

**Area Agency on Aging services and the impact of Alzheimer's disease**  
**House Human Services Committee February 12, 2015**  
**Beth Stern, Executive Director of Central Vermont Council on Aging**

**AREA AGENCIES ON AGING**

- 5 Area Agencies on Aging serve the entire state. We are the hub for direct and contracted services (see attachment).
- 95% of the people we serve are over 60; 64% are over 75.
- We provide Case Management services to over 8700 individuals, including Older Americans Act Case Management and Choices for Care Case Management.
- Our Senior HelpLine answers over 50,000 calls a year.
- We work with Senior Centers and Mealsites to provide over 1 million Home Delivered or Congregate meals.
- We offer wellness programs, Medicare Part D insurance, transportation, mental health counseling, legal services and caregiver support. Some of these are direct and some are by contract.
- We administer the Veteran's Independence program, which is similar to Choices for Care, and allows Veterans to direct their own care.
- Our funding is primarily through the Older Americans Act, with some state and private funding. According to AARP, OAA funding levels have remained essentially stagnant for the last decade while the elder population has increased 30%.
- Our services are cost effective, efficient and make a difference in people's lives. The cost of one year of Home Delivered Meals is less than the cost of one day in a hospital or one month in a nursing home.
- Over 90% of our clients report that our services help them remain living in their homes (Infographics attached).
- By 2030, ¼ of Vermonters will be over age 65.

**ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND OUR SERVICES**

- All Area Agencies on Aging have caregiver coordinators who work with family members and others who are caring for those with Alzheimer's Disease.
- All AAAs manage respite funds of about \$250,000 statewide; 90+% of recipients report the grants gave them a break, and helped them maintain their physical and mental well-being.
- We offer classes such as Powerful Tools for Caregivers and Living with Dementia.
- We have newsletters, information and other resources for caregivers.

However....

- The percent of people with Alzheimer's is expected to grow by 50% over the next 15 years.
- With increasing rates of diagnosis, services which are level funded at best will not be able to keep up with the demand for services.
- Most services and programs are NOT designed for people with dementia, and instead focus on hands-on care rather than the cuing, oversight and set-up that many people with dementia need.
- By the time someone reaches "nursing home level of care" due to dementia, the client cannot be left alone which means there is a need for 24/7 care.
- Most caregivers in this situation are on the edge of burn-out, especially if dealing with sundowning, which means that neither the client nor the caregiver can sleep well.

- Most agency based services do not provide night and weekend services; it is left to the family caregiver to find this help on their own, or to work with us to try to find it.
- Many nursing homes, residential care homes and/or assisted living are not set up for individuals with dementia...and when taken out of their familiar environment, these clients often quickly go downhill.

### **Real life stories:**

Mrs. S. is 77 and caregiver for her 78-year-old husband, who has Alzheimer's Disease. She applied for the Dementia Respite Grant (DRG) when she found herself depressed and nearing a state of emotional breakdown. Mrs. S. has used the DRG for housekeeping and organizational assistance to make the home easier to manage. A man hired as a companion for Mr. S. did outside autumn chores with him, supporting Mr. S's sense of dignity and competence while giving Mrs. S. much needed free time. "He is not motivated to do these things on his own but is happy working with others." Additionally, when Mrs. S. recently had serious medical needs, her husband was already comfortable receiving care from these individuals. Mrs. S. will now be receiving case management services from CVCOA to look at future needs and resources, and to move forward with appropriate care plans for her husband and herself.

We are working with 69 year old client with advanced Alzheimer's and blindness, who lives with his disabled spouse. He is on Choices for Care and gets 67 hours a week of service. He requires 24 hour supervision, so the family is left with providing the other 100 hours of care. Nursing Home placement would likely result in chemical or physical restraint and cause anxiety and disorientation. Client's daughter helps out and provides night care, while working full time and having her own family. Our staff has worked to develop the plan of care, assisted in requesting variances for more hours and is working with family to appeal the last decision regarding more hours. Keeping this man home is not only what he and his family want, the cost is ½ that of a nursing home. Yet much of the care is unpaid and provided by the family.

**What does the future hold?** As Vermont continues to age, the number of clients with dementia will grow proportionately, putting greater strains on family members, the broader community, and the resources of the state and area agencies on aging. **We need:**

- ❖ **Improved client assessment** for long-term care that works early-on with people with dementia to put programs, systems and safeguards in place aimed at honoring clients' wishes about how they want to live, and keeping them comfortably and safely in their homes as long as possible.
- ❖ **Stronger collaboration** between the healthcare professionals who diagnose and monitor the medical treatment of clients with dementia, and the social service agencies who provide the day to day assistance.
- ❖ **Continued training opportunities** for our staff on new, creative and evidence based skills to assist them in working with people with dementia and their families.
- ❖ **Expanded resources and funding** for agencies on aging and other providers to educate and engage families, the wider community and partners in efforts to respond to the needs of an aging and rapidly growing senior population.

**Thank you for your time!**