

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Sophie Walsh 271-3469

SB 454-FN, requiring the department of health and human services to update existing relevant public health outreach programs by incorporating information to aid public understanding and awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Hearing Date: January 21, 2026

Time Opened: 10:06 a.m.

Time Closed: 10:34 a.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Avard, Birdsell, Prentiss and Long

Members of the Committee Absent: Senator Rochefort

Bill Analysis: This bill directs the department of health and human services to engage in certain public health outreach regarding Alzheimer's disease and other related dementia.

Sponsors:

Sen. Avard

Sen. Long

Sen. Birdsell

Sen. Prentiss

Sen. Rochefort

Rep. Layon

Rep. M. Pearson

Rep. Mandelbaum

Who supports the bill: Sen. Avard, Sen. Rochefort, Jenny Horgan (Alzheimer's Association), Olivia Parzick (Alzheimer's Association), Leah Farley (Alzheimer's Association), Lara McIntyre (Ascentria Care Alliance and Granite State Home Health & Hospice Association), Francis Hayes, Polly Campion, Chase Eagleson (NH Council on Developmental Disabilities), Robert Dunn (Roman Catholic Bishop of Manchester), Helena Rozier, Suzanne Haldane, and Cathryn Stratton (NH Medical Society).

Who opposes the bill: Daniel Richardson.

Who is neutral on the bill: Wendi Aultman (DHHS).

Summary of testimony presented:

Senator Kevin Avard, Senate District 12

- This bill requires the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to update existing, relevant public health outreach programs by incorporating information to aid public understanding and awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

- The state is currently facing a crisis, as New Hampshire is the 2nd oldest state in the country with at least 10% of our population over 65 years old living with Alzheimer's.
- This is a low-cost, high-impact step that can be taken to make Alzheimer's and dementia awareness mainstream in our public health priority. This supports those living with the disease and their families, while reducing long-term system costs.
- Senator Avard noted that he is the Chair of the Subcommittee on Alzheimer's Disease and Other Related Dementia, which has many discussions about resources that people are unaware of. He emphasized that if caregivers are providing constant care and do not have access to respite or support, there is a risk of breakdown. Senator Avard shared that a hospital in Nashua offers support services for caregivers, yet many do not know about it.
- Due to the high need for care for those in the later stages of Alzheimer's, a significant strain is also put on the health care system.
- Under the Subcommittee's direction, the Alzheimer's Association and DHHS has collaborated to draft an amendment that prioritizes Alzheimer's and dementia in our public health efforts, while ensuring that the language would work appropriately with the Department to be implemented with little to no cost.
- Senator Avard emphasized the importance of raising public awareness and breaking down the barrier of shame that is associated with early on-set disease.

Wendi Aultman, Department of Health and Human Services

- This bill directs DHHS to incorporate information related to Alzheimer's disease and related dementias into existing public health outreach programs. It also directs the Department to include information for health care providers on early detection and timely diagnosis of cognitive impairment using validated assessment tools and existing resources.
- The Department does not anticipate a fiscal impact associated with this bill. The fiscal note reflects that the work is minimal and can be absorbed within existing resources.
- Ms. Aultman reviewed the key findings of New Hampshire's legislative brain health project, emphasizing the importance of early awareness, consistent public messaging, and provider education related to public health. She explained that the topics addressed in this bill are aligned with the identified themes of the report, and the bill will assist in filling these gaps.
- This bill does not expand any eligibility for services or create new benefits. It focuses on awareness and education using existing tools and systems.

Jenny Horgan, Alzheimer's Association

- Ms. Horgan stated that she is speaking in support of the bill.

- In New Hampshire, there are more than 26,500 individuals living with Alzheimer's and dementia. This number is likely higher, as many individuals struggle to get a diagnosis or hesitate to seek evaluation due to fear and stigma.
- As our population ages, the impact of the disease will continue to grow on families, the health care and long-term care systems, and on the state as a whole.
- Ms. Horgan noted the aforementioned brain health campaign and emphasized its success. It was the first state-wide initiative to promote brain health, reduce stigma, and encourage early diagnosis and detection. It generated over 16.6 million impressions and produced measurable improvements on public knowledge and attitudes.
- This bill and amendment builds on the progress made thus far by integrating Alzheimer's and dementia into existing and relevant public health campaigns.
- This includes educating the public on early signs of the disease, the importance of a timely diagnosis, connections to other chronic conditions, and lifestyle interventions.
- For providers, it includes information about risk reduction strategies, validated cognitive assessment tools, biomarker testing, Medicare annual wellness visits, care planning tools, FDA-approved treatments, and available resources to patients and families.
- The amendment would also require the Department to submit a report every two years to the Subcommittee to give an idea of how the progress of integrating information has gone into public health campaigns. It also encourages the Department to pursue federal and private funding to support ongoing implementation of the Healthy Brain Initiative Road Map.
- Ms. Horgan noted that a national analysis shows a potential savings of \$63,000 per person with an earlier diagnosis. This includes \$30,000 in Medicare costs, \$20,000 in Medicaid savings, and \$13,000 in other savings.
- New Hampshire is already facing the high costs of this disease. She cited that \$363 million was spent in Medicaid costs for individuals living with Alzheimer's in 2025. This is only expected to rise, as health care costs and disease rates increase.
- Senator Birdsell asked if the Subcommittee needs to be re-established, and Ms. Horgan explained it is a permanent subcommittee in statute.
- Senator Prentiss asked if an EMS representative has been appointed to the Subcommittee, and Ms. Horgan explained that the process of finding an individual has started.

Olivia Parzick, Alzheimer's Association

- Ms. Parzick stated that she is speaking in support of the bill.

- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are a rapidly growing public health crisis affecting families, caregivers, and communities.
- Families face the emotional, cognitive, and financial tolls of this disease every day, often without the knowledge, tools, or support to respond effectively.
- Education, prevention, and early intervention are critical in reducing burdens and improving outcomes.
- Ms. Parzick brings both personal and professional perspective to this issue, as she has a neuroscience degree and was once a caregiver for her grandfather with Alzheimer's.
- There is a generational gap in public education on this topic, which is why raising awareness is essential. Public education is also critical in the medical field, as 40% of primary care physicians report feeling unprepared to accurately detect and diagnose dementia.
- This bill addresses these gaps, giving residents and providers the basic knowledge and tools they need. New Hampshire has the chance to lead the way in prevention, awareness, and hope for families.

Leah Farley, Alzheimer's Association

- Ms. Farley stated that she is speaking in support of the bill as someone with lived experience.
- Ms. Farley shared a personal story about her journey being diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment due to Alzheimer's disease. She struggled with worsening symptoms for years while seeing multiple providers before she was able to receive a diagnosis. During this time, she carried fear and shame as she realized she was changing without an understanding of why,
- She explained that this is not an unusual experience, especially for those under 65 years old.
- Ms. Farley emphasized the importance of early detection, as it allowed her to step away from her career with integrity, put her affairs in order, and make lifestyle changes to support her health.
- Diagnosis now matters more than ever, as there are treatments that can slow the progression of Alzheimer's in its early stages. Furthermore, lifestyle interventions can protect brain health if people are informed and supported.