

Todd Novak: State dementia care program provides great benefits for Wisconsin

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In Wisconsin, it is estimated that 115,000 individuals aged 65 and older are living with some form of dementia. Over the next twenty-five years, this number is expected to more than double. To address this problem, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services created the Wisconsin Dementia Care Specialist Program at five Aging and Disability Resource Centers across the state. Since its inception, the program has grown to include 19 DCS workers who cover 26 counties and 3 tribes. I have been, and will continue to be, a strong advocate for this program and the great benefits it has had for Wisconsin.

Designed with a primary goal of supporting those who are living with Dementia, Wisconsin's Dementia Care Specialist (DCS) program has a proven track record of success in supporting individuals living with dementia and their families. DCS are able to provide an individual with a memory screen to determine if they should seek treatment from a medical professional. An early diagnosis allows for preventative lifestyle changes, involvement in financial and care planning, and connections to additional resources. These specialists continue to provide support to the family through consultations that help them recognize and respond to the needs of their loved one. The consultations help the family to provide better support at home in order to keep the individual out of institutional care. Statistics show that \$161 are saved each day an individual avoids expensive institutional care resulting in DCS essentially paying for themselves. This is an investment that just makes sense.

Dementia Care Specialists also provide support outside of the home in the form of social programs such as Memory Cafes. Events like these encourage people with Alzheimer's to gather and stay engaged in the community through social and cognitive activities with their peers. It has become clear that institutional care doesn't have to be the only answer.

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I will be fighting for the continued funding and expansion of this program from 19 to 24 specialists in the state budget. The DCS program has been a key asset in expanding the outreach of Aging and Disability Resource Centers and the services they can provide for our communities. Demand for their services has grown at incredible rates and the number of referrals has more than doubled. Continued expansion of this program only stands to benefit our state and those living with dementia and their families.

— *Novak, R-Dodgeville, represents the 51st Assembly District.*