

2023-2024

## MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

*Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias are a growing public health crisis. In 2020, there were 130,000 individuals living with Alzheimer's Disease in Massachusetts, and that number is expected to grow to 150,000 by 2025. It is imperative that Massachusetts addresses this crisis now with both support for families impacted by this devastating disease and investments in public health infrastructure and dementia care workforce development. The Alzheimer's Association believes the following pieces of legislation will provide that necessary support while preparing the Commonwealth to address the increased demand for awareness and services.*

### **H.629 (CARRYING S.383) AN ACT TO IMPROVE ALZHEIMER'S AND DEMENTIA CARE IN SENIOR CARE OPTIONS (SCO) PROGRAMS**

*Sponsors: Senator Jason Lewis & Representative Danielle Gregoire*

Alzheimer's and other dementia pose significant challenges and costs to families and the health care system. Too often, Massachusetts families are exhausting their financial resources to care for loved ones living with dementia and then requiring state assistance through MassHealth (Medicaid). In 2020, Massachusetts spent more than \$1.75 billion caring for people living with Alzheimer's in the MassHealth program — a figure expected to rise by over 15% by 2025. Comprehensive care planning, however, can help people living with dementia reduce unnecessary rehospitalizations, improve the management of other chronic conditions and reduce premature nursing home placement—which in turn improves the quality of life for the patient and reduces the cost and burden on our stressed healthcare system.

The Alzheimer's Association is calling on the legislature to pass a bill which would require Massachusetts Senior Care Options (SCO) plans, a Medicare-Medicaid program for eligible seniors which serve our most vulnerable population, to provide comprehensive care planning services to SCO members who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

### **H.2245 (CARRYING S.1408) AN ACT TO STRENGTHEN THE DIRECT CARE AND DEMENTIA WORKFORCE**

*Sponsors: Senator Paul Mark & Representative Tram Nguyen*

As the number of individuals living with Alzheimer's in Massachusetts grows, there will be an increased demand for home and community-based services as well as long-term care services. This, in turn, will result in an increased demand for direct care workers. Direct care workers include home health aides, nursing assistants, and personal care aides. However, demand is already high for these professionals, with many families currently experiencing long wait times for home and community based services and long term care facilities. Additionally, it is predicted that Massachusetts will need a 68% increase in geriatricians in order to meet the Alzheimer's population needs in 2050.

Therefore, the Alzheimer's Association is asking the Massachusetts Legislature to incentivize careers in the dementia and direct care workforce, as well as provide opportunities for career development, through the passage of this legislation.

### **S.2683 AN ACT TO STRENGTHEN OUR PUBLIC HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE TO ADDRESS ALZHEIMER'S AND ALL DEMENTIA**

*Sponsors: Senator Adam Gomez & Representative Denise Garlick*

According to the CDC, Alzheimer's prevalence will increase by 25% in Massachusetts over the next decade. This is a growing public health crisis that requires public health interventions. As the need for care and support services grows, Massachusetts will benefit greatly from having a position within the state government that is charged with coordination of services, training standards and public awareness efforts for Alzheimer's disease.

Despite the anticipated increase in prevalence, there is hope. We are at the dawn of a new era in Alzheimer's care and treatment as the FDA has, for the first time, granted accelerated approval to disease modifying treatments. However, these treatments are only effective in slowing cognitive decline if administered in the early stages of the disease. Therefore, early detection and diagnosis will be vitally important in identifying those who may benefit from treatment.

In addition to establishing a Massachusetts Director of Dementia Care and Coordination, this bill increases public awareness of Alzheimer's and other dementias to promote early detection and diagnosis, as well as bring awareness to the support and services available to families. Finally, the bill also requires the collection of data on Alzheimer's and other dementia in Massachusetts, including racial and ethnic disparities.

#### **H.4433 AN ACT TO EXPAND ACCESS FOR THOSE LIVING WITH YOUNGER ONSET ALZHEIMER'S, DEMENTIA AND OTHER DISABILITIES**

*Sponsor: Representative Bruce Ayers*

Individuals living with younger-onset Alzheimer's face unique challenges when it comes to family, work, and finances. Also, the stigma associated with younger-onset Alzheimer's can have a significant impact on their well-being and quality of life. On top of that, because of their younger age, it is often difficult for those living with younger-onset to access the same resources available to their older counterparts.

We are fortunate in Massachusetts to have a variety of supports and services in place for those living with Alzheimer's or related dementias and their families, including the MassHealth Frail Elder Waiver, which helps residents who require nursing home level care to receive health care and ongoing support services in their homes or community living residences instead of in a nursing homes.

However, an individual with Alzheimer's disease can only qualify for the waiver if they are aged 60 or older. We encourage the legislature to support this bill, which would reflect the federal government's definition of disabled and ensure services provided through the Frail Elder Waiver are made available to those diagnosed with younger-onset Alzheimer's disease, other dementias and disabilities—regardless of their age—if they are otherwise eligible for such services.

#### **S.689/H.1074 AN ACT RELATIVE TO PATIENT ACCESS TO BIOMARKER TESTING TO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE THERAPY**

*Sponsors: Senator Susan Moran & Representative Meghan Kilcoyne*

For individuals with Alzheimer's, access to treatment is dependent on biomarker testing. Currently, the only FDA approved treatments for Alzheimer's targets amyloid plaque in the brain, one of the hallmarks of Alzheimer's disease. In order to access treatment, an individual must be proven to have amyloid plaque through an amyloid PET scan or cerebrospinal fluid test. Eligible patients also require early detection for this treatment to work for them. In the future, select biomarkers related to dementia may be detectable through blood tests similar to other laboratory tests.

An Act relative to patient access to biomarker testing to provide appropriate therapy will ensure that individuals living with Alzheimer's disease in Massachusetts can access necessary biomarker testing, reducing the time it takes to receive a diagnosis and enabling access to new disease-modifying treatments, other supports and care planning.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION'S LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

Please contact Chelsea Gordon, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at [cgordon@alz.org](mailto:cgordon@alz.org)