



CARING FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA DIGNITY, RESPECT, UNDERSTANDING

The Greens' plan for improving dementia care and investing in research

There are more than 300,000 people living with dementia today. Dementia is not yet curable which is why the Greens support better investment in dementia research, as well as creating more control over care, and choices for people diagnosed with dementia and their families.

The Greens plan will ensure people living with dementia are treated with dignity and cared for how they want to be cared for, as well as investing in research that can help us improve people's lives and reduce the burden of dementia on our community in the future.

> CARING FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

The Australian Greens would:

- **Invest in dementia research** with \$40million per year over the forward estimates.
- Support the development of a **National Dementia Action Framework** with measureable goals
- Invest in the creation of dementia specific respite
- Ensure that the recent reforms to aged care deliver **greater choice and control over care** for people diagnosed with dementia; including support to be cared for at home; support to keep young people out of nursing homes; and support to deliver person-centered care that doesn't rely on anti-psychotic medication.

These measures reflect the calls by leading dementia advocates such as Alzheimer's Australia for a clear investment that can help tackle the impact that dementia has on our community.

> A GROWING NEED

There are more than 300,000 Australians living with dementia today. This number is projected to triple to almost 900,000 by mid-century. Dementia is not curable but there are a range of ways in which we can slow the progress of the disease and improve the lives of those suffering from it

> DEMENTIA RESEARCH

Dementia is a broad term used to describe a progressive decline in mental functioning. A person with dementia experiences memory loss, confusion, and personality and behaviour change. There are a variety of causes that lead to dementia, many of which are difficult to diagnose.

In Australia, about 70 per cent of people with dementia have Alzheimer's disease, either in pure form or combined with another kind of degeneration such as cerebro-vascular disease (poor circulation to the brain). Other kinds of dementia include vascular dementia (caused by mini-strokes), Pick's disease and alcohol-related dementia.

Although we have begun to identify the diseases that cause dementia, there is still no known cure and very little is known about the causes of dementia or how to slow its affects. As a result, dementia is the third most common cause of death in Australia.

An investment in dementia research is critical. The Greens would invest \$40million per year over the forward estimates in dementia-specific research to begin to address the gaps in our knowledge.

> NATIONAL DEMENTIA ACTION FRAMEWORK

As well as supporting better research, the Greens recognise that there are a range of ways in which we can improve the well-being of those diagnosed with dementia.



The Greens strongly support implementing a National Dementia Action Framework in order to build on the announcement of dementia as the Ninth National Health Priority Area and ensure that progress is made to improve things like diagnosis waiting times and the ability of hospital staff to recognise and respond to dementia.

> CHOICE IN CARE FOR DEMENTIA

People with dementia make up more than half of those living in residential aged care facilities. However, more than two thirds of those with a diagnosis of dementia are being cared for at home.

The Living Longer, Living Better aged care reform package, which the Greens supported through the Senate, has improved the way in which home care packages can deliver services for people living with dementia. This has increased options for people to choose to stay at home for longer and age in place, yet still receive the specialist services that they need.

However, the Greens know that the aged care reform package has only delivered the first steps towards complete choice and control for older Australians over where and how they receive care. There will still need to be a range of improvements to the aged care system.

More community care packages must be made available in the future and those packages must be affordable.

> GATEWAYS TO CARE & RESPITE

One of the challenges in assisting people with dementia is that they themselves may not identify as needing support, even when their loved ones recognise that there is a problem.

Neither the current assessment framework nor the proposed aged care Gateway yet supports early intervention for people with dementia and their families which can reduce or minimise its impacts.

Respite is also critical. There is not very good respite, particularly for those who are experiencing symptoms such as BPSD.

Any future investment in aged care reform needs to ensure that there are clear pathways to care and support, including respite, available to those caring for people experiencing dementia.

> CARING ALTERNATIVES TO ANTIPSYCHOTIC MEDICATION

Research reported in the Medical Journal of Australia revealed that up to 70% of residents are being given potentially dangerous antipsychotic or sedative medication.

Government needs to do more to protect the legal and human rights of nursing home residents.

However, this also needs to be backed up with support for alternative forms of care, and training and support to deliver care that is respectful and person-centred even when supporting patients with complex behavioural needs.

The Australian Greens supported the identification of dementia as a specific area of need within the recent aged care reform package and Greens in Federal Parliament will continue to monitor the roll out of the legislation and seek to ensure that it delivers on its promise of better care for people living with dementia.

> CARING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Younger Onset Dementia (YOD) typically refers to the onset of dementia before the age of 65. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2011 Report, Dementia in Australia, there were an estimated 23,900 Australians under the age of 65 who had dementia in 2011, representing 8% of all people with dementia in Australia at this time.

This demonstrates that we cannot simply rely on the aged care system to meet the needs of people living with dementia.

The Australian Greens have campaigned for appropriate services for young people so as to keep them out of nursing homes. We support the call from Alzheimer's Australia to develop further the programs that meet the needs of young people diagnosed with dementia.