

Alzheimer's Association Early-Stage Initiative

Recognizing the changing demographics of our aging population and science advancements on the horizon, in January 2006 the Alzheimer's Association launched an Early-Stage Initiative to gather information about current early-stage programs and to discover the best ways to provide services to the emerging early-stage population. An advisory group made up of people with early-stage Alzheimer's (including some early-onset individuals), and a professional taskforce of experts in early-stage dementia were convened and continue to meet on a monthly basis. Most recently, the Alzheimer's Association paid for the Early-Stage advisory group to travel to Washington, D.C., and lobby their representatives to increase funding for research and support.

For the purposes of program design and planning in this initiative, "Early-Stage" refers to people, irrespective of age, who are diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or related disorders and are in the beginning stages of their disease. In this stage they retain the ability to participate in daily activities and participate in a give-and-take dialogue. This includes those persons with "early onset," who develop dementia under age 65, who are still in the "early-stage".

Some of the additional high-level goals of this initiative are:

- To increase early-stage services and access to services
- Change the face of Alzheimer's disease to reflect the full disease continuum and reduce stigma
- Improve physician education and sensitivity
- Involve people with dementia at local and national levels
- Enhance collaboration with other organizations and services
- Increase early-onset services and awareness

By changing the public perception of dementia, it is hoped more people in the earliest stages of the disease will seek assistance earlier; be able to be a part of the planning process for their own care; be able to seek medical interventions earlier; and maximize their independence for the longest possible timeframe.

Three functional workgroups have been created for each of the major areas of the initiative: Program, Advocacy and Awareness. Each workgroup is composed of persons with dementia; professional researchers and clinicians; and Association staff.