



Minnesota - North Dakota Chapter

**Testimony
Senate Bill 2012
House Appropriations
Human Services Division
Rep. Jon O. Nelson, Chairman
March 9, 2023**

Good morning Chairman Nelson and members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Division. For the record, my name is Nikki Wegner and I am the North Dakota Program Director for the Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. I am one of six staff who provide programs and support to North Dakota residents impacted by Alzheimer's and other dementia, and their caregivers. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of Senate Bill 2012. Alzheimer's and dementia have touched so many lives. For those in the room today, if your life has been impacted by Alzheimer's or dementia; as a caregiver, a loved one, or friend, please raise your hand.

The Dementia Care Services Program began in 2010 when the legislature chose to start contracting for services such as care consultations to increase support for people living with dementia and their caregivers. We appreciate the continued funding included in this bill for the Dementia Care Services Program (DCSP). Throughout the thirteen-year partnership between the State and the Alzheimer's Association, we have provided a lifeline for thousands of North Dakota families when they need it most, when they are faced with a dementia diagnosis and the question of "what next?" in planning for the growing care needs for their family member. The DCSP has also provided dementia education for tens of thousands of community members and professionals across the state.

The goals of the DCSP are to improve care, quality of life, and health outcomes; and to reduce the total cost of care associated with the disease for individuals, families, and ultimately the state budget. The innovative services that are provided promote early detection and diagnosis, connect people with community resources and support groups, provide effective caregiver training, and planning for the future.

In the early years of the DCSP, the legislature requested a study of the program which was conducted by the UND Center for Rural Health. The study found that over a 42-month period, with an investment of \$2 million, the state saved an estimated \$39 million in long-term costs from reduced hospital and emergency related services and delays in placing a person with dementia in long-term care facilities. The link to the full report is included in the testimony I submitted online and can provide you with a full overview of the DCSP.

Dementia that is unmanaged negatively impacts the individual diagnosed, their caregivers, and ultimately creates a costly toll for communities and on the economy. The DCSP can help reduce higher costs related to dementia care. For example, studies have consistently shown that active management of dementia can improve the quality of life of affected individuals and their caregivers. This is where the DCSP has the greatest impact.

Consider, for the current contract period, July 1, 2021 through Dec 31, 2022, the DCSP has:

- Delivered 1,975 Care Consultations and Information and Referrals - for 1,040 caregivers on behalf of 583 people living with dementia, including 51 veterans living with dementia;
- Educated 2,558 community members across the state;
- Trained 197 law enforcement and 1,753 health care professionals; and
- Referred 110 people directly to the Aging and Disability Resource LINK (ADRL).

The need for care and support across North Dakota is growing, the number of people who receive services through DCSP continues to increase. Our current estimate is that 15,000 people in North Dakota are living with Alzheimer's and we expect those numbers to increase to 16,000 by 2025. I have provided more information and statistics in the packet for you to review.

Request for Funding Increase

To respond to the growing needs of North Dakotans, we requested an increase of \$305,000 which would bring our funding from \$1,300,000 to \$1,605,000. The funding increase was included by the Senate. We respectfully request that the House maintain this increase in SB 2012. The funding increase will provide us with the ability to expand our capacity by hiring another care consultant. The addition of another care consultant will allow us to continue meeting the needs and increasing demand specifically in underserved locations, including rural areas and Tribal communities. As the number of people in North Dakota who need our services increases, we want to be prepared and able to provide the support needed.

We recently held our Alzheimer's Advocacy Day at the Capitol. Donna was invited to attend the event, she sent the following response along with permission to share her story. Donna states:

Good Morning. As much as I would love to make the trip to this important event- it is not possible You see ALZ has impacted me personally. Recently diagnosed with Alzheimer's myself I am still trying to come to grips with all the things this disease is robbing me of. I worked my entire adult life as an RN @ Sanford Hospital. First as an Oncology nurse, then moving on to my real passion as a Labor & Delivery Nurse. My passion for families and newborns directed me to work with Dr. S. Christensen in developing the first Reproductive Clinic in the state of North Dakota. I had a passion for educating our patients about the process of making their dreams become a reality. My career pathway led me to become a Health Careers teacher with the FPS in Fargo. I had the opportunity to have teenage students exploring various health career pathways for themselves. I take great pride in seeing these former students making a difference as nurses, therapists & physicians!

I am married to the love of my life ~ Michael was my high school sweetheart & we have been married for 43 years! We have two grown children and 4 grandchildren! They are my life! It breaks

my heart knowing that as this disease progresses I will be robbed of the quality life I have always dreamed of having with my family. They are all aware of my diagnosis & we continue to live in the moment and not thinking about what's to come.

I often look at my husband & think "He doesn't deserve this" My daughter in law overheard me saying that, Her response to me was "You don't deserve this". She got it right! NO ONE DESERVES TO HAVE ALZ.

This is just one person's experience. We hear stories from thousands of families and I'd be willing to bet those of you who raised your hands can relate.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.