

Hawai'i Leads the Nation in Dementia Policy: A Historic Victory for Early Detection, Medical Training, and Our Families

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In a bold and unprecedented move, Hawai'i has become the first state in the nation to enact transformative dementia legislation, signaling a new era of hope and action for those impacted by Alzheimer's and related conditions. With the passage of HB700 and SB1252, Hawai'i has set a gold standard in the fight against dementia—ensuring early detection, access to life-altering treatments, and a dementia-competent healthcare workforce.

This is more than a policy win. It is a deeply human victory for thousands of families across our islands affected by Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's dementia, Lewy body dementia, vascular dementia, and more.

The Human and Financial Cost

More than 29,000 Hawai'i residents age 65 and older live with Alzheimer's dementia today, and this figure does not include those with the other types of dementia such as Parkinson's Disease dementia, Lewy Body dementia, Frontotemporal dementia and Vascular dementia. When including all forms of dementia, conservative estimates place the total number of individuals living with dementia in Hawai'i at over 32,000 who are supported by over 65,000 unpaid family caregivers. The average lifetime cost of caring for someone with dementia exceeds \$400,000—a burden that falls largely on local families. These bills have the power to significantly reduce that cost through earlier diagnosis, better medical support, and timely interventions that delay institutionalization and prevent crisis care.

Why These Bills Matter

Alzheimer's is a brain disease marked by the accumulation of amyloid and tau plaques. New treatments can slow its progression—but only if caught early. Yet half of Americans living with dementia are never formally diagnosed, and those who are often receive their diagnosis in the late stages, when it's too late to benefit from emerging therapies.

Two-thirds of primary care physicians say they received little to no dementia care training in medical school (Alzheimer's Association, 2024). And many still rely solely on outdated observation methods—missing the disease until it has already devastated the brain and the family.

The Solution

HB700 mandates the use of validated cognitive assessment tools at Medicare Annual Wellness Visits—such as MoCA, SLUMS, or Mini-Cog—so we no longer wait until it's too late. Early detection will give families more time, more options, and more hope.

SB1252 allocates \$525,000 to the University of Hawai'i to develop specialized dementia training programs at the John A. Burns School of Medicine, Thompson School of Social Work and Public Health, and Center on Aging, preparing a future healthcare workforce that is truly dementia-competent.

Together, these bills create a comprehensive model for dementia care reform that other states can now follow.

Our Deepest Gratitude

We extend sincere thanks to the policymakers who championed these efforts:

- Rep. Della Au Belatti. - Rep. Greggor Ilagan. - Rep. Scott Nishimoto
- Rep. Takashi Ohno. - Rep. Greg Takayama - Rep. Kyle Yamashita
- Rep. Andrew Garrett - Rep. Darius Kila - Sen. Joy San Buenaventura
- Sen. Donovan Dela Cruz. - Rep. Chun (HB700) - Sen. Donna Mercado Kim (SB1252)

We also recognize the leadership of the Alzheimer's Association Hawai'i Chapter, whose relentless advocacy made these wins possible—especially:

- LJ Dueno, Executive Director
- Coby Chock, Policy Director

And most importantly, we honor the incredible volunteer ambassadors and advocates who spent months walking the halls of the State Capitol, holding meetings, sharing personal stories, and never giving up. Their presence, courage, and compassion helped legislators understand the urgency and humanity behind this issue. Special recognition goes to:

- Sandy Domingo - Jerry Perone - Calvin Hara
- Kathy Wyatt - Bill Richardson - Alice Mizuno
- And so many others who gave their voices and their time.

A Future Built on Dignity and Action

By 2030, nearly 1 in 4 Hawai'i residents will be over the age of 65. The time to act was now—and Hawai'i has acted. These laws bring early screening to our clinics, dementia expertise to our classrooms, and relief to our caregivers.

This is aloha in action. This is Hawai'i at its best. And this is just the beginning. Let our islands be a model for the nation. Let no family face this disease alone again.