



The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
U.S. House of Representatives
2367 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
U.S. House of Representatives
2354 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

February 4, 2021

Dear Representatives Schakowsky and Bilirakis:

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 write today in strong support of the bipartisan Advancing Connectivity during the Coronavirus to Ensure Support for Seniors (ACCESS) Act, which would help address social isolation for those living in long-term care communities by increasing access to vital televisitiation technologies.

Nursing homes and assisted living communities are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis, where 48 percent of nursing home residents are living with dementia, and 42 percent of residents in residential care facilities have Alzheimer's or another dementia. Residents with dementia are particularly susceptible to COVID-19 due to their typical age, their significantly increased likelihood of coexisting chronic conditions, and the community nature of long-term care settings. Across the country these facilities, their staff, and their residents are experiencing a crisis due to a lack of transparency, an inability to access the necessary testing, inaccurate reporting, and more. According to some reports, over 150,000 residents and employees of nursing homes and long-term care communities have died, representing over 30 percent of the total death toll in the United States.

In addition to the physical devastation long-term care residents have suffered as a result of COVID-19, social isolation is taking a particular toll on those living with dementia and their families. Family caregivers have been unable to provide direct care, observe adverse changes in residents, and provide mental stimulation to slow decline. Access to televisitiation services are crucial to maintaining personal connections and support during this time of physical isolation. Project VITAL, an initiative from the Alzheimer's Association and the Florida Department of Elder Affairs, is one strategy designed to address the negative consequences of social isolation by creating a network for connection, engagement, education, and support of individuals with dementia and their families and caregivers. Through the use of customized technology and resources, Project VITAL facilitates connections between individuals living with dementia in long-term care communities and their families; provides opportunities for individualized, person-centered engagement; and offers education and support for staff and families through video-based learning platforms.

The ACCESS Act would help mitigate the harmful effects of social isolation by authorizing emergency supplemental appropriations to expand telehealth capacity for long-term care communities and support virtual visitation to residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. This much-needed funding for nursing homes will help them purchase the technology needed to help residents stay connected through video with both loved ones and health professionals while the health risk of in-person visits remains high.

Again, the Alzheimer's Association and AIM deeply appreciate your continued leadership on behalf of all Americans living with Alzheimer's and other dementia, especially during this vulnerable time. 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