



# NATIONAL GRANGE

*Elevating rural interests since 1867*

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## **Don't Leave Rural America Behind in the Fight Against Alzheimer's**

*by Christine E. Hamp, President, National Grange*

In America, where you live should never determine the quality of healthcare you receive. But for too many families in rural communities, that is still the reality.

An Alzheimer's diagnosis is difficult anywhere. In rural America, it comes with an added burden – fewer specialists, fewer resources, and fewer opportunities to detect the disease early enough to make a difference. And in a disease where time matters, that gap matters.



Rural communities are older, aging faster, and more medically fragile. At the same time, they face persistent shortages of specialty care and increasing pressure on family caregivers. Nearly [three in four](#) rural physicians report they do not have enough dementia experts to meet the growing demand, leaving communities without the help they need. Rural adults are [more likely to receive care from an unpaid family member](#), and rural caregivers are [substantially more likely](#) to face significant financial strain compared to urban caregivers.

This disparity has devastating consequences. Alzheimer's demands preparation, but early diagnosis – essential for planning caregiving, arranging future care, making financial decisions, and honoring a patient's wishes – remains out of reach for too many rural families.

The reason is that, in addition to a lack of specialists, many rural communities lack access to brain imaging and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) testing, which, until recently, were the only two ways to detect biomarkers of Alzheimer's disease. So, by the time many rural Americans finally receive a diagnosis, they have lost the critical window when this all-consuming disease can be anticipated, planned for, and made more manageable.

Recent breakthroughs in diagnostic testing may be able to help close this gap. Last year, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration cleared two blood-based diagnostic tests for Alzheimer's. These tests are significantly less invasive and easier to administer than costly PET scans or CSF testing, which requires an invasive spinal tap by a specialist. It's not hard to see how blood tests like these are advantageous in rural clinics and physician offices, especially where there are no nearby dementia specialists or major medical centers.

When coupled with digital cognitive assessments, delivered through mobile apps and telehealth platforms by non-specialists, there's even more hope for expanded access in underserved areas. Research is ongoing to evaluate whether blood tests can be used to detect Alzheimer's in people

before they show symptoms – which could empower individuals to take steps to reduce their risk and better understand their options for treatment.

These breakthroughs – and others sure to follow – could dramatically change the Alzheimer’s landscape in rural America, but only if policymakers in Washington, D.C. [maintain their commitment](#) to bridging the rural-urban divide in dementia care and removing barriers that keep patients and providers from accessing the latest technologies.

A [new report](#) from the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation and the National Grange outlines practical steps to reduce rural health disparities, including passage of the *Alzheimer’s Screening and Prevention (ASAP) Act*. Today, a technical distinction in Medicare policy limits coverage for Alzheimer’s blood tests when used for screening purposes. That distinction may seem small, but its impact is not. Without action from Congress, the full potential of Alzheimer’s blood tests may not be realized for the very communities that stand to benefit most.

The ASAP Act would help address this gap by creating a pathway for Medicare coverage of FDA-cleared blood tests for routine Alzheimer’s screening, allowing more individuals to benefit from earlier detection and more informed decision-making.

Alzheimer’s is one of the most significant health challenges facing our country, and for decades progress has been slow. Now, we are finally seeing meaningful advancements. The question is whether those advancements will reach every community, or only those with the greatest access.

Rural America cannot be left behind.

This is not about one test or one policy. It is about whether we are willing to ensure that where someone lives does not determine whether they have a chance to prepare, to plan, and to face this disease with dignity.

Rural families deserve that chance. And with the tools now in front of us, it is within reach if we choose to act.

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*The National Grange is a community-driven, nonpartisan organization that brings people together to strengthen their local communities through service, shared learning, leadership, and connection to the land. Founded in 1867, the Grange includes more than 1,400 local chapters across the country, where members take action on what matters most close to home. From supporting families and schools to organizing events and advocating for local needs, Grange members contribute millions of hours of service each year. The Grange creates opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to make a meaningful difference in their communities. Learn more at [www.nationalgrange.org](http://www.nationalgrange.org).*