



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

United States Senate Special Committee on Aging United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs Joint Hearing on "Heroes at Home: Improving Services for Veterans and their Caregivers"

June 5, 2024

The Alzheimer's Association and Alzheimer's Impact Movement (AIM) appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the Senate Special Committee on Aging and Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs joint hearing on **"Heroes at Home: Improving Services for Veterans and their Caregivers."** The Association and AIM thank the Committees for their continued leadership on issues important to the millions of veterans living with Alzheimer's and other dementia and their caregivers. This statement highlights the importance of services to meet the needs of our nation's veterans living with Alzheimer's and other dementia, as well as their caregivers.

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 a 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 the development of approaches to reduce the risk of developing dementia.

Nearly half a million American veterans are living with Alzheimer's — and as the population ages, that number is expected to grow. In 2022, an estimated 451,000 veterans were living with Alzheimer's. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has projected the number of veterans living with Alzheimer's dementia will increase by 8.4 percent through 2033 to more than 488,000. For veterans, the prevalence may grow even faster in future years because they have a higher risk of developing dementia, as they are uniquely exposed to certain risk factors. For example, evidence indicates that even mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) increases the risk of developing certain forms of dementia. A recent meta-analysis estimated the increase in dementia risk from any form of TBI was nearly 70 percent. The significant increase in the number of veterans with Alzheimer's and other dementias will place a heavy burden on the VA health care system, and in particular, nursing home care.

The Alzheimer's Association is deeply grateful for the VA's comprehensive approach to dementia and the people it affects: its extensive research, its care and support services within

the Geriatrics and Extended Care program, and its participation on the Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Research, Care, and Services. We are particularly appreciative of our joint pursuits, including the Alzheimer's Disease Neuroimaging Initiative (ADNI) and the Partners in Dementia Care program, and we are glad to serve as a resource to the VA as it continues to balance the protection of its aging veterans while encouraging the availability of high quality care.

Home- and Community-Based Services: The Impact on Family Caregivers and Needs of the Alzheimer's and Dementia Community

We are grateful for the VA's commitment to supporting veterans living with Alzheimer's and other dementia by offering an array of long-term care and support services, such as assisted living, residential, as well as adult day and home health care.

Home- and community-based services (HCBS) allow people with dementia to remain in their homes while providing family caregivers with much-needed support. These services empower caregivers to provide quality care for their loved ones while allowing them to manage and improve their health.

While 83 percent of care provided to older adults in the United States comes from family members, friends, or other unpaid caregivers, nearly half of these caregivers do so for individuals with Alzheimer's or other dementia. Of the total lifetime cost of caring for someone with dementia, 70 percent is borne by families — either through out-of-pocket health and long-term care expenses or from the value of unpaid care. In 2023, caregivers of people with Alzheimer's or other dementias provided an estimated 18.4 billion hours of informal — that is, unpaid — assistance, a contribution valued at \$346.6 billion.

Several states are implementing innovative solutions to address Alzheimer's by developing critical, cost-effective, dementia-specific HCBS programs. These programs are allowing people with dementia and their caregivers to access services and support that are uniquely tailored to meet their needs, allowing them to remain in their homes and communities longer and enjoy a greater quality of life. Building off of innovative solutions by several states, the VA through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) should consider adopting a core set of home- and community-based services that are specifically designed for people with dementia. A core set of HCBS, in addition to other services, will allow people with Alzheimer's to continue to remain in their communities and be independent for as long as possible.

Supporting Veterans' Access to High Quality Long-Term Care Services

While people living with Alzheimer's and other dementia and their caregivers often prefer to keep the individual living in the home for as long as is manageable, they make up a significant portion of all long-term care residents. More than 60 percent of the VA's costs of caring for those with Alzheimer's are for nursing home care. Given our constituents' intensive use of these services, the quality of this care is of the utmost importance.

While much of the training for long-term care staff is regulated at the state level, we encourage the Committees to consider proposals that support state VHA Medical Centers in implementing and improving dementia training for direct care workers, as well as their oversight of these activities. Training policies should be competency-based, should target providers in a broad range of settings and not limited to dementia-specific programs or settings, and should enable staff to (1) provide person-centered dementia care based on a thorough knowledge of the care recipient and their needs; (2) advance optimal functioning and high quality of life; and (3) incorporate problem-solving approaches into care practices.

We also urge the Committees to support VHA Medical Centers in the following efforts: (1) any training curriculum should be delivered by knowledgeable staff that has hands-on experience and demonstrated competency in providing dementia care; (2) continuing education should be offered and encouraged; and (3) training should be portable, meaning that these workers should have the opportunity to transfer their skills or education from one setting to another.

Conclusion

The Alzheimer's Association and AIM appreciate the Committees' steadfast support for veterans and their caregivers and the continued commitment to advancing issues important to the millions of military families affected by Alzheimer's and other dementia. We look forward to working with the Committees and other members of Congress in a bipartisan way to advance policies to support the growing population of veterans living with dementia and their caregivers.