

Opening Statement
Senator Susan Collins
“Changing the Trajectory of Alzheimer’s: Reducing Risk, Detecting Early Symptoms,
and Improving Data”
June 19, 2018

Good afternoon, and welcome to all the advocates and families from Maine and across the country.

One hundred years ago, infectious diseases such as pneumonia and tuberculosis accounted for almost half of all deaths. Today, because of advancements in public health, we can treat and prevent what were once the deadliest diseases in America.

Public health saves lives, and has proven over the past century to extend lives, too. Since 1900, public health has added nearly three decades to the lifespan. The leading causes of death are now chronic diseases including cancer, respiratory diseases, and stroke. Alzheimer’s disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the nation.

While we all may be familiar with the role of public health in protecting against communicable diseases, advancements in public health are beginning to change the story for certain chronic diseases, too. For breast cancer, early detection and screening save lives. The earlier the cancer is caught, the better the prognosis.

We are here today to explore how we can tap into public health to rewrite the future of Alzheimer’s disease, just as we have done for so many diseases of the past.

An estimated 5.7 million Americans are living with Alzheimer’s, costing our nation \$277 billion a year, including \$186 billion in costs to Medicare and Medicaid. If we continue along this trajectory, Alzheimer’s is projected to claim the minds of nearly 14 million seniors, and surpass \$1 trillion in costs by 2050.

Last year, when this sea of purple last gathered, we explored the arc of Alzheimer’s from preventing cognitive decline to improving care for those living with dementia. We learned that there are some modifiable risk factors that may be able to slow Alzheimer’s progression. We saw that there are models of care that can reduce co-morbidities, prevent hospitalizations, and improve life for those living with Alzheimer’s – and for their caregivers. Essentially, we sowed the seeds of a public health approach.

Today, with the start of summer in sight, we are here for the harvest. The BOLD Alzheimer’s Act, which I authored with Senator Cortez Masto, would create the public health infrastructure we need to combat Alzheimer’s and preserve brain health. Our legislation would establish Centers of Excellence in Public Health Practice dedicated to promoting Alzheimer’s disease management and caregiving interventions as well as educating the public on Alzheimer’s disease and brain health.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are already doing tremendous work to combat Alzheimer's within the Public Health Road Map of the Healthy Brain Initiative. The Centers of Excellence created by our bill would implement this CDC Road Map. BOLD would spread the opportunity for communities across America to create the capacity to combat Alzheimer's. Our legislation would help public health departments take key steps including education, early diagnosis, risk reduction, care management, and caregiver support. Early diagnosis makes a difference. Earlier detection of symptoms would provide individuals and families the opportunity to prepare by planning their finances, and to find help navigating the challenges of dementia.

Early diagnosis also saves money. A new study following everyone alive in 2018 shows that diagnosing Alzheimer's sooner would yield an estimated total savings of \$7 trillion in medical and long-term care expenditures. Just as we screen for cancer, diabetes, and other chronic diseases, appropriate screening for Alzheimer's is the first step to improve treatment.

Finally, at the heart of public health are data. BOLD would direct CDC to expand its data collection of cognitive decline, caregiving, and health disparities.

Today, the BOLD bill has 35 cosponsors, and we are on our way to moving it through the Senate Health Committee, and across the finish line.

Several states and towns are already establishing public health plans to take on Alzheimer's. I am proud of the actions that Maine is taking to promote early detection and improve data collection. The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention has distributed the State Plan for Alzheimer's, including its special insert with cognitive assessment tools to help primary care professionals make early diagnoses.

Maine CDC has also collected data through the Cognitive Decline and Caregiver modules in its Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. In Bangor, the Public Health Department has distributed hundreds of the "Know the 10 Signs" brochures to educate the public. In Kennebunkport, Public Health Office nurses are hosting talks on Alzheimer's to connect people with resources.

Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging. It is a public health issue with a course that we can potentially change. There are steps that we can take today to help prevent the risk of cognitive decline and to improve the lives of those living with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. This public health approach is not only empowering; it is the key to saving lives.

Public health has proven its power with infectious diseases. With common public health measures, we are now able to control and prevent infectious diseases better than ever before.

In the time we are here today, more than 100 Americans will be newly diagnosed with dementia. Each and every one has a story – a life rich with memories and a future left to finish. While some of those precious memories may vanish due to Alzheimer's, we are here to boldly hold out hope for a better future.