Every major aspect of Aged Care Policy is under review by the Commonwealth Government. These reviews are important opportunities to establish a higher priority for dementia care.

Firstly, the Commonwealth Government has commissioned a pricing review costing $7.2 million on long term financing options for residential aged care. Minister Andrews has requested that the review present recommendations by the end of 2003.

Alzheimer’s Australia believes that current arrangements for the pricing of aged care do not promote access to residential care on the basis of care needs. We have a concern that those with difficult care needs, and in particular those with behaviours of concern, find it more difficult to access care. The review has to result in access to appropriate care for those that need it.

Second, the Commonwealth Government have engaged consultants to conduct a review of the resident classification and payment tool, the Resident Classification Scale (RCS), with a view to reducing the load of documentation required. A report is expected in February 2003.
Alzheimer’s Australia supports changes in the RCS that would result in care staff being able to spend more time in caring and seeks changes in the RCS that would give greater priority to dementia care.

Lastly, the Department of Health and Ageing have conducted an internal review of community care programs and services to advise the Minister on whether it would be feasible to design and implement a system which improves access, assessment processes and continuity of care for people seeking help and their carers. A discussion paper may be released in February 2003 as a basis for community consultation.

The frustration is that the reviews mean a further delay in decision taking. After all the Government’s Two Year Review of Aged Care reforms which reported in 2001 after three years of work could only manage a recommendation which said, “Further investigation be undertaken into the needs for and provision of accommodation and care options for people with dementia.”

The risk of the reviews is that dementia will again be placed in the too hard basket, that necessary reforms to achieve incentives for funding quality dementia care will not be put in place and that the programs of Alzheimer’s Australia will continue to be under funded against growing demands.
Alzheimer’s Australia has, or will be making, submissions to all these reviews and has already made a submission to the Government in the context of the 2003/04-budget process.

In addition, longer-term work is being done to establish the case for dementia as a National Health Priority and for a nationally coordinated plan of action to deal with the growing dementia epidemic. We expect to have a report for presentation to Ministers by March.

2003 promises to be a very active year for lobbying on dementia and aged care in the lead up to the next Federal Election.