

Keeping Kiwis with dementia connected, independent and safe. A small investment in Speech-language Therapy will save millions and transform lives.



Our Position

The NZ Speech-language Therapists' Association is urging the next Government to:

- Fund 10 dementia specialist SLTs nationwide (across Health NZ regions).

The Challenge

Dementia mate wareware is one of New Zealand's fastest-growing health issues:

- 83,000 New Zealanders live with dementia today
- Three New Zealanders develop dementia every hour — over 500 a week
- Nearly 170,000 New Zealanders will be living with dementia by 2050 – four people an hour will develop this health condition by then
- Carers already provide 62.5 million hours of unpaid care

Communication and swallowing difficulties are common in dementia. Without timely support, they lead to:

- Social isolation and faster loss of independence
- Avoidable hospital admissions from aspiration pneumonia and dehydration
- Premature entry into residential care
- Severe stress and burnout for family carers

The opportunity

Speech-language therapists (SLTs) can dramatically change this story. Early, proactive SLT intervention:

- Keeps people engaged in daily life and decision making
- Supports safe eating and drinking
- Delays or avoids entry into residential care
- Reduces hospitalisations
- Sustains whānau carers and protects their wellbeing

The current reality

Right now, New Zealand has just 0.5 FTE SLT dedicated to dementia care — in one region only.

That leaves thousands without essential support, driving up costs for hospitals, aged care, and families. Doing nothing costs more.

What we're asking for

The NZSLTA wants the next Government to:

- Fund 10 dementia specialist SLTs nationwide (across Te Whatu Ora regions).
- Integrate them into Older People's Mental Health Teams or dementia care pathways.
- Provide support from diagnosis to end of life.

Value for money

We estimate this will cost: \$1.12M per year for 10 FTE. This needs to be weighed against the massive savings — preventing just one hospital admission or delaying one residential placement by a few months saves tens of thousands of dollars per person. Early SLT intervention is a proven, low-cost, high impact solution that will save millions and help thousands of New Zealanders live well with dementia.