

Senate Health & Welfare Hearing

March 18, 2015

INTRODUCTION

- As the Governor's Commission on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders met to address the needs of the aging population in the state, they quickly realized that the increasing prevalence and skyrocketing costs of Alzheimer's and dementia amplifies the need for the development of an Alzheimer's state plan. That plan was published in 2009 and, and since that time, we have been working to implement the recommendations in that plan, but we are still behind the curve.

ABOUT THE DISEASE

- So, what exactly is Alzheimer's? Alzheimer's disease is more than just a little memory loss as you may hear - Alzheimer's kills.
- Alzheimer's is a progressive disease of the brain that destroys brain cells, causing problems with memory, thinking and behavior.
- Dementia is a general term used to describe a decline in cognitive functioning and Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia.
- There are 3 stages: pre-clinical, mild cognitive impairment, and dementia due to Alzheimer's.
- So, what causes Alzheimer's? Well, there are several things to consider.
 - Age is the Greatest Known Risk Factor. The likelihood doubles about every five years after age 65, after age 85 the risk reaches nearly 50%.
 - Family history can also be a factor. Having a parent, brother or sister or child with Alzheimer's means you are more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease.
 - It is also believed that high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and high cholesterol lead to increased risk for Alzheimer's. At least 74% of people with Alzheimer's have at least one major chronic condition, and if you include hypertension, that percentage jumps to 94%.

FACTS/FIGURES/COSTS

- An estimated 5.2 million Americans of all ages are living with Alzheimer's disease. This includes an estimated 5 million people age 65 and older, and approximately 200,000 individuals under age 65 who have younger-onset Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's is no longer just an aging issue - prevalence of younger-onset Alzheimer's, with folks being diagnosed in their 40s, is growing rapidly.
- It is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.
- With Alzheimer's disease, it is not just those with the disease who suffer. It's also their caregivers – a job that usually falls on family and friends.
- In Vermont there are nearly 30,000 family caregivers providing 34 million hours of unpaid care, valued at \$400 million dollars, to the 11,000 individuals living with the disease, costing \$20 million in higher health costs of caregivers.
- This disease has a profound effect on the family caregivers who often suffer their own health crises as a direct result of the stress related to providing Alzheimer's care.
- By the year 2025, 17,000 Vermonters will be living with Alzheimer's disease, an increase of 55%.
- In 2013 Vermont used the Cognitive Module of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), and found that 9% of adults aged 18 and older in our state are experiencing increased confusion or memory loss that is getting worse. Of those aged 45 and older reporting memory issues, 26% had to give up household activities/chores and 30% say their cognitive problems interfered with their ability to work, volunteer, or engage in social activities.
- Alzheimer's is the only cause of death among the top 10 that cannot be prevented, cured, or even slowed.
- The New England Journal of Medicine released a study in 2013 that determined that Alzheimer's disease is the most expensive disease in America. The average per person Medicaid spending for seniors with Alzheimer's and other dementias is, on average, 19 times higher than the average across all other seniors.
- Alzheimer's disease is a growing public health crisis. As I mentioned earlier, age is the greatest known risk factor for Alzheimer's; one in nine Americans over the age of 65 will develop the disease. As the baby boomer generation continues to age, more Vermonters will be affected by this disease either as individuals living with the disease or as caregivers.

CLOSING

- Even without a way to cure, slow, or treat Alzheimer's disease – there are ways to improve the quality of life for those with the disease and decrease associated costs.
- Please know that the Alzheimer's Association stands in the ready to work with you and your staff and is committed to carrying out the mission of the Governor's Commission on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders, to address the effects of this devastating disease and support your efforts in every way possible.
- We must start looking at Alzheimer's and dementia for what it really is – a public health crisis.
- Please work with us to implement Vermont's state plan on dementia. Please help us make Vermont a dementia-capable state and carry out our ultimate vision of a world without Alzheimer's. We are counting on you.

I have included our legislative handout with three priority activities for consideration this year. While I understand the request for increasing the dementia respite grant funding in our current budget climate is a challenge, two of our requests are not tied to appropriations. They are:

1. Requesting that the Blueprint for Health include dementia specific recommendations for cognitive screening during the annual Medicare Wellness visit and establishing an algorithm or road map for next steps when a patient screens positive.
2. Supporting the Governor's Commission on ADRD request to add the Cognitive Impairment and Caregiver modules to the Department of Health's 2016 Behavioral Risk Management Survey.

Thank you,



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