



Maine Chapter

**Testimony**

Relating to

**L.D. 1102, Resolve, to Raise Awareness of the Importance of Brain Health and Reducing the Risk of Dementia**

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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

March 28, 2025

Senate Chair Ingwersen, House Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jill Carney, Director of Maine Public Policy for the Alzheimer's Association, and a resident of Cumberland. The Alzheimer's Association urges the Committee to support L.D. 1102, which would raise awareness of the importance of brain health and dementia risk reduction by providing one-time funding of \$100,000 to implement a public awareness campaign. The prevalence and costs of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD) will rise significantly in the coming years, and one of the most effective ways to address this looming crisis is to aggressively promote risk reduction and early diagnosis.

**Overview of the Alzheimer's and Dementia Public Health Issue**

Alzheimer's is a progressive, fatal disease affecting 29,600 Mainers aged 65 or older. In addition, there are more residents who are living with other forms of dementia or who have younger onset Alzheimer's (when Alzheimer's occurs in individuals under the age of 65). In Maine, the Alzheimer's Association estimates that 51,000 caregivers provide 87,000,000 hours of unpaid care for people living with Alzheimer's at a total value of \$1.9 billion.

As people live longer and the population ages, the prevalence of Alzheimer's will rise significantly in the coming years. Today, there are nearly 7 million Americans living with Alzheimer's, and \$360 billion is spent on their care. By 2050, there will be 13 million Americans living with Alzheimer's, costing \$1 trillion annually. This sharp rise will threaten

federal and state budgets and our health and long-term care systems, as well as devastate individual families affected by Alzheimer's.

Much has been learned about how public health systems can impact brain health. The efforts of these systems have led to an increasing number of states and jurisdictions creating, updating and implementing plans that address brain health, cognitive impairment, dementia and caregiving. Their work has been accelerated by passage of the Building Our Largest Dementia Infrastructure for Alzheimer's Act (BOLD Act) (Public Law 155-406) in 2018 and its reauthorization in 2024, both authored by Senator Susan Collins. The BOLD Act supports public health efforts for strengthening systems, environments and policies to promote risk reduction, improve early detection and diagnosis, prevent and manage comorbidities, avoid preventable hospitalizations and support dementia caregiving. Maine is currently receiving BOLD funding to carry out the Alzheimer's Prevention Program, implement the Healthy Brain Initiative (a public health road map for state and local entities jointly authored by the U.S. CDC and the Alzheimer's Association), and support the recommendations in the Maine State Plan on ADRD.

### **Benefits of Risk Reduction and Early Diagnosis**

There are both modifiable and non-modifiable risk factors for dementia, and research suggests that as many as 40 percent of all dementia cases worldwide could be prevented or delayed by addressing modifiable risk factors, such as diabetes, obesity, and smoking. In addition, the cost of ADRD can be reduced through early diagnosis. A 2018 analysis by the Alzheimer's Association estimated cost savings of \$63,000 per person when receiving a diagnosis earlier in disease progression, with \$30,000 in savings to Medicare, \$20,000 in savings to Medicaid, and \$13,000 in other savings.

As part of Maine's BOLD grant, the Maine CDC is convening a Healthy Brain Initiative Stakeholder Group to help advance its public health approach to dementia and the recommendations in the Maine State Plan on ADRD, which was jointly authored with the stakeholders. One of the recommendations in the state plan is to create a widespread public awareness campaign for ADRD, and passage of this bill would help enable that work.

Notably, the Alzheimer's Association has developed public awareness campaign assets that have been developed for joint partnerships with state and local health departments. Therefore, the funding provided through this bill, would not be needed to create the collateral, but would be dedicated to purchasing ad space to get those messages out to Mainers through TV, radio, print, and digital channels.

Other states are recognizing the need for such public awareness campaigns. New Hampshire passed similar legislation last year.

### **Conclusion**

With public awareness campaigns, we've come a long way in increasing public knowledge of other diseases. Take breast cancer for example. Twenty years ago, you wouldn't have expected awareness of this disease to be prominently featured in NFL football games, but that's where we are today.

From conversations with those affected by dementia, we know existing stigmas are preventing individuals from receiving a diagnosis as early as possible. Data from the 2022 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System shows that 10 percent of Mainers aged 45 and older are experiencing confusion or memory loss that is happening more often or getting worse, which is the earliest warning sign of dementia. But nearly one-third of them have not talked to a health care professional about it. We need to get to a place where care providers are actively discussing brain health with their patients, where families feel comfortable talking with each other when something about their ability to manage daily tasks doesn't feel right, and where those experiencing the warning signs of dementia are supported in raising those issues with their health care providers.

Thank you for your consideration of L.D. 1102. Again, we urge the Committee to support this critical legislation.

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