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Dementia Friendly Massachusetts supports families living with dementia

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As Secretary of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs in Massachusetts, I am especially pleased to recognize the recent efforts of LifePath to improve the lives of individuals living with dementia and their caregivers.

The Administration commends these efforts, and plans to continue supporting this innovative work with initiatives and partnerships in Franklin County and throughout the Commonwealth.

More than 120,000 Massachusetts residents are living with dementia, a condition affecting the brain and body that may include memory loss, personality changes, and difficulty planning and communicating. Stigma and lack of public awareness about dementia can lead to isolation among families and their loved ones living with dementia.

Dementia Friendly Massachusetts (DFMI) is a new initiative involving many partners; efforts to date include programs to train law enforcement and public safety officials, as well as home health aides and family caregivers.

The initiative focuses on individuals with all types of

dementia — Alzheimer's (the most common form) and less common types such as frontotemporal lobe dementia or FTD. And while dementia is often associated with older adults, over 200 people in our state develop dementia before they are 65 years old.

DFMI has conducted outreach to interested communities, with special attention to specific sectors such as businesses, hotels, restaurants, and health care, and has provided information and technical support for all who are ready to get involved.

Going forward, DFMI will introduce new videos and other materials in order to heighten the overall awareness of dementia among everyone living in our communities.

We will also be trying to enhance sensitivity to people living with this condition, as part of an overarching goal of creating an environment of inclusivity for individuals living with dementia in each of our cities, towns and neighborhoods.

This can only be accomplished through multiple, effective partnerships. Jewish Family & Children's Services, for instance, has been leading a strong campaign to create participation at the grassroots, community level.

The DFMI website (DFmassachusetts.org) has specific information on how to get started.

LifePath's Dementia Caregivers Support Groups, dementia coaching and work with the Alzheimer's Music Project represents examples of the importance of local initiatives. More information is available on the LifePath website, LifePathMA.org, or by calling 413-773-5555 or toll free 800-732-4636.

We have also been building on work by national organizations such as Dementia Friendly America: www.DFamerica.org. Their website has engaging information and visual material, as well as a handy 'tool kit' for getting started with community involvement.

There is tremendous activity and enthusiasm all over the Commonwealth. And that's my point: the Baker-Polito administration is encouraging and supporting initiatives that are being implemented on a local basis, in Franklin County, in the North Quabbin, and throughout the State.

More information is available at DFmassachusetts.org, with links to how each and every person in the Commonwealth can become better aware of dementia and take steps to welcome individuals living with dementia and their caregivers into our communities.