



The Honorable Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate Majority Leader
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
U.S. Senate Minority Leader
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

March 20, 2020

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the Alzheimer's Association and the Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM), including our nationwide network of advocates, thank you for your continued leadership on issues and legislation important to Americans living with Alzheimer's and other dementia, and to their caregivers. The Alzheimer's Association and AIM also thank you for your crucial and timely work to support families and businesses affected by COVID-19. We write today in support of several policies that could be beneficial to people living with Alzheimer's and other dementia, and their caregivers during this pandemic. We respectfully request that these policies be included in the forthcoming COVID-19 legislative response package.

People living with Alzheimer's and other dementia are at increased risk of having serious complications relating to COVID-19 due to their typical age and likelihood of coexisting conditions. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, older adults and those with serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are at higher risk of getting very sick from this virus. There are currently 5.8 million Americans age 65 or older living with Alzheimer's dementia and more than 95 percent of people with the disease have one or more other chronic conditions. This includes 38 percent of people with Alzheimer's that also have heart disease and 37 percent that also have diabetes.

There are also over 16 million Americans providing unpaid care for loved ones living with Alzheimer's and other dementia. In 2019, these caregivers provided an estimated 18.6 billion hours of care valued at nearly \$244 billion. Approximately one-quarter of these caregivers are "sandwich generation" caregivers, meaning that they care not only for an aging parent, but also for children under age 18.

The Alzheimer's Association and AIM support the *Coronavirus Relief for Seniors and People with Disabilities Act* which would benefit people living with Alzheimer's and other dementia and their caregivers in multiple ways. First, the bill would increase funding for inspections of nursing facilities and their infection control practices. At age 80, approximately 75 percent of people with Alzheimer's dementia live in a nursing home. These inspections could mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes, protect this vulnerable population, and save lives. Second, the bill

would ensure that seniors living on low, fixed incomes can afford the treatment they need if they are diagnosed with COVID-19. Finally, the bill would provide funding to ensure seniors have access to healthy food and other important home- and community-based services, which is especially important given the fact that 70 percent of all people with Alzheimer's live in the community. This increased funding would allow States and community-based providers to offer three meals a day, seven days a week during this emergency, provide shelf-stable food to more seniors through the Senior Food Box program, and provide respite care and other important support services to family caregivers.

The Alzheimer's Association and AIM support provisions of the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act* to allow a State agency or an area agency on aging to transfer 100 percent of their Older Americans Act (OAA) funds for uses they consider appropriate to meet the needs of the State or area served. Additionally, allowing State agencies to extend eligibility of home-delivered meals to individuals isolated at home due to social distancing in addition to individuals who are homebound due to disability would be beneficial to persons living with Alzheimer's and other dementia and their families. The proposal would also waive nutrition requirements for OAA meal programs during COVID-19 to ensure seniors can get meals in case certain food options are not available.

The Alzheimer's Association and AIM also support the inclusion of provisions to expand access to telehealth. As noted above, Medicare beneficiaries with Alzheimer's and other dementia are more likely than those without dementia to have other chronic conditions. While 26 percent of Medicare beneficiaries age 65 and older with Alzheimer's and other dementia have five or more chronic conditions, only 4 percent of Medicare beneficiaries without dementia have five or more chronic conditions. Most people with dementia also develop at least one dementia-related behavior like hallucinations and aggression, and a significant percentage of these individuals have serious associated clinical implications. Improved access to virtual and telehealth services allow persons with dementia to avoid unnecessary visits or travel that could further compromise their physical health, and also provide strained caregivers help managing medical needs or behaviors in the home.

Additionally, the Alzheimer's Association and AIM support provisions within the proposal released by Leader Schumer which focus on additional funding and relief for States for home- and community-based services and increasing access to care at home during the COVID-19 public health emergency. We support increasing appropriations for OAA programs like Meals on Wheels and Aging and Disability Resource Centers, along with temporarily waiving some requirements in those programs to facilitate in-home access to services.

Finally, we urge Congress to consider the implications of a workforce shortage during the COVID-19 emergency, including those in home health care and long-term care. Many families who have loved ones living with Alzheimer's and other dementia rely on the services and support of these individuals. Congress must take steps to ensure the health and safety of these workers and those for whom they care.

Again, the Alzheimer's Association and AIM deeply appreciate your continued leadership on behalf of all Americans living with Alzheimer's and other dementia. If you have any questions about this or any other legislation, please contact Rachel Conant, Vice President of Federal Affairs, at rconant@alz-aim.org or at 202.638.7121.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Egge', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert Egge
Chief Public Policy Officer
Executive Vice President, Government Affairs
Alzheimer's Association