

Minnesota-North Dakota Chapter

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April 6, 2021

RE: House Health Omnibus Bill, HF 2128 – Article 3, Health Department

Dear Chair Lieblich and Members of the House Health Finance and Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed health omnibus budget bill, HF 2128. And thank you for all you are doing to keep Minnesotans safe and healthy during these uncertain times.

The Alzheimer's Association is asking for you to include Representative Lee's bipartisan bill, HF 313, in the final omnibus health budget under Article 3, Health Department. **HF 313 asks for \$250,000 in one-time funding** for the Minnesota Department of Health to develop a focused statewide public awareness program with culturally-specific messages about the importance of early detection and diagnosis, awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementia, and discussing cognition with a health provider.

There are 99,000 Minnesotans living with Alzheimer's and we expect that number to reach 120,000 by the year 2025. Minnesota is getting older - we have more people over the age of 65 than we do in K-12 schools for the first time in state history - and age is a factor in developing Alzheimer's disease or other dementia.

Quality care for people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias starts with an early, documented, and disclosed diagnosis. However, only about half of those with Alzheimer's have been diagnosed. Among those seniors who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, only 33 percent are even aware that they have the disease.

Early detection and a formal diagnosis allows people living with dementia to: have access to available interventions, build a care team, participate in support services, and potentially enroll in clinical trials.

And 95% of those with dementia have other chronic conditions, including diabetes and hypertension. A diagnosis that includes care planning for these conditions saves people with dementia and their caregivers from having to travel and pay for unnecessary hospital visits or trips to the emergency room.

Alzheimer's is the most expensive disease in America. The average annual per person Medicaid cost for someone without dementia is \$374, versus \$8,779 for someone with dementia – that means that a person with dementia costs Medicaid 23 times more than a person without dementia.

In 2020, Minnesota, through Medical Assistance, spent \$905 million on supporting those with dementia, and that cost is expected to increase by 20% in the next four years.

But the Alzheimer's Association ran a financial model that shows we could reduce lifetime per person health and long-term care costs by as much as 15% or \$64,000 by diagnosing Alzheimer's earlier. One-third of those savings were to Medicaid.

Primary and long term care costs to both the state and to the person living with the disease and their family are lower in people with diagnosed and managed mild cognitive impairment or dementia.

Over the past half-century, public health has provided leadership on the need for diagnosis disclosure with other difficult conditions. Through public health education efforts and advocacy, health care providers are much more open and honest discussing difficult diagnoses, like cancer or HIV/AIDS, and relaying the impact of their diagnosis with care and understanding. We are seeking the same with Alzheimer's disease.

Minnesotans must feel comfortable discussing symptoms and concerns with their healthcare provider. This requires addressing barriers, including low public awareness of the early warning signs of dementia, as well as the emotional distress and misconceptions about the disease.

This bill asks for a \$250,000 investment to develop a public awareness program that could save the state and Minnesota families real money. It will allow Minnesotans with dementia to live a more actively engaged life and a higher quality of life while significantly reducing the costs for health and social care.

Please include HF 313 in your final health budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

With deep appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Ney', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Josh Ney
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