play Up Program – a humour-based therapy program for people with dementia – in all 19 of their care homes, which has helped manage challenging behavior and reduce reliance on medication.”

The Whiddon Group’s Chief Operating Officer Jo Caughtry said that innovative humour and arts-based programs like Play Up make a huge difference to clients and their day-to-day enjoyment of life.
“Having strong links to the community and fostering partnerships with other local health services is very important to providing quality care that can enrich lives for people with dementia, particularly in regional and remote areas where specialist resources are hard to come by,” Ms Caughtry said.

“We collaborate regularly with hospitals and Medicare locals to gain specialist training for brain injury induced dementia, for example, and to provide our clients with more opportunities for social interaction and connection with their communities.

“We recognise that there is a need to further grow our partnerships and recommend that more incentives and opportunities are provided by the NSW Government and NSW Health for providers and health services to collaborate and share resources, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas.”

The discussion paper makes a raft of recommendations, including:

- that the NSW Government fund the services, programs and initiatives outlined in the Dementia Services Framework Implementation Plan to improve the support that people with dementia and carers in regional and rural NSW receive;
- that the NSW Government implement quality of care standards for its regional and rural Multipurpose Services which respond to the needs of people with dementia and carers;
- any Government funding for dementia-specific services have flexible guidelines to encourage innovation, and
- communities across regional NSW look at strategies to develop dementia-friendly communities.

The discussion paper was launched at a briefing at NSW Parliament House today. Living with Dementia in Regional NSW was sponsored by The Whiddon Group.

An international photo exhibition, which features images of people with dementia from around the world, as well as from Sydney, the Hunter and the Central Coast, was also officially opened at NSW Parliament House today.

The Love, Loss and Laughter: Seeing Dementia Differently exhibition has been touring the country and is in Sydney – its final stop of the national tour - at the Fountain Court at NSW Parliament House until 27 November.

Almost 100 photographs of people living with dementia are included, taken by American sociologist Cathy Greenblat. The images offer a unique, compassionate and positive portrayal of people living with dementia. The exhibition has already toured throughout America, Asia and Europe.

The exhibition has been made possible by the generous sponsorship of Eli Lilly and Nutricia.

Alzheimer’s Australia NSW is the charity for people with dementia and their families and carers. As the peak body, it provides advocacy, support services, education and information. More than 320,000 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach more than half a million by 2030.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500
An interpreter service is available
(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)
Dementia is a National Health Priority Area

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