

My name is Meg Polyte, I am the Policy Director for the Vermont Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. Older Vermonters with dementia are some of our most vulnerable and require access to services that have been perpetually underfunded. This has resulted in our inability to keep up with inflation, offer competitive wages, and reduced resources for Vermonters living at home with dementia.

By 2025, the number of Vermonters over the age of 65 diagnosed with dementia is projected to be 17,000, an astounding 30.8% increase from 2020. In 2022, unpaid family caregivers in Vermont provided more than 28 million hours of care. Almost 10% of family caregivers leave the workforce to provide care and 19% are forced to reduce their hours. Older Vermonters are the fastest growing demographic in our state, and by 2030, one in three Vermonters will be 60 years or older.

The \$250,000 Dementia Respite Grant, paid for from the General Fund and awarded to families by the Area Agencies on Aging, has not seen any increase in more than two decades! Further, \$50,000 a year is now taken to pay for licenses for TCARE (Tailored Caregiver Assessment and Referral). This is an ACL approved, evidence-based assessment tool that, when used consistently, has been shown to reduce hospitalization rates and help people remain at home and in their communities for longer periods of time. This leaves only \$200,000 to meet the needs of those struggling to care for a loved one with dementia.

In FY22 the Area Agencies on Aging served 398 caregivers but only 132 of them were able to access any respite funds. That means 2/3 of the vulnerable people they worked with were not able to access potentially needed support. Families are able to receive up to \$2000/year meaning at the current level of funding we could only support 100 families. It is important to note the \$2000 maximum was set in 2014 and is woefully inadequate to purchase meaningful respite at 2024 rates. I'm asking you to please increase the Dementia Respite Grant to \$500,000 a year.

I'm also asking you to fully implement the increases, outlined in the [2023 DVHA rate study report](#), for home-based Choices for Care and Enhanced Residential Care (ERC) services. These programs provide services to our lowest income older Vermonters who require nursing home level of care at home. The report recommended 13% to 60% increases in per-diem rates for ERC depending on the level of care. This service received 4%. The report recommended a 51% increase in at-home, direct Choices for Care services. These services received 15%. It is imperative we complete the work outlined by the DVHA rate study.

I want to thank you for the investments you made to the long-term care sector last year, including fully funding the Assistive Community Care Services (ACCS) and Adult Day rates. Unfortunately, this sector remains in jeopardy without additional support. In the last year, we have lost 192 assisted living and residential care home beds in 7 counties, and one home health agency is in the process of closing. Increasing rates is essential to attract and offer competitive compensation to staff caring for some of our most vulnerable.

Older Vermonters are suffering. Vermont's dementia caregivers are struggling. 35.4% report depression, the national average is 24.4%. 66% have one or more chronic health conditions, compared to 64% nationally. I'm asking you to help by increasing the Dementia Respite Grant to \$500,000 and fully implementing the rate study increases for our CFC home-based services.

Thank you,
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[2023 VT Alzheimer's Facts and Figures](#)