
September 25, 2026

Dear Colleague:

According to the Alzheimer's Association, approximately 62,100 Iowans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's disease, representing approximately 11% of adults over age 65 in Iowa. More than 80,000 Iowa caregivers provide an estimated 118 million hours of unpaid care valued at \$2.7 billion dollars. Alzheimer's disease and related dementias represent a significant public health challenge, underscoring the importance of a coordinated public health approach focused on brain health, risk reduction, early detection and diagnosis, treatment, and support for individuals and caregivers.

Iowa has an important opportunity to strengthen this work through collaboration. The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, the Alzheimer's Association, AARP, Dr. Yogesh Shah, Medical Director at Broadlawns Memory Clinic, and other partners share a strong commitment to advancing brain health across the state, including raising awareness, promoting earlier detection and diagnosis, supporting caregivers, and identifying opportunities to make brain health a more visible and routine part of health care and healthy aging in Iowa.

The number of Iowans living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias may be underrecognized due to delayed or missed diagnosis. Early detection is increasingly important as diagnostic tools and treatment options advance. FDA-approved disease-modifying therapies, including Leqembi (lecanemab) and Kisunla (donanemab), can slow clinical decline in some patients with early Alzheimer's disease. These treatments are not cures and require confirmation of amyloid pathology, careful patient selection, monitoring for risks such as Amyloid-Related Imaging Abnormalities (ARIA), and shared decision-making with patients and families.

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services strongly urges health care personnel to consider the importance of early detection/diagnosis of cognitive impairment and dementia. There are numerous benefits of early detection/diagnosis:

- Identify potentially reversible causes of cognitive symptoms;
- Expand treatment options, including access to appropriate therapies for early-stage Alzheimer's disease;
- Support timely referral for diagnostic evaluation, early intervention, and specialty care;
- Connect patients and caregivers to services and supports;
- Support advance planning for health, housing, finances, and care;
- Promote safety, independence, and quality of life;
- Encourage brain health and risk reduction strategies;

- Offer opportunities to participate in clinical trials or research; and
- Reduce avoidable crises, hospitalizations, and health care costs.

As trusted leaders in health care, Iowa physicians and providers play a vital role in helping patients understand that brain health is an essential part of overall health.

Iowa HHS highly recommends that healthcare professionals:

1. Understand the benefits of early and accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, including new blood-based biomarker tests

Blood-based biomarkers are transforming dementia care by enabling earlier, more accessible detection of Alzheimer's disease pathology, helping primary care providers identify appropriate patients for further evaluation, treatment and care planning.

<https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/diagnosis/why-get-checked>

https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/diagnosis/medical_tests#blood

2. Incorporate brain health into routine care

Please consider discussing brain health during annual wellness visits, preventive visits, chronic disease management visits, medication review visits, caregiver visits and midlife checkups. Providers are also encouraged to use the Medicare Annual Wellness Visit's cognitive assessment provisions when appropriate, connect eligible patients and caregivers to comprehensive care planning services reimbursable through CPT® code 99483, and refer individuals and families to community services and supports following a diagnosis. Brief conversations about lifestyle habits, vascular risk factors, sleep, physical activity, nutrition, tobacco use, social connection, and stress management can have lasting impact.

<https://www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/>

3. Ensure both people living with dementia and their caregivers have access to support and services

Familiarize yourself with the tools and resources the Alzheimer's Association has available for early screening, diagnosis, treatment, and care planning for individuals living with dementia and caregivers. Please visit <http://www.alz.org/hcps>

4. Review Iowa's State Plan for Alzheimer's disease and Related Dementias -

<https://hhs.iowa.gov/media/592/download?inline>

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services continues to work with local and national organizations to promote awareness of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, make strides toward preventing this devastating disease and to support the many individuals and families currently affected by this disease.

Thank you for your continued dedication to the health of Iowans and for your leadership in advancing brain health statewide.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Robt Kruse', followed by a horizontal line.

Robert Kruse, M.D., M.P.H.
State Medical Director, Director
Division of Public Health
Iowa Department of Health and Human Services