

## **Kansas is the final state to start work on Alzheimer's disease plan**



Dr. Jeffrey Burns is co-director of the KU Alzheimer's Disease Center.

By [Elise Reuter](#) – Reporter, Kansas City Business Journal

Jun 11, 2018, 11:26am

After years of effort, Kansas became the 50th state to take steps to create a plan to prepare for a rising number of patients with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. On June 1, Gov. [Jeff Colyer](#) signed a bill to form a taskforce that will create this plan.

The effort dated back several years to the Gov. [Mark Parkinson](#)'s term in 2009, said [Michelle Niedens](#), former director of education and programs for the Alzheimer's Association's Heart of America Chapter. Niedens recently was recruited to serve as executive director of a new program for the University of Kansas Alzheimer's Disease Center, with the goal of connecting patients across the state to its services and expertise.

"The conversation at the time was what can we do now without a plan? At the time, there were very few states who had work groups, so there wasn't a precedent and there weren't yet outcomes to be seen," she said.

Now, with every other state having developed a work plan, or in the process of developing one, Niedens said the results have been positive. In Wisconsin, for example, the state developed a crisis team to respond to behavioral health issues in dementia patients; in many cases, they have successfully prevented hospitalization.

"The state needed to work together, eliminate some of those silos, come up with a plan to respond to disease in a more effective way," she said.

In Missouri, a task force has been in place since 2009 to plan for the future impact of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. That plan includes adding more training in diagnosis and detection for health care professionals and piloting a brief statewide screening test for dementia.

"Various states approach the state plan differently," Niedens said. "Some states, for example, Missouri, approached it from a very generalist perspective. Missouri's plan speaks to overarching issues, such as (caretaker) shortages and improving dementia care standards."

As with Missouri, workforce shortages also will be a topic to consider in Kansas.

"As a physician, I can definitely attest to a fact that there are not enough clinicians to take care of the patients out there," said Dr. [Jeffrey Burns](#), co-director of the KU Alzheimer's Disease Center. "We need more training in social workers, hired caregivers, and nurse practitioners. There's a big need across the spectrum."

In the last few years, the Alzheimer's Disease Center has initiated an effort to provide fellowship and training opportunities to physicians to specialize in dementia or aging.

The working group, which is still being formed, will include legislators, physicians, patients, and scientists. They will be tasked with assessing the current and future impact of Alzheimer's disease, evaluating current services and resources, and developing a strategy for the state to respond.

"Kansas is the only state in the nation that is not currently drafting or implementing a comprehensive Alzheimer's Disease Plan," Colyer said in a release. "It is my hope that

this working group will provide research, guidance, and recommendations so we can begin developing one of these plans immediately.”

The working group will report their findings by Jan. 14, 2019, to create a state plan. In particular, they will look to combat the overuse of antipsychotic medications to treat dementia patients and will consider the role the state should play in long-term care and supporting caregivers.

Kansas currently has more than 53,000 residents living with Alzheimer’s disease, and Missouri has 110,000. Those numbers are expected to increase by 20 percent in the next two decades, Burns said.

Considering that many families often serve as caretakers for loved ones with dementia or Alzheimer’s, it affects almost everyone. Between the cost of care, the personal impact on families and the broader effect on employers, it’s outpacing cancer and heart disease as the costliest condition.

“I’m very excited about this opportunity to really shine a light on a problem in the state of Kansas, to bring together all of the diverse efforts across the state and unify those to fight this disease,” Burns said. “It’s a huge problem and it’s something we have to address. This is an opportunity to do that.”