

Walker signs three dementia bills in Brown Co.

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USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Three bills signed into law Tuesday will improve conditions for Wisconsinites with dementia, and the people who care for them, supporters said.

Gov. Scott Walker signed the bills into law Tuesday in Green Bay, saying they will help boost the quality of care for some patients while likely reducing costs to government.

The measures:

» Add \$1 million for the Alzheimer's Family Caregiver Support Program, which provides respite for people who care for dementia patients within their own families.

» Requires the state Department of Human Services to award counties \$250,000 grants to train mobile-crisis teams on recognizing and serving people with dementia.

» Requires the DHS to

design a pilot program for two or more counties to create dementia-crisis units.

Advocates for persons with Alzheimer's disease and dementia hailed the new laws, especially the one aiding caregivers. Assemblyman Mike Rohrkaste, a Neenah Republican who was a primary sponsor, said the stress of caring for a loved one with dementia increases the caregiver's risk of heart attacks, strokes and other medical problems.

"We heard loud and clear that respite care is needed for caregivers, especially family members," he said.

Among other benefits, the caregiver support bill provides an incentive to allow patients to receive care in their homes rather than institutions, said Rob Gundermann, public policy director for the Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin, a Madison-based support agency for patients and their families. And home care, he said, typically comes at a lower cost.

That bill, Gundermann said, "is going to save taxpayers a lot of money over the long term ... this is good legislation."

The bills were part of a 10-proposal dementia package Assembly Republicans developed. That chamber passed the entire package but only three bills made it out of the Senate. Republicans who control that chamber said they were worried about spending too much money.

Passage of the laws is an acknowledgement that more needs to be done to address issues associated

with a rapidly growing elder population, supporters said.

Around the state recently, governments and their component agencies have been working to improve the way they handle people with dementia. The Green Bay Metro Fire Department, for example, has held special training to better educate paramedics on issues specific to people with failing memory and other problems often associated with dementia.

Walker said about three in five people who care for a person with dementia also hold down a regular job. Citing the case of former Wisconsin Gov. Martin Schreiber and his wife, Elaine, — chronicled this winter by the Journal Sentinel — he noted that the bills received bipartisan support, in part because the condition cuts across people across the spectrum.

"Dementia ... doesn't know political boundaries," Walker said. "It doesn't know economic boundaries. It doesn't know geographical boundaries."

The bill-signing was on Green Bay's far west side at Options for Independent Living, a nonprofit group that helps persons with disabilities lead productive lives. Other state officials who attended included state sens. Robert Cowles, R-Allouez; Frank Lasee, R-Ledgeview; and Luther Olsen, R-Ripon.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.
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38 arrested in NE Wisconsin meth bust

PATTI ZARLING
USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Authorities say 38 people were arrested and 35 booked into Brown County Jail after a seven-month methamphetamine investigation involving multiple police agencies

and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration to make arrests following a lengthy investigation into meth distribution in several Northeastern Wisconsin counties. Authorities worked with the sheriff's office, the Green Bay and