

**Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement Statement for the Record
United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP)
Hearing on "Next Steps: The Road Ahead for the COVID-19 Response"**

November 4, 2021

The Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM) appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) hearing on "Next Steps: The Road Ahead for the COVID-19 Response". The Association and AIM thank the Committee for its continued leadership on issues important to the millions of people living with Alzheimer's and other dementia and their caregivers. This statement provides an overview of the impact COVID-19 continues to have on the Alzheimer's community and policies that help protect this vulnerable population, particularly those living in long-term and community-based care settings.

Founded in 1980, the Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support, and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's and other dementia through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. AIM is the Association's advocacy affiliate, working in strategic partnership to make Alzheimer's a national priority. Together, the Alzheimer's Association and AIM advocate for policies to fight Alzheimer's disease, including increased investment in research, improved care and support, and development of approaches to reduce the risk of developing dementia.

COVID-19 Impact

At least 184,000 residents and employees of nursing homes and long-term care facilities have died from COVID-19, representing over 30 percent of the total death toll in the United States. These 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.

These challenges are compounded by the negative consequences of social isolation that many older adults already experience. Social isolation is an issue within the aging community as a whole, exacerbated due to the current pandemic, and acutely impacting those living with Alzheimer's and other dementia.

Long-term and Community-based Care Policies

To best support individuals living with Alzheimer's and dementia during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alzheimer's Association released a comprehensive set of long-term care policy

recommendations for federal and state lawmakers, [Improving the State and Federal Response to COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Settings](#). These recommendations focus on four areas: (1) rapid point-of-care testing, (2) reporting, (3) surge activation, and (4) providing support.

Dedicated funding for testing and tracing in nursing homes and assisted living communities is crucial. All cases of COVID-19 in these settings need to be reported immediately and accurately. These reports should be updated upon remission, death, transfer, or other appropriate status update. With all appropriate privacy safeguards for individuals, this reported data should be freely and immediately accessible to all down to the facility level. It is critical that data on race and ethnicity are included in this reporting, which will be especially important in ensuring targeted support for the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic, and preparedness for potential future pandemics.

As “hot spots” occur, they must be dealt with urgently and effectively. Any reported COVID-19 cases should trigger careful, ongoing monitoring and, if conditions warrant, well-trained and equipped strike teams should be deployed to the facility to provide needed support until the outbreak is contained and eliminated. All nursing homes and assisted living communities must have full access to all needed personal protective equipment, testing equipment, training and external support to keep them COVID-19-free. It is also important to ensure increased access to televisitiation technologies to address social isolation in long-term care settings, which can have a devastating impact, so that people living with dementia are able to continue communicating with designated family and friends.

These policies are designed to create a strong and decisive response to the COVID-19 crisis in all long-term care settings and we were grateful to see many of them enacted as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2). We thank you for your work to ensure these critical provisions were included, as they represent a significant step forward in improving care during this pandemic and beyond.

In addition, with the approval of multiple safe and effective vaccines and subsequent boosters, we urge the continued prioritization of access for Americans over the age of 65, particularly those in long-term care settings. This is consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s recommendation that long-term care residents be prioritized for access to vaccines, as well as the health care workers caring for some of the most vulnerable in our country and who provide an enormous service to society as a whole.

Finally, expanded access to home- and community-based services (HCBS) is crucial, and a strong HCBS workforce is needed to ensure quality care. People living with dementia make up a large proportion of all elderly people who use these important services. In fact, 31 percent of individuals using adult day services have dementia. Access to these services can help people with dementia live in their homes longer and improve quality of life for both themselves and their caregivers. For example, in-home care services, such as personal care services, companion services, or skilled care can allow those living with dementia to stay in familiar environments and be of considerable assistance to caregivers. Adult day services can provide social engagement and assistance with daily activities. Given the demands on and responsibilities of caregivers, respite services are also critical to their health and well-being, and may allow people with dementia to remain in their homes longer. Strengthening the HCBS workforce through increased wages, benefits, and support is also especially important as the majority of home care workers

are disproportionately women of color. We are glad to see the additional HCBS funding included in the Build Back Better Act and support swift enactment of those crucial provisions.

Conclusion

The Alzheimer's Association and AIM appreciate the steadfast support of the Committee and its continued commitment to advancing legislation important to the millions of families affected by Alzheimer's and other dementia. We look forward to working with the Committee in a bipartisan way to strengthen policies to protect those living with Alzheimer's and other dementia during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, particularly in the Committee's forthcoming pandemic preparedness package. We welcome the opportunity to be a resource to the Committee as that legislation moves forward.