



## Alaska Commission on Aging SFY2017 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

### Improve capacity to serve Alaskans living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias

Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia, is a progressive and degenerative illness of the brain which affects a person's ability to think, feel, and function. The disease progresses from mild impairment to an advanced stage in which the person loses the ability to communicate, fails to recognize loved ones, and becomes bed-bound and totally reliant on others for their personal care. The disease is always fatal. Caring for persons with Alzheimer's is difficult, expensive, and heartbreaking.

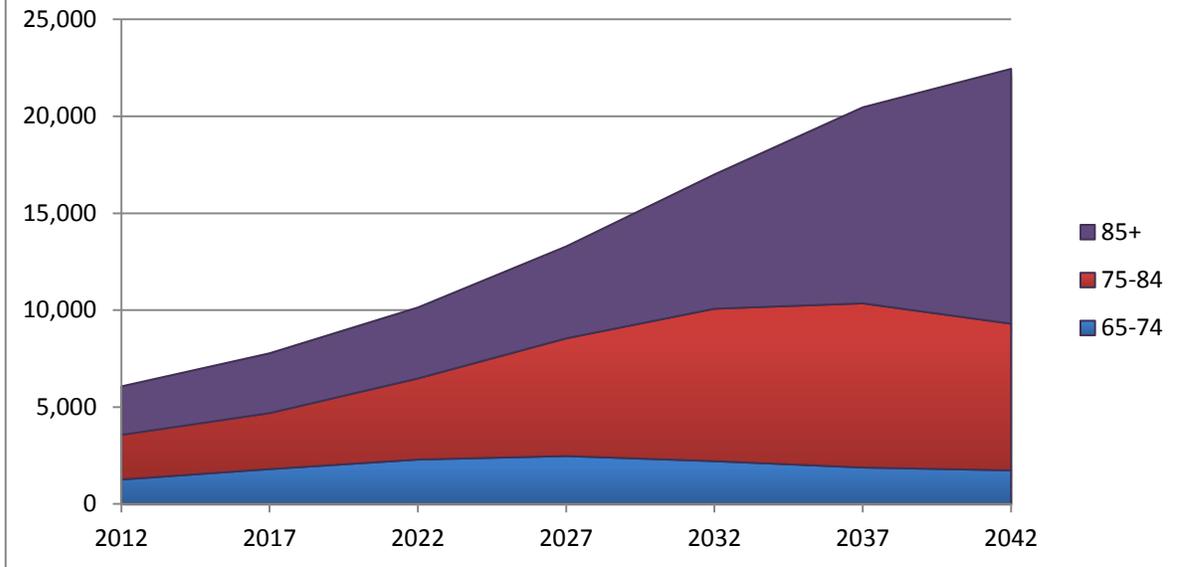
Because age is the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer's, the rapidly growing number of older Alaskans will lead to an increasing growth in the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease in our state. The number of older Alaskans living with Alzheimer's today is projected to grow from an estimated 6,800 to almost 11,000 by 2025. The number of seniors living with other forms of dementia, including Parkinson's disease, vascular dementia, and Lewy Body dementia, are also increasing. Caring for Alaskan seniors with Alzheimer's and related dementias is expensive.

*Alaska's Roadmap to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ARD)* lays out an implementation plan that identifies Alzheimer's as a public health priority. The Roadmap is guided by a desire for early detection and planning, to serve individuals with ARD in their homes and communities for as long as possible, and to address costs by providing services at the earliest stage possible. In 2015, Alaska spent an estimated \$56 million in Medicaid alone (Alzheimer's Association 2016 Facts and Figures).

**Recommendations:** The Alaska Commission on Aging supports efforts to

- (1) Move forward with the **proposed 1915(i) Medicaid state plan option** to serve income-eligible seniors with dementia and challenging behaviors who do not qualify for waiver services. Potential services may include
  - Assisted living rate that is tailored to reflect the special care needs of this population
  - Targeted service package using a "cash and counseling" structure where seniors and their families may choose from an array of services (such as meals, rides, homemaker services, devices to prevent wandering, and caregiver supports)
  - Additional federal funding for the Pioneer Homes who care for residents with early to mid-stage dementia and do not meet the level of care to qualify for the Alaskans Living Independently waiver.
- (2) Maintain sufficient base funding for **Adult Day, Senior In-Home, and the Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Education and Supports program** (administered by Senior and Disabilities Services Senior Community Grants program) to serve those who require care but do not meet Medicaid eligibility for the Alaskans Living Independently waiver or the proposed 1915(i) Medicaid State Plan option. Limiting these core services for an increasing senior population could facilitate more costly out-of-home placement.
- (3) Implement the **InterRAI Assessment Tool** used by Senior and Disabilities Services to assess consumer strengths and preferences as well as to track an individual's health care outcomes in order to guide the plan of care process.

## Projected Number of Alaskans with Alzheimer's, Age 65+



## Percentage of Seniors with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Receiving Select Services FY2011 - FY2016

