



**Adjournment Speech**  
**House Of Representatives**

21 September 2011

**Sharon Grierson MP**

**Ms Grierson** (Newcastle) (7.10 PM) — I rise to inform the House that this week is Dementia Awareness Week, with today, the twenty-first of September, being World Alzheimer's Day.

The theme of this year's awareness week is "Worried About Your Memory?"

As one of the founding members of the Parliamentary Friends of Dementia now operating for eight years I have followed closely the issues faced by those in our Australian communities with dementia, in particular those with Alzheimer's Disease, as well as their families and their carers.

Dementia was and continues to be a critical health issue of national significance.

Today Alzheimers Australia and the Parliamentary Friends of Dementia, hosted an event to raise awareness of the latest developments regarding dementia. Minister for Mental Health & Aging Mark Butler addressed the group as well as Ita Buttrose, president of Alzheimer's Australia, Glenn Rees, CEO of Alzheimer's Australia and the keynote presenter Professor John Breitner, one of the world's leading authorities on Alzheimer's Disease and dementia.

Sue Pieters Hawke was also in attendance today. A long-term champion of those living with dementia, her generosity and that of her mother Hazel Hawke in sharing their experience with dementia over a long period of time continues to encourage and inspire so many people.

Thank you Hazel and Sue.

Today the Minister referred to two emerging epidemics in our country: diabetes and dementia, observing that the stigma and mythology often associated with dementia continues to pervade our nation's consciousness.

Minister Butler raised the enormity of the challenge that dementia presents to the health and wellbeing of Australians in the future and expressed his willingness to work with Alzheimer's Australia in formulating the Government's response to the recently released Productivity Report, *Caring for Older Australians*. With 52% of residents in aged care diagnosed with dementia the Minister stated that any aged care policy must have dementia at its centre.

Access Economics estimates that over 269,000 Australians are currently living with dementia, with many facing over three years without diagnosis. Nationwide, this number continues to grow by 1500 new cases each week.

As the third leading cause of death in Australia, after heart disease and stroke, it is our duty to continue in our mission to raise the profile of dementia, awareness of its effects on individuals and communities, and to resource the research and interventions that will prevent dementia.

Introducing the keynote speaker, Ita Buttrose referred to recent reports, one of which showed that developed countries achieve a 20-50% diagnosis rate. She also referred to a study undertaken at the University of Newcastle showing an average time of three years until diagnosis. Whilst this data is discouraging, it supports the importance of early diagnosis and intervention.

Early diagnosis was the topic of Professor John Brietner's presentation. Outlining the global challenge, he predicted that by 2050, there will be over 115 million cases of dementia worldwide, costing us \$2.3 trillion.

Professor Brietner presented interesting research that went to the core challenges of early detection, from bio marker evidence to prevention and arresting dementia symptoms associated with Alzheimer's disease.

Whilst acknowledging the importance of behaviour and lifestyle changes, such as exercise and what he describes as a "Mediterranean diet instead of a McDonald's diet", as well as better managing risk factors, his trials with anti-inflammatory medication and nasal insulin showed positive impacts at this stage of his research. His efforts to be with us today are very much appreciated.

On a positive note, I draw the House's attention to the work of Novocastrians Dr Maggie Haertsch and her husband, trained clown doctor Jean-Paul Bell in what they call "The Smile Study" – a study which investigated impacts of humour therapy on people with dementia.

A documentary of the study *The Smile Within* will be shown at the National Dementia Research Forum in Sydney this week. Their study found a 20 per cent reduction in agitation using humour therapy, comparable to the results achieved through the use of common dementia drugs. I commend their ongoing work to improve the quality of life of others.

The CEO of Alzheimer's Australia Glenn Rees emphasised that early diagnosis of dementia can be achieved and will assist in treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's disease and the impacts of refocused research and policy.

I close in expressing the support of the Parliamentary Friends of Dementia for all Australians impacted by dementia. I particularly note Anne Kirchler and her partner Andrew Stenning from my region who will have reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania today, a trek conducted in memory of loved ones who have passed away due to Alzheimer's disease. I commend their efforts.