

Alaska State Legislature
REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE STUTES



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

Sponsor Statement for House Bill 308 (Version B)

This legislation directs the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) to provide information to the public regarding the importance of a timely diagnosis of dementia. The goal is to increase education among the public and health care providers to recognize the signs of dementia and to promote the value of early detection, diagnosis, and treatment.

Fewer than half of Americans living with Alzheimer's disease receive a formal diagnosis¹. This means that many Alaskans with dementia have not received a formal diagnosis. This legislation is designed to improve the rate of diagnosis for dementia in Alaska and to educate clinicians, health professionals, and the public on the early warning signs of dementia. Increased diagnosis is the first step to ensure future treatment, care planning, and clinical trials for this condition.

Alzheimer's is one of 10 types of dementia and is the ninth leading cause of death for Alaskans². More than 12,500 Alaskans are currently living with dementia. With this educational program, early diagnosis of Alaskans suffering with dementia is anticipated to increase.

Medicaid costs of caring for Alaskans with Alzheimer's is expected to climb by 45% in the coming years. Early diagnosis of dementia allows patients to access treatments and research trials sooner so that we can slow the progression of the disease. Delaying the onset of dementia will help reduce the disease's impact on the patient, their community and Alaska's health care system.

The dementia public awareness campaign envisioned with the passage of this legislation, will be instrumental to increase the diagnosis of dementia and help us be prepared for "the most underrated threat to public health in the 21st century."³ Additionally, the creation of the dementia awareness program within the Department of Health and Social Services, will open the door to federal funding for dementia education through the 2018 federal legislation known as the "Building Our Largest Dementia Infrastructure for Alzheimer's Act" or the BOLD Program.

¹ Boustani M, Peterson B, Hanson L, Harris R, Lohr KN. Screening for dementia in primary care: A summary of the evidence for the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. *Ann Intern Med* 2003;138(11):927-37

² SOA Bureau of Vital Statistics. 2022

³ Dr. David Satcher, Alzheimer's is greater public health crisis than Ebola. Opinion piece. The Hill 2014; <https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/healthcare/223922-alzheimers-is-greater-public-health-crisis-than-ebola>