

alzheimer's association®

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January 24, 2024

The Honorable William G. Herbkersman
Chairman, Ways and Means Healthcare Subcommittee
308C Blatt Bldg.
Columbia 29201

Dear Mr. Chairman-

I am honored to have the opportunity to share with you about the issue of Alzheimer's and other dementias, as well as state and national statistics on prevalence and impact.

In 2023, an estimated 6.7 million Americans aged 65 and older were living with Alzheimer's. That number is projected to reach 13.8 million in 2060. It affects 95,000 individuals over age 65 in South Carolina, based on estimated prevalence models in the Alzheimer's Association 2023 *Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* report. However, we know that number is more likely closer to 118,000 South Carolinians living with Alzheimer's or related dementia, based on the actual diagnosed cases tracked by our South Carolina Alzheimer's Disease Registry, the most comprehensive registry of its kind in the United States..

Alzheimer's disease is not just an aging issue. And alarmingly, research released in July 2023 identified Orangeburg County in South Carolina as having the 8th highest prevalence of the disease in the nation, compared to other counties in the nation with 10,000 or more residents.

Alzheimer's disease has a profound effect on the 216,000 family members who provide 355 million hours of unpaid care for their loved ones in South Carolina. These family caregivers often suffer their own health crises as a direct result of the stress related to providing Alzheimer's care.

On average, \$26,789 from Medicare is spent per persons with dementia in SC each year. In addition, to speak to Medicaid costs, the state spends \$652 million on the care of people with Alzheimer's.

The data makes it clear that dementia is a costly and growing public health crisis that we— as a nation and as a state— must address with interventions that support families facing a dementia diagnosis. What can we do as a state to curb the impacts of this growing burden on our families while South Carolina works to mobilize rural outreach for early diagnosis and increase research collaboration and clinical trial access statewide? Part of the answer lies in case management for these families.

The Dementia Care Specialist (DCS) Program housed within the South Carolina Department on Aging (SC Aging) will support individuals living with dementia and their caregivers in order to ensure the highest quality of life possible while living at home. DCS provide community outreach, promote programs that safely engage individuals with dementia in local social activities, conduct local education for caregivers and family members, and connect local families to local resources, like respite, transportation, sitter service, meal delivery, and more. All of which helps ensure individuals with dementia are able to remain in their home longer, if that is the most appropriate setting, which reduces cost of care for the entire family.



Dementia care specialists are “fiscally responsible investments” that will help hold down costs to South Carolina’s Medicaid program, reducing the cost for care for people living with dementia in the state that qualify for Medicaid. The DCS program will be a cost-effective way to assist individuals with dementia to remain in their homes and communities. The Dementia Care Specialists help delay more expensive, publicly-funded institutional care.

In 2023, Governor McMaster signed into law the *Alzheimer’s State Plan Act*, which requires SC Aging to maintain a strategic, evidence informed plan to address Alzheimer’s and related dementias, with annual reporting on progress presented to the legislature each year and a plan updated required every five years. The current Alzheimer’s State Plan for 2023-2028, published in March 2023, has a special focus on supportive services in the community to bring resources to the person caregiving for the person with dementia. Dementia Care Specialists support this goal and the outcomes of sustainable community support for people living with dementia and caregiving their loved ones.

The Alzheimer’s Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer’s care, support and research. We are here to be a resource as you address important policy decisions that will affect the thousands of citizens in our state living with Alzheimer’s and other dementias. As such, we emphatically support the 2024-2025 State Budget proposed line item in SC Aging budget to create the Dementia Care Specialist Program statewide within the Division of Family Caregivers and Alzheimer’s disease (SC Aging). These 10 new positions to work in regions across the entire state will not only make a difference in the fight against Alzheimer’s disease, they are also fiscally responsible investments that will reduce the state’s cost of providing institutionalized care through Medicaid.

I am available to discuss this ask and other policy issues around Alzheimer’s and related dementias anytime at twilson@alz.org or 803-315-0569.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Taylor Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

S. Taylor Wilson
Director of Communications and Advocacy
Alzheimer’s Association, South Carolina Chapter