



Testimony on H.B. 397 to the Public Health Committee

by The Ohio Council for Cognitive Health

Bonnie K. Burman, Sc.D,

June 5, 2024

Thank you Chair Matthews, Vice-Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Ohio House Public Health Committee, for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 397 (HB 397) which is intended to increase education, awareness and understanding of cognitive impairment, Alzheimer's disease, and other types of dementia. I am Dr. Bonnie Burman, immediate Past President, and current Strategic Partnership Lead for the Ohio Council for Cognitive Health, a 501c3 dedicated to enhancing brain health throughout the life span and ensuring that Ohioans impacted by dementia--along with their care partners - continue to live with meaning, purpose, and joy. As the state lead for both Dementia Friends Ohio and Dementia Friendly Ohio, we work with our many partners at the local, regional, and state level to help individuals reduce the risk of dementia and ensure access to early detection, diagnosis and community supports when needed. I also served as the Director of the Ohio Department of Aging from 2011-2016.

I begin my comments with a focus on both the content and timing of HB 397 and will close with 3 suggestions for next steps. Let me start with the content. As our State's population ages and more of our citizens are impacted by dementia, it is important that we take both a life cycle approach to prevent or delay cognitive decline whenever possible while also caring for those who do experience cognitive changes and their care partners in the most responsive and cost-effective manner. Ensuring that the Ohio Department of Health incorporates dementia awareness information into relevant public health outreach, as proposed in HB 397 is certainly an important step in the right direction since, as the World Health Organization, the Alzheimer's Association and the CDC have all stated often and with conviction, dementia is, indeed, a public health priority.

As a public health priority, we need to focus on brain health throughout the life span just as the various sections of House Bill 397 explain. In addition, the proposed bill encourages our great state to engage in the three key principles of public health-- primary prevention, (that is intervening before a health or medical event occurs through promoting healthy behaviors);

Helping Ohioans living with dementia,
along with their loved ones, care partners and broader community,
live with meaning, purpose and joy.



secondary prevention, (which focuses on early diagnosis and/or detection); and tertiary prevention--often thought of as clinical care— which focuses on managing diseases to enhance quality of life. HB 397, as written, is focused directly and precisely on all three of these levels of intervention and concern and thus we applaud it.

The timing of HB 397 is important as well because with the new developments in dementia diagnosis and treatment on the horizon, (and more to come) public health has a pivotal role to play in creating healthy communities that reduce the risk of dementia while ensuring more equitable access to early detection, diagnosis, community-based support and treatments across populations. We also now know that there are modifiable risk factors that, if introduced earlier in life, can help reduce the risk of developing dementia. These modifiable risk factors also help reduce cardiovascular disease, stroke, and diabetes, which are already well-known public health issues. Who better to lead these efforts and translate them into action for communities than public health agencies?

While we are clearly very supportive of the intent and current content of HB 397, we respectfully offer the following 3 recommendations and a bit of context for the Committee to consider.

The overarching context for our 3 recommendations is simple. While national and international organizations certainly set the tone for public health action, our responsibility to Ohio's citizens is to ensure we are framing our actions and utilizing our limited resources to meet the specific needs of Ohioans and the local communities in which they live. To do so, we should build upon current successful local and regional partnerships to empower communities to work together to address THEIR identified public health needs. There are amazing efforts currently underway in Ohio that are creating meaningful change in communities and need to be integrated into the proposed work outlined in this bill so that we are building on proven and evidence-informed initiatives and using our citizen's tax dollars in the most responsive and cost-effective manner. Thus we are respectfully proposing that HB 397 focus not only on the Ohio Department of Health but provide opportunities and, if possible, resources for local Departments of Public Health—of which we have 113-- to become involved in and potentially lead community-based efforts. The approach we recommend will work for all Departments of Public Health in Ohio regardless of size, budget, or staff.

Given the focus on local initiatives, we offer the following 3 comments to be considered as the Committee reviews HB 397.

Helping Ohioans living with dementia,
along with their loved ones, care partners and broader community,
live with meaning, purpose and joy.



1. Our first comment could be labeled, "Let's not reinvent the wheel." With HB 397, the Ohio Department of Health could be joining with broad-based and diverse state-wide coalitions that have been working collaboratively throughout Ohio for the past 5 years to enhance both quality of life and the health care experience for those impacted by dementia. This work that has been completed or is currently underway to build a dementia capable Ohio by focusing directly on communities has been funded nationally through 4 multi-year ADPI (Alzheimer's and Dementia Program Initiative) grants from the Administration for Community Living and a 5 year Geriatric Workforce Enhancement Program grant provided by HRSA, the Health Resources and Services Administration. Let's ensure that that HB 397 keeps these local—and I must add nationally recognized and applauded efforts—going.

2. Our second comment focuses on what we believe should be core to the actions identified in HB 397—and that is Ohio's robust—and nationally recognized-- Dementia Friends program which has been central to the success of each of Ohio's federal grants and has served as the foundation and door opener in all of our state's dementia friendly efforts. Dementia Friends is a global movement changing the way communities think, act, and talk about dementia. This call- to-action program reduces stigma and promotes the kinds of positive messaging HB 397 requires including the basics of dementia including communication and engagement strategies and helpful resources and how we each can make a difference in the lives of people living with dementia. To date, we have more than 10,000 Dementia Friends in Ohio and a strong cadre of Dementia Friends Champions who are trained to offer the program. Throughout Ohio, the Dementia Friends program is changing how communities—large and small--think, act and talk about dementia, thus opening the door for the broad-based public health effort we all envision.

We would like to propose that the Dementia Friends program, which is comprised of 22 distinct sector specific offerings, be considered as a core component of the public health and dementia initiatives provided by HB 397. Throughout Ohio we have found that Dementia Friends has played a pivotal role in helping local communities become dementia friendly, and that the culturally responsive, cross sector collaborations has helped families and individuals navigate transitions related to dementia. And most importantly, we point to the statistically significant impact the Dementia Friends program has had on attitude change, knowledge, and confidence levels in interacting with individuals living with dementia, and motivation to get to know people with dementia. Ohio has already become a leader nationally in ways to implement this program and adapt it for diverse communities. Other states—our neighboring state of Pennsylvania, for example-- have ensured, through budgetary commitments, that the Dementia Friends program is offered significant times throughout their states. It would be wonderful if Ohio would consider such an approach.

Helping Ohioans living with dementia,
along with their loved ones, care partners and broader community,
live with meaning, purpose and joy.



3. So far we have commented on the where—lets focus on communities-- and the how—lets keep the wonderful efforts around Dementia Friends going strong, and now we turn our attention to the incredible opportunity we could have here in Ohio if we could incentivize local Health Departments to play an active role in HB 397 and the creation and sustainability of Dementia Friendly communities.

One Department of Public Health in our state stands out as a core member of our state dementia efforts. It set the stage for what we as a state can and should be doing going forward with HB 397. For the next few minutes, I will be using Summit County and the Summit County Public Health Department as a model of what we in Ohio could implement if local Departments of Public Health played active roles in HB 397.

Summit County Combined General Health District, also known as Summit County Public Health (SCPH), is the local public health entity that monitors and services the public health needs of over 541,000 citizens of Summit County, including nine townships, nine villages and thirteen cities. The mission of SCPH is to protect and promote the health of the entire community

Summit County Public Health has served as the lead organization in one of Ohio's recent federally funded dementia grants. Core to their grant was providing versions of Dementia Friends throughout the community, providing education on brain health, including risks and prevention and behavioral interventions—that is managing difficult behaviors. Early on they recognized the gaps with those living alone and the need for support for family caregivers and they focused on those areas as well.

One highlight that will give you a sense of how amazing the Summit County Health Department's leadership is focuses on their work to address the unique needs of those living with developmental disabilities who are at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease as they age. Together with the Summit County Department of Developmental Disabilities (DD) they have become a national model for serving this important and growing population. In fact, in Summit County ALL DD staff attend Dementia Friends for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DF-IDD) sessions. In addition, DF-IDD sessions have been incorporated into new hire orientation and are now offered two times per year. Summit DD also began offering DF-IDD sessions throughout the region, ultimately offering statewide training through a partnership with the Ohio Association of County Boards for DD (OACB) to offer DF-IDD sessions twice a year. Additionally, Summit DD provides quarterly training to their provider agencies within Summit County. The

Helping Ohioans living with dementia,
along with their loved ones, care partners and broader community,
live with meaning, purpose and joy.



education offered through this project enabled SCPH to impact the community's knowledge regarding dementia, the stigma associated with dementia, and the risk and prevention factors associated with brain health. They also identified at-risk older adults living alone with dementia and provided needed support to caregivers.

I close my comments about the role of local Health Departments by addressing the often-asked question of whether efforts like this can be sustained so that they could be a model to include in HB 397. Our answer is a resounding “yes.” In fact, Summit County has recently completed year one as a designated Dementia Friendly County. This local health department co-leading the effort. This designation has and will continue to enable Summit County to sustain the Dementia Friends program within their service area.

In sum, we offer our full support of the intent and content of HB 397 and would like to ensure that when implemented, it builds upon Ohio’s amazing successes and partnerships by: 1. focusing on the local or community level; 2. building on existing coalitions; and 3. providing for local health departments to follow the lead of Summit County and take a active—and even a leadership role. The funding to ensure this call to action would only require a very small commitment of funds.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that those Ohioans impacted by dementia can live with as much meaning, purpose and joy as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bonnie K. Burman, Sc.D.
Director of Strategic Partnerships
The Ohio Council for Cognitive Health
bburman@ocfch.org
614 266 3809

Helping Ohioans living with dementia,
along with their loved ones, care partners and broader community,
live with meaning, purpose and joy.

www.ocfch.org