



Minnesota - North Dakota Chapter

**Testimony
House Bill 1012
Senate Appropriations
Human Resources Division
Sen Dick Dever, Chairman
March 14, 2025**

Good morning Chairman Dever and members of the committee. My name is Joan Danks and I am the North Dakota Program Director for the Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of House Bill 1012.

I stand here in support of the Adults and Aging Services budget proposals because we partner with them in so many ways beyond the Dementia Care Services contract. There are multiple programs administered by the division who refer clients to us for assistance and we refer many clients to their support programs and services. This partnership is a vital part of how we support people living with dementia and their caregivers.

I am also here in support of the continued funding of the Dementia Care Services Program and to explain a bit more about how the program works. Alzheimer's and dementia touch our lives as caregivers, loved ones, friends, and family. When our loved ones start experiencing symptoms of cognitive decline, our lives are turned upside down as well. It is normal to start grieving the person we have known and wondering what comes next. There is no longer an "easy decision" about day-to-day life. There are so many things we take for granted every day; brushing our teeth, getting dressed, even paying bills. We perform these tasks without even thinking about it. Once cognitive decline begins, our loved ones need support to perform all of these activities. For a caregiver, it is overwhelming to navigate ever changing needs and symptoms alone, all while wondering if there is anyone who can help.

This is why the original language authorizing the Dementia Care Services program was passed in the 2009 session. The Dementia Care Services program is a contract for services located in the Adult and Aging Services section of Health and Human Services. The agency manages the contract and the Alzheimer's Association delivers the services. The contract and services are designed to provide support and education for caregivers after the person they are providing care for is showing symptoms of cognitive impairment.

Prior to the implementation of the program, caregivers found it difficult to move through next steps after symptoms develop. Caregivers didn't always know what resources and help were available much less how to get connected with those resources. Through the 15 year partnership between

the State and the Alzheimer's Association, we have provided a lifeline for thousands of North Dakota families facing the unknown of caring for someone living with memory loss. Our Dementia Care Service Program staff provide a number of services, free of charge, to North Dakotans. They provide services ranging from education opportunities to learn more about Alzheimer's and related dementias and how to work through behavioral symptoms of dementia, to what is possibly the most important part of the work to support caregivers; care consultations.

Our care consultation services offer individualized assistance, problem-solving, and resource identification for individuals with memory loss, as well as their family and professional caregivers. Through these consultations, individuals with dementia and their caregivers receive valuable one-on-one support, enabling them to better manage care and make informed decisions regarding services, resources, and treatments, including clinical trials.

Care consultations are provided at the most convenient location for those accessing the service. Our Dementia Care Service Program staff are based in Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks, Maddock, and Minot, and they travel throughout the state. Consultations can be conducted in person at our offices, in clients' homes, by phone, or virtually, ensuring that family members have flexible options to participate.

While care consultations are a keystone of the support we provide, the education opportunities are just as valuable. We provide comprehensive information and education to the general public about the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, the benefits of early detection and diagnosis, available treatments, research opportunities, and services. Our program staff also work to build and foster partnerships with other programs and entities across North Dakota communities to promote access to services, supports, and quality care for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Our team provides dementia education tailored to specific audiences, including professionals in long term care, healthcare, and law enforcement and first responders. We also provide on-demand training for direct care providers who manage and care for individuals with symptoms of mild cognitive impairment or dementia. This on-demand training ensures the quality service providers who provide home and community based services have dementia specific training to best care for their clients.

Our innovative services enable individuals to remain safely in their homes and communities, thereby delaying the placement of individuals living with dementia in long term care facilities. Dementia that is unmanaged negatively impacts the individual living with the disease, their caregivers, and ultimately creates a costly toll for communities and on the economy. The Dementia Care Services Program 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. Consider, for the current contract period, July 1, 2023 through December 31, 2024, this program has:

- Delivered **2,020** Care Consultations and Information and Referrals - for **1,217** caregivers on behalf of **698** people living with dementia, including **17** veterans living with dementia;
- Educated **2,932** community members across the state;
- Trained **110** law enforcement and **818** health care professionals; and
- Referred **57** people directly to the Aging and Disability Resource LINK.

The need for care and support across North Dakota continues to grow. Currently, just over eleven percent of our citizens over the age of 65 are living with dementia. As the number of people over the age of 65 grows, it will mean an increasing need for the services we provide.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be here today. I am happy to take any questions you might have.