



Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement Statement for the Record

United States Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs hearing titled, "Honoring Our Commitment: Improving VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers"

March 23, 2022

The Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM) appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for United States Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs hearing titled "*Honoring Our Commitment: Improving VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.*" The Association and AIM thank the Committee for its continued leadership on issues important to the millions of people living with Alzheimer's and related dementias, including those who have served our nation in uniform, and their caregivers.

Nearly half a million American veterans have Alzheimer's — and as the population ages, that number is expected to grow. In 2015, an estimated 486,000 veterans were living with Alzheimer's. The annual number of veterans newly diagnosed with dementia has increased more than 22% since 2008. For veterans, prevalence may grow even faster in future years because they have a higher risk of developing dementia. Evidence indicates that moderate and severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) increases the risk of developing certain forms of dementia. More than 1 in 5 combat wounds from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq involve brain injuries, and more than 430,000 veterans have been diagnosed with TBI since 2000 — 12.7% of them with moderate or severe TBI. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is two to five times more common in veterans compared with the general population and has been linked to an increased risk of dementia.

Given the prevalence and increased risks, we note for the Committee that the *National Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease* has long featured action items related to supporting veterans and caregivers affected by dementia. Throughout the history of the Plan, the Veterans Administration has disseminated information about all facets of the VA Caregiver Support Program, including the highly successful Resources for Enhancing All Caregivers Health (REACH) VA Program, which it has also helped to pilot in sister agencies. Most recently, the VA Caregiver Center implemented a supportive texting intervention for caregivers of veterans with dementia through which caregivers receive information about managing dementia behaviors and their own stress and coping. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has funded REACH Hope, Supporting Caregivers of Veterans with TBI and Alzheimer's Dementia/Mixed Dementia: The REACH Hope Behavioral Intervention, to assist caregivers of veterans who are living with TBI and dementia. The three-year study, August 2020-August 2023, combines the REACH-VA intervention and the DoD's Virtual Hope Box mobile app to support caregivers one-on-one in real-time and as needed.

Caregiving can be unpredictable, the Association and AIM are encouraged by the Committee's commitment to empowering veteran caregivers to support the specific needs of veterans, without imposing undue stress or financial burdens. The Association and AIM appreciate the ongoing discussions focusing on this issue and value the steadfast support of the Committee and its continued commitment to advancing policies important to the millions of families affected by Alzheimer's and related dementias and their caregivers. We look forward to working with the

Committee and other members of Congress in a bipartisan way to support the caregivers of those living with this disease.