

# ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION<sup>®</sup>

**Bill:** SB 555 - Health - Dementia Services and Brain Health Program and Clinical Toolkit

**Committee:** Senate Finance Committee

**Position:** Favorable

**Date:** February 24, 2026

On behalf of the Alzheimer's Association, the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support, and research, we strongly support SB 555 - Dementia Services and Brain Health Program and Clinical Toolkit.

Dementia is a fast-growing public health crisis in Maryland. Newly released state data shows that **148,470 Marylanders aged 65 and older – approximately 15% of our older adults – live with Alzheimer's or another dementia**, aligning with national estimates that rank Maryland highest in Alzheimer's prevalence.<sup>1,2</sup> In addition, the dementia burden is not shared equally. Older Black Marylanders are twice as likely, and older Hispanic Marylanders 1.5 times as likely, to develop Alzheimer's than White Marylanders.<sup>3</sup>

Maryland's high dementia prevalence and growing aging population make clear that Maryland needs a more coordinated, strategically led approach to dementia. SB 555 takes a critical step toward that goal by **strengthening two pillars essential to an effective dementia response: our health care providers and our public health system**. Specifically, SB 555 will:

- **Create a statewide Clinical Toolkit for Dementia Care** that centralizes evidence-based guidance on early detection, diagnosis, treatment, risk reduction, assessments, billing, and referrals. As new diagnostic tools and treatments emerge, earlier detection is increasingly critical. And because most dementia care begins in primary care, giving health care providers consistent, practical tools is one of Maryland's most effective strategies for improving dementia care.
- **Establish a Dementia Services and Brain Health Program**. Maryland currently relies on a single Director of Dementia Services and Brain Health to coordinate the response to one of our fastest-growing public health crises. Establishing a dedicated Program within the Maryland Department of Health recognizes the complexity and urgency of dementia needs, and will strengthen Maryland's ability to lead statewide efforts on brain health, risk reduction, early detection, and more. In addition, this Program expands the Department's focus to include supporting the delivery of dementia-capable care across health care settings, an essential connection that is needed to help address early detection and improve health outcomes. Lastly, this Program will ensure continuity through staffing transitions, enable

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<sup>1</sup> Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias Prevalence Data Report, November 2025, Maryland Department of Health. <https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/healthyaging/Documents/Alzheimer%e2%80%99s%20Disease%20and%20Related%20Dementias%20Prevalence%20Data%20Report%20-%20MDH%20Letterhead.docx.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Dhana K, Beck T, Desai P, Wilson RS, Evans DA, Rajan KB. Prevalence of Alzheimer's disease dementia in the 50 US states and 3142 counties: A population estimate using the 2020 bridged-race postcensal from the National Center for Health Statistics. *Alzheimers Dement*. 2023 Oct;19(10):4388-4395. doi: 10.1002/alz.13081. Epub 2023 Jul 17. PMID: 37458371; PMCID: PMC10593099.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures>

opportunities for future funding, and puts the state's response in line with other major chronic diseases, such as cancer and diabetes.

- **Strengthen strategic planning** by expanding the duties of the Virginia I. Jones Alzheimer's and Related Dementia Council's role to assess health care provider readiness and capacity to deliver care to people with or at risk of Alzheimer's disease or another dementia. With the State Plan approaching its regular five-year update, this is an important time to ensure that information on health care provider readiness is incorporated.

Taken together, these provisions will generate meaningful and measurable impact across Maryland's health-care system and for families. **Specifically, if enacted, SB 555 will:**

- **Improve the quality and consistency of dementia care:** Health care providers will gain timely, evidence-based tools to support earlier and more accurate diagnoses, provide person-centered care planning, and improve coordination across care settings.
- **Advance dementia risk reduction and improve health outcomes:** Marylanders will benefit when health care providers are better equipped to offer clear, evidence-based guidance on reducing dementia risk. A Dementia Services and Brain Health Program will complement and amplify these efforts by increasing public awareness and empowering Marylanders to prioritize their brain health.
- **Reduce long-term costs:** Risk reduction and early detection can reduce hospitalizations and avoid unnecessary long-term care placements. These strategies can lower dementia prevalence and save Maryland millions in future Medicaid and healthcare costs. In 2025 alone, it is estimated that Maryland Medicaid spent \$1.7 billion caring for people with Alzheimer's disease.<sup>4</sup>
- **Build statewide infrastructure for dementia:** A coordinated public-health approach will ensure stability across administrations, continuous improvement, and a more equitable response for the thousands of Marylanders living with dementia and their caregivers.

Ultimately, by equipping Maryland's health care providers with practical tools, improving the State's public health response, and strengthening state planning, SB 555 will improve care today and can help reduce dementia risk for future generations. For these reasons, the Alzheimer's Association respectfully urges a favorable report on SB 555.

Please contact Megan Peters, Director of Government Affairs at [mrpeters@alz.org](mailto:mrpeters@alz.org) with any questions.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/facts-figures>