

**May 18, 2021**  
**House Committee on Families, Children, and Seniors**  
**Alzheimer's Association Remarks**  
**Colin Ford, Public Policy Director**

Good afternoon, my name is Colin Ford and I am the public Policy Director for the Michigan Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. On behalf of our organization and the people we represent, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present today.

As some of you may already be aware, Alzheimer's disease is the most prevalent form of the group of conditions known as dementias (Other forms of dementia include Lewy Body, Vascular, Frontotemporal). Dementia is the general term for loss of memory, language, problem-solving and other cognitive abilities that are severe enough to interfere with daily life. Although there are biological distinctions between different forms of dementia, they are largely similar in terms of the impact they may have on the daily lives of persons diagnosed with this condition. As a practical matter these terms are extremely similar so forgive me as I may refer to them interchangeably throughout my remarks.

Dementia is not a single disease, but the cumulative result of damage to brain cells that is significant enough to hinder brain functions required for many daily activities that require short-term memory. Dementia is chronic, and is a disease that we don't yet have a cure. It is also often progressive in nature meaning that what may manifest itself as low-grade forgetfulness may evolve into more severe manifestations such as disregard for hygiene and feeding or loss of the capacity to conduct the required activities to live a healthy and independent life.

To give you an idea of the scope of this disease, here are some facts and figures that have been compiled with respect to the prevalence and costs of dementia:

- More than 6 million americans are currently living with dementia
  - This translates to 190,000 cases in Michigan and is expected to grow to 220,000 case by 2025
- 1 in 3 seniors die with alzheimer's disease or another dementia
  - For context, this figure is slightly higher than breast cancer and prostate cancer combined.
- More than 11 million Americans provide unpaid care for someone living with dementia.
  - This is roughly 15.3 billion hours of care
- Death rates attributable to dementia have increased by approximately 16% nationwide during the pandemic.

As an organization, we are committed to our vision of a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementias. But in the meantime, we are committed to addressing the practical realities of living with this disease or caring for someone living with the disease. As an organization we rely on fundraising to support our operations which allows us to provide research funding, programming and support for persons living with the disease and caregivers, and advocacy. In terms of our advocacy, we are focused on the areas of early detection and diagnosis, assuring that Michigan has the workforce necessary to tackle the increasing number of persons diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and lastly looking at policies that allow persons living with the dementia the best opportunities to safely stay in their homes according to their own wishes.

Because of the nature of Alzheimer's and dementia, families may encounter any number of state agencies as they seek care for their family member. Adult and aging, LARA, Medicaid, public health, are just a few examples of where many decisions are made that can have direct impact on the lives of patients and caregivers. Currently, Dementia lacks the type of resources and coordination that many other diseases and conditions. As an organization, we see on a daily basis the scope of need many patients require and the amount of effort required for caregivers to navigate the various agencies to access services for their family members.

I'd like to turn now to Doug Hammond to allow him to share his experience as a caregiver:

### **DOUG READS HIS REMARKS**

Our staff in Michigan is configured precisely to help someone like Doug navigate many of the challenges of living with dementia or living with someone who has dementia. Accessing information, care planning, emotional well-being and support are just a few of the services we provide. Our team of social workers is ready to help. Last year alone, we helped nearly 7,000 people find and attend support groups, provided care consultations to nearly 4,000 families, and connected 7,500 people to educational resources. I say this, in part because this is a very rewarding aspect of our work, but also as an open invitation for you and your staff to consider utilizing the Alzheimer's Association as a resource should you or one of your constituents ever require it.

Thank you, and we would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.