

Alaska State Legislature
REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE STUTES



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

HB 308

An Act Pertaining to Alzheimer/Dementia Awareness

Sponsor Statement

Representative Louise Stutes

Speaker of the House

Fewer than half of Americans living with Alzheimer's disease receive a formal diagnosis¹. Due to Alaska's lack of public health infrastructure for dementia, it is likely that a lower rate of Alaskans with dementia have received a formal diagnosis. Alaska must improve its rate of diagnosis for dementia. The State of Alaska must educate clinicians, health professionals, and the public on the early warning signs of Alzheimer's and other dementias in order to increase our rate of diagnosis. A timely diagnosis is the first step in ensuring that anyone living with this disease can benefit from future treatments, care planning, and clinical trials. This legislation directs the Department of Health and Social Services to promote information regarding the importance of a timely diagnosis, the signs and symptoms of different types of dementia, facts regarding brain health. The purpose of the public awareness campaign is to increase education among the public and health care providers on the signs of dementia, the value of early detection and diagnosis, risk reduction, and care planning.

Alzheimer's, which is only one of the 10 most common types of dementia, is the ninth leading cause of death for Alaskans². Over 12,500 Alaskans are known to be currently living with at least one type of dementia. This number is not stagnant. A tsunami of new diagnosis is expected as Alaskans feel more comfortable leaving their homes to seek medical advice and attend annual wellness appointments, and as Alaska's senior population continues to grow and outnumber younger generations. The population of Alaskans with Alzheimer's Disease, a type of dementia that currently accounts for about 8,500 of Alaska's 12,500 dementia cases³, is expected to soar with an increase to 11,000 by 2025⁴. Alaska's population has silvered significantly since that projection was calculated, which has led to Alaska's dementia experts sounding the alarm.

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 World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dementia> 2021.

⁴ Weuve J, Hebert LE, Scherr PA, Evans DA. Prevalence of Alzheimer disease in U.S. states. *Epidemiology* 2015;26(1):E4-6

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As a consequence of the rapid growth of Alzheimer's in Alaska, Medicaid costs of caring for Alaskans with Alzheimer's is expected to climb by 44.6%, which is the highest increase in the United States, and is more than double the average projected increase of 20.2%. Early diagnosis of dementia allows patients to access treatments and research trials that may slow the progression of the disease. Delaying the onset of dementia will help to reduce the disease's impact on the patient, their community, and Alaska. A dementia public awareness campaign is instrumental to preparing for the incoming dementia tsunami, and what former CDC Director and US Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher calls "the most underrated threat to public health in the 21st century."⁵

⁵ 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>