



**STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**  
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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243

**BILL LEE**  
GOVERNOR

**LISA PIERCEY, MD, MBA, FAAP**  
COMMISSIONER

January 30, 2020

Dear Colleague:

In Tennessee there are approximately 120,000 Tennesseans living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Currently, Alzheimer's disease is the fifth leading cause of death in Tennessee, and Tennessee has the fourth highest Alzheimer's death rate in the nation. By 2025 it is estimated that number of individuals will grow by 16.7 percent.

Much like other chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, there are multiple modifiable risk factors associated with Alzheimer's disease. Research shows the changes associated with brain health begin to take root many years, even decades, before symptoms appear. The Alzheimer's disease continuum spans decades, providing many opportunities to change outcomes across communities.

The importance of having a public health approach in addressing Alzheimer's disease and other dementias is crucial. The Tennessee Department of Health strongly encourages health care providers to consider the importance of early detection and accurate diagnosis of cognitive impairment and dementia. Although there is not currently a known cure for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, there are many benefits for early detection and diagnosis, including:

- Symptoms of some dementias can be reversed;
- Increased treatment options and access to information, services and community support;
- Advance planning for health, housing, finance, care and risk reduction;
- Options to participate in clinical trials recruiting individuals in the early stages of dementia;
- Relief gained from better understanding by patients and caregivers;
- Better overall health outcomes through management of comorbidities;
- Establishment of a support system;
- Reduced health care costs.

The disease is costly and family members often assume the role of providing continuous care so people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias can remain at home and in their communities. As a result, the health, well-being and economic condition of caregivers are critical in supporting our system of care. Tennessee has approximately 439,000 caregivers providing care to individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

As a health care provider you can help support those living with cognitive decline and their caregivers by talking to all patients about risk factors associated with cognitive decline and through the early diagnosis of dementia; talking to patients and providers about planning for the future; managing co-occurring conditions to maximize health and developing linkages with community-based organizations for patient and caregiver support. Links to resources for each of these focal points are listed below for your convenience.

TDH recommends health care providers take the following actions:

- Familiarize yourself with risk factors associated with Alzheimer's and other dementias:
  - [www.cdc.gov/aging/aginginfo/pdfs/Module2-Alzheimers-Other-Dementias-Basics.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/aging/aginginfo/pdfs/Module2-Alzheimers-Other-Dementias-Basics.pdf)
- Promote the advantages of the Annual Medicare Wellness visit, which includes the creation of a personalized prevention plan and detection of possible cognitive impairment. This can be the first step in detecting cognitive impairment before referring to a specialist for additional assessments, as needed.
  - [www.alz.org/media/documents/alzheimers-well-visit-algorithm.pdf](http://www.alz.org/media/documents/alzheimers-well-visit-algorithm.pdf)
  - [www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Medicare-Learning-Network-MLN/MLNProducts/Downloads/AWV\\_Chart\\_ICN905706.pdf](http://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/Medicare-Learning-Network-MLN/MLNProducts/Downloads/AWV_Chart_ICN905706.pdf)
- Refer patients with signs of memory loss and their caregivers to the Alzheimer's Association or Alzheimer's Tennessee to access support services and education.
  - Alzheimer's Association: 1-800-272-3900
  - Alzheimer's Tennessee: 1-800-ALZ-4283
- Attend education events for providers to learn about diagnoses and management of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.
  - [www.alztennessee.org/events/educational-events/34th-annual-management-and-research-symposium](http://www.alztennessee.org/events/educational-events/34th-annual-management-and-research-symposium)

Our department continues to work with national, state and local organizations to promote awareness of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and we hope you will join us in our efforts.

Thank you in advance for working with us to promote optimal health for all Tennesseans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Piercey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" being more prominent than the last name "Piercey".

Lisa Piercey, MD, MBA, FAAP  
Commissioner