

# VALE - DR RICHARD (DICK) LEFROY



## The pioneer of Geriatric medicine in WA

It is with sadness that we recognise the passing of the very first Medical Director of Alzheimer's Australia WA and prominent physician, Professor Richard Bruce Lefroy, who died in July 2016, aged 97.

Current AAWA Medical Director, Dr Sean Maher confirms the importance Dr Lefroy's work in not only the formation of AAWA but also the care and diagnosis of those living with dementia in Western Australia " Richard was instrumental in recognising the need for an association to support people with dementia, their carers, and encourage research. He was also one of the key driving forces behind the formation of our association and geriatric medicine in Western Australia."

Dr Richard Lefroy was born in Perth in 1918 and graduated in medicine at Melbourne University in 1946. Returning to Perth he was an RMO at Royal Perth Hospital from 1946 to 1948, a general practitioner from 1948 to 1950 and re-joined Royal Perth Hospital staff in 1951 as Assistant Medical Superintendent, the year he also became a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. Practising as a physician since 1951, he became associated with the developing University Department of Medicine in 1957 as its Associate Professor of Medicine and a consultant to Royal Perth Hospital. Seeing the need of the community for a geriatric medical service, he joined the medical administration of the Hospital and Health Department of the State in 1964. From then until 1982, he pioneered the development of geriatric medicine in WA.

The vision for a dementia specific support organisation in

WA was first cast in December 1980 when Dr Lefroy gave a presentation to the WA Association of Mental Health (WAAMH) on the issue of dementia in older patients.

His talk, entitled *Geriatrics: A Useless Term*, discussed the need for care services for older patients and how Alzheimer's support organisations have been formed in other parts of the world so that families living with Alzheimer's disease could receive proper support from the hospital and the community.

Challenged by Dr Lefroy's address, WAAMH began to focus their attention on the mental health of the elderly, particularly those who were undergoing changes of behaviour and explored the possibility of forming an Alzheimer's Association in WA.

Dr Lefroy held a number of prominent positions throughout his career including the President of the Australian Geriatric Society and President of the Australian Association of Gerontology.

He was also a published author with books including *Medical Care of Elderly and Disabled People*, *Changing Disease Patterns and Human Behaviour*, *History of the Australian Geriatric Society* and *To Follow Knowledge*.

In his private life he was greatly supported by his first wife Betty and after her death, is survived by his second wife Jennifer and their five children.

Dr Maher concludes "Dr Lefroy was also an example to us all of healthy ageing, remaining physically and cognitively active until his last few weeks. ...Vale, Dick.