

SALLYANNE ATKINSON AO

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Dear Commissioners

I am writing in my capacity as co-chair, with Ms Sue Pieters-Hawke, of the Australian Government's Ministerial Dementia Advisory Group. Several members of the Group, including Ms Pieters-Hawke, have sent you submissions in their own right or from the organisations they represent. MDAG brings together a group of people, including clinicians, academics, carers, nursing personnel and other aged care workers, who probably represent the best collective of Dementia expertise in the country (but excluding this co-chair!).

I write to endorse formally their various submissions and to summarise some facts about Dementia relevant to the deliberations of the Productivity Commission.

The financial cost of Ageing Dementia will rise from \$6.6 billion (over \$40,000 per annum per person with Dementia) in 2002 to a total of 3.3% of Australia's GDP in 2050 (Access Economics)

Ageing Dementia currently affects more than 220,000 Australians; by 2050 that figure will be more than 700,000 (Access Economics)

Brain disease currently accounts for more than 30% of the health costs of the country: it is more common than cancer and touches the lives of more people than any other set of illnesses (Queensland Brain Institute)

Dementia has a significant effect not only on people with Dementia but also on their carers, families and the wider community.

Whilst there is currently no actual cure for Dementia, researchers at various institutions (including the Queensland Brain Institute on whose Advisory Board I serve) are working on such programmes as pharmaceutical treatments and the production of new nerve cells, or neurogenesis.

Preventative programmes such as exercise, diet and mental stimulation are effective and need to be widely promoted.

#Carers of people with Dementia are in particular need of help and support. This need will become greater with the higher incidence of Younger Onset Dementia.

There is a need for greater community awareness and understanding, especially among service providers such as police, fire and ambulance personnel and public transport workers.

In 2003, State Health Ministers were asked to make Dementia a National health priority and agreed to the development of a National Framework for Action on Dementia. Both the then Federal Government and its successor have taken steps to further action on Dementia, and MDAG is a vehicle for providing advice to the Minister for Ageing and the Commonwealth Department.

With the ageing of our Australian population, Dementia will continue to have a significant effect on Australian families and the overall productivity of the community at large.

Again, I commend our submissions to you and wish you well in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Sallyanne Atkinson AO
Co-Chair Minister's Dementia Advisory Group.