MEDIA RELEASE
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Leading experts call for national approach to Alzheimer’s disease

A panel of experts in the field of dementia care have called for an urgent national approach to the diagnosis and care of people with dementia given the critical shortage in Australia’s dementia care workforce, following the finding of a new report launched today at the Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) Conference in Melbourne.

Stemming from a roundtable discussion between a team of leading health professionals from around the country, the report provides a multidisciplinary perspective on barriers and potential solutions as part of a national approach to the diagnosis, treatment and care of Australians living with dementia.

Australian of the Year and National President of Alzheimer’s Australia, Ita Buttrose, will launch the report, Collaborating for a better future for Australians living with Alzheimer’s disease, released by Alzheimer’s Australia and sponsored by pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly Australia (Lilly).

Ms Buttrose said that the report will provide valuable input to the development of a new National Action Framework on dementia by Australian Health Ministers.

“It is important to get this new framework into place quickly so that Health Ministers can continue to implement dementia as a National Health Priority Area and agree a nationally coordinated action between the Commonwealth, States and Territories,” Ms Buttrose said.

“The report recognises that every individual with dementia is unique and that care services and support should respond to the needs of the particular individual. This is why the principle of partnership between the person with dementia and the family carer on the one hand and health care professionals and care services on the other is so important. It is why Alzheimer’s Australia has advocated for so many years for the empowerment of the consumer through consumer directed care.”

Professor Henry Brodaty, Director of the Dementia Collaborative Research Centre and Co-Director of the Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing, University of New South Wales who chaired the roundtable, agreed that a national approach was imperative.

“The report puts forward a number of potential solutions that may form part of a national approach. One such solution is a National Dementia Registry aimed at ensuring that patients and their carers do not ‘fall through the cracks’, and recommended therapies and services are logged and followed up on, to improve the timely access to and delivery of appropriate information and services,” Professor Brodaty said.

“We already have more than 320,000 people living with dementia and the cost to the health system, the aged care system, the patients and, importantly, the patients’ carers and families, is already immense. We need to look at a number of solutions to help ease this burden and ensure the best health outcomes for all Australians,” Professor Brodaty said.
Professor Brodaty also noted that together with an ageing population, a current lack of specialist dementia and aged care professionals will pose significant challenges to our society, indicating a critical need for a well-trained and remunerated dementia care workforce.

Key recommendations from the Collaborating for a better future for Australians living with Alzheimer’s disease report include:

- The adoption of a national best-practice, multidisciplinary approach for the diagnosis, treatment and care of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease in Australia
- A critical need to build a dementia workforce to meet the growing need for specialised care
- Funding of a national program of key workers for people with dementia that provide one on one support from the point of diagnosis onwards
- Ongoing investment in dementia research
- Destigmatisation of dementia and recognition that the experience of dementia is unique to each person.

Glenn Rees, CEO Alzheimer’s Australia, said that the report is an important reminder that if the quality of dementia care was to improve, coordinated action is necessary across both the health and the aged care system.

“Over the years, there has been inadequate recognition of the importance of timely diagnosis, dementia care in hospitals and dementia risk reduction.

“The report highlights the important principles that had to underpin action to improve dementia care outcomes including a person-centred approach that ensures care and support responds to the needs of the individual, a collaborative multidisciplinary approach, prompt referral of those with a diagnosis to services and organisations like Alzheimer’s Australia and a commitment to ensuring that we invested in our workforce.”

The Collaborating for a better future for Australians living with Alzheimer’s disease report, will be available for download from 12 November at www.fightdementia.org.au

Ends

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Notes to editor:

The roundtable
The multidisciplinary roundtable discussion was held on 14th May 2013 during Alzheimer’s Australia’s 15th National Conference in Hobart, Tasmania. The roundtable was hosted by Alzheimer’s Australia Tasmania and Eli Lilly Australia and sponsored by Eli Lilly Australia. The discussions provided a unique opportunity for a wide range of healthcare professionals involved in dementia care to share their views and perspectives on the diagnosis and care of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease in Australia, comprising:

- Professor Henry Brodaty (Chairman), Director, Dementia Collaborative Research Centre – Assessment and Better Care and Co-Director, Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing, University of New South Wales
- Professor Constance Dimity Pond, Professor of General Practice and Head of Discipline of General Practice, University of Newcastle
• Professor Elizabeth Beattie, Professor of Aged and Dementia Care, Queensland University of Technology, Director, Dementia Collaborative Research Centre: Carers and Consumers and Director, Qld Dementia Training and Study Centre
• Associate Professor Cassandra Szoeke, Director, Women’s Healthy Ageing Project, The University of Melbourne
• Associate Professor Michael Woodward, Director of Aged Care, Austin Health
• Dr Mathew Summers, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Tasmania
• Dr Ellen Skladzien, National Policy Manager, Alzheimer’s Australia
• Ms Janet Floyed, Carer.

About Alzheimer’s Australia
Alzheimer’s Australia 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.

About Lilly
Founded in 1876, Eli Lilly and Company is a leading, innovation-driven corporation committed to developing a growing portfolio of best-in-class and first-in-class pharmaceutical products that help people live longer, healthier and more active lives.

Based in West Ryde, NSW, Eli Lilly Australia was founded in 1960 as an affiliate of Eli Lilly and Company. Lilly’s areas of focus include men’s health, oncology, cardiovascular, diabetes, neuroscience, endocrinology and osteoporosis.

2013 marks Lilly’s 25-year commitment to investing in Alzheimer’s disease research and development (R&D) in an effort to bring medicines to patients suffering from this debilitating disease.

For more information about Eli Lilly Australia visit our website at www.lilly.com.au

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