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STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update

By Senator Howard Marklein

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The “Wisconsin Cares” Agenda: Supporting Those With Alzheimer’s and the People Who Care For Them

We all know someone who has been afflicted by Alzheimer’s or dementia. It is painful to watch as a loved one struggles with the memory loss and other challenges that come with these debilitating conditions. More than five million Americans are living with Alzheimer’s disease and as the population continues to age, this number will continue to climb. This new reality requires serious, long-term solutions for those who suffer from it and those who have dedicated time to serve as caregivers.

According to the Alzheimer’s Association, Alzheimer’s is the 6th leading cause of death in the United States, killing more individuals than breast and prostate cancer combined. It is the only cause of death in the top 10 that cannot be prevented, cured, or consistently slowed. Risk factors include age, family history, and genetics. One in three seniors dies with Alzheimer’s or another form of dementia.

Dementia is a general term for a decline in mental ability where it is severe enough to interfere with daily activity. While dementia is not a specific disease, it is a term that describes a wide range of symptoms relating to the decline in mental ability. Dementia is caused by damage to the brain cells. While there is no specific cause of this damage, physicians point to physical exercise and diet as methods of lowering risk. Currently, there is no cure for dementia.

Alzheimer’s is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking, and behavior. Alzheimer’s is the most common form of dementia. Symptoms can slowly worsen over time until they interfere with daily activities and tasks. The majority of individuals that suffer from Alzheimer’s are 65 and older. There is no current cure for Alzheimer’s disease.

In 2015, more than 15 million caregivers provided an estimated 18.1 billion hours of unpaid care valued at over \$221.3 billion. In Wisconsin, there are currently 110,000 people living with Alzheimer’s. There are 192,000 caregivers providing care for these individuals.

In response to this nationwide epidemic, a group of legislators created the *Wisconsin Cares* legislative package to seek ways to address some of the major issues related to the prevalence of dementia and Alzheimer’s in Wisconsin.

The proposals in the *Wisconsin Cares* package were a result of the Speaker’s Task Force on Alzheimer’s and Dementia, a bipartisan group of legislators selected by both parties to seek ways to better serve the needs of those suffering from Alzheimer’s and their caregivers. The task force met with stakeholder groups, individuals from the medical profession, and caregivers. They held multiple public meetings

across the state to gather input. All of the bills in the package were created and passed on a bipartisan basis to assist those suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia and their caregivers.

This session, the following bills were passed and signed into law as part of the *Wisconsin Cares* agenda:

2015 Wisconsin Act 273: Adds \$1 million to the Alzheimer's Family and Caregiver Support Program (AFCSP) for respite care. Respite care provides temporary care for those living with Alzheimer's and other dementias, so that primary caregivers (frequently family members) get a break from their caregiving responsibilities. The AFCSP provides a much-needed resource for caregivers and their families so that they do not become overwhelmed caring for loved ones.

2015 Wisconsin Act 274: Increases training grants to local mobile crisis teams by \$250,000. This funding will help mobile crisis units that can assess those that are suffering from symptoms of Alzheimer's or other dementias instead of relocating them to hospitals.

2015 Wisconsin Act 272: Requires the Department of Health Services (DHS) to propose a pilot program for a specialized dementia crisis unit. There is a lack of appropriate placement of individuals in an Alzheimer's or dementia crisis situation. DHS would be required to reach out to counties to assess their interest in forming coalitions to address this problem.

I am optimistic that the legislation signed into law will be an effective effort to assist those suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia and their caregivers. For more information on the Wisconsin Cares legislative package or Alzheimer's and dementia, please visit:

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/2015/committees/assembly/ad/>

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website

<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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