by Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The government is setting what it calls an ambitious goal for Alzheimer's disease: Development of effective ways to treat and prevent the mind-destroying illness by 2025.

The Obama administration is developing the first National Alzheimer's Plan to find better treatments for the disease and offer better day-to-day care for those afflicted.

A newly released draft of the overall goals sets the 2025 deadline, but doesn't provide details of how to fund the necessary research to meet that target date. Today's treatments only temporarily ease some dementia symptoms, and work to find better ones has been frustratingly slow.

A committee of Alzheimer's experts begins a two-day meeting Tuesday to help advise the government on how to finalize the plan.

An estimated 5.4 million Americans have Alzheimer's or similar dementias. It's the sixth-leading killer, and is steadily growing as the population rapidly ages. By 2050, 13 million to 16 million Americans are projected to have Alzheimer's, costing $1 trillion in medical and nursing home expenditures.

The national plan is supposed to tackle both the medical and social aspects of dementia, and advocacy groups had urged that it set a deadline for progress.

Among the draft's other goals:

--Improve timely diagnosis. A recent report found as many as half of today's Alzheimer's sufferers haven't been formally diagnosed, in part because of stigma and the belief that nothing can be done. Symptomatic treatment aside, a diagnosis lets families plan, and catching the disease earlier would be crucial if scientists ever find ways to slow the disease's progress.

--Improve support and training for families so they know what resources are available for patients and what to expect as dementia worsens.

Alzheimer's sufferers gradually lose the ability to do the simplest activities of daily life and can survive that way for a decade or more. In meetings around the country last summer and fall, families urged federal health officials to make sure the national plan addresses how to help patients live their last years at home without ruining their caregivers' own health and finances.