Helping Australians with dementia, and their carers – making dementia a National Health Priority

Dementia currently affects around 185,000 Australians and this figure is expected to grow as our population ages. Dementia can be a particularly distressing and difficult condition for individuals and those who care for them. The Australian Government currently invests more than $2.6 billion per year in dementia care, research and support.

In recognition of its significance, dementia has been made an Australian Government National Health Priority. This has been supported with a $320.6 million package over five years targeting better prevention, treatment and care.

On 18 February 2005, the Federal Minister for Ageing, Julie Bishop, announced funding of $52.2 million over four years for the first component of the package, known as Dementia – A National Health Priority. This provides funds for additional research, improved care and early intervention programs to care for people with dementia. The Budget provides additional funding for these initiatives, bringing the total to $70.5 million over five years and extending funding to 2008-09.

Identifying dementia as an Australian Government National Health Priority provides focus for collaboration between the Australian Government, State and Territory Governments and other organisations to improve the quality of life and care for people living with dementia.

The 2005-06 Budget also delivers on the two remaining components of the package, providing $250.1 million over four years for more Extended Aged Care at Home places and new training opportunities for health professionals and community workers.

Extended Aged Care at Home Places

Funding of $225.1 million over four years will be provided to create 2,000 new dementia-specific Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) places.

EACH provides high level care comparable to nursing home care, but delivered to people in their own home. Care is coordinated and tailored to meet the individual needs of each person. About a third of existing EACH clients have dementia.

This expansion of EACH will allow many more people with dementia to stay at home in familiar surroundings rather than entering an aged care home.

Dementia training initiative

This measure will provide $25.0 million over four years for dementia training for up to 9,000 residential aged care workers and 7,000 people in the community who may come into contact with people with dementia, such as police, emergency services and transport staff.
This training will be provided through an expansion of the Carer Education and Workforce Training project.

**Dementia education and support**

Funding of $11.9 million over five years will continue to be provided for the Dementia Education and Support Program, and to support dementia assessments in rural and remote areas.

Continuing the funding for the Dementia Education and Support Program will ensure ongoing information and advice for people caring for those with dementia through:

- a 24-hour Dementia Helpline (1800 639 331) for information and referral services;
- ongoing support groups and social activities, and individual and group counselling;
- information on dementia resources such as help sheets;
- referral to relevant services; and
- education services to help carers of people with dementia better cope with their caring role.

This measure will also ensure that rural Aged Care Assessment Teams can obtain training and employ staff with dementia expertise to enable them to better assess people with dementia, and support them and their families in choosing the right care for their needs.