

**Q: How many people in Massachusetts are suffering from Alzheimer's Disease?**

A: There is no Alzheimer's Disease (AD) registry in Massachusetts, so no official count of people with the disease exists. But based on census data, there are roughly 130,000 people in Massachusetts diagnosed with AD, or a related disorder. AD is the fourth leading cause of death among adults, after heart attacks, cancer, and strokes. The majority of AD cases take place in people over the age of 65, but in some cases the illness can last as long as 20 years. Because the 85+ population is expected to rise by 82% between 1990 and 2010, AD cases are expected to skyrocket.

**Q: Who is caring for these people with Alzheimer's?**

A: The average AD caregiver in Massachusetts provides around 18 hours a week of care. 90% of the caregivers are providing help to a family member, and 46% are over the age of 50. 76% of such caregivers are women. 50% of those caring for people with Alzheimer's report suffering from depression, and about 1 in 3 caregivers die before the person for whom they are caring. The value of this caregiving is estimated at \$4.6 billion a year. The presence of a caregiver can delay an Alzheimer's patient's entry into a nursing home by almost a year. As many as 50% of nursing home recipients have AD, which suggests that the Massachusetts Medicaid program spends roughly \$600 million on nursing home care for AD patients.

Nationally, about 64% of all caregivers are also holding down jobs. Most caregivers (84%) have had to make changes in their work schedules, and over their lifetime, the average loss of wages per caregiver comes to \$566,443. The cost to American businesses of worker absenteeism, reduced productivity, worker replacement and other caregiving costs comes to \$33 billion a year.

**Q: Are researchers close to finding a cure for AD?**

A: As many as 60 drugs are in various stages of development. Previous studies have indicated that ibuprofen and other anti-inflammatory drugs may reduce the risk of Alzheimer's. Certain cholesterol-lowering drugs may decrease the occurrence of AD. Other researchers are looking for ways to slow the development of enzymes that form beta amyloid, proteins that build into dense plaques in the brain, which may cause cell death. Researchers at Brigham & Women's Hospital are studying a potential nasal spray vaccine that would immunize people against Alzheimer's.

For more information, contact the Governor's Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Disease at 617-222-7481.