

March 2, 2022

Members
Senate Health and Social Services Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99801

Sent via email

Re: Support for Senate Bill 216, Dementia Awareness

Members of the Senate Health and Social Services Committee,

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (Trust) supports SB216 which gives the Division of Public Health the ability to increase awareness of dementia and encourage people to get screened and take early action if a dementia diagnosis is received. This bill also positions the State of Alaska to apply for federal funds through the BOLD Act to implement a public health approach for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia.

Alaskans who experience Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia are beneficiaries of the Trust. While dementia awareness explicitly supports this Trust beneficiary group, dementia can also negatively impact individuals and caregivers who are Trust beneficiaries experiencing mental illness, substance use disorders, traumatic brain injuries, and developmental disabilities.

According to the US Administration on Aging, Alaska has over 12,500 people living with dementia. Our state is about to experience rapid growth of its senior population and with that, an estimated 90% increase in the number of people with dementia. The demand for information about dementia from people at risk or recently diagnosed, and their caregivers, will continue to increase. Like many disorders, if dementia is diagnosed early there are opportunities to maintain current levels of cognitive functioning. Early diagnosis also offers a person and their family the time to research and plan for future needs before dementia symptoms require crisis intervention.

The Trust sponsored the facilitation of the Dementia Action Collaborative that formed in 2021 and has over 67 participants from organizations across the state. This group works collectively to improve the community inclusion of and services for people with dementia.

We urge passage of SB216 and respectfully request your support for this bill that will help improve outcomes for Alaskans who do and who will experience dementia.

Sincerely,



Steve Williams,
Chief Executive Officer