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May 18, 2014

Congress needs to address issues with Alzheimer's Accountability Act

According to the Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org), Congress passed the National Alzheimer's Project Act, a bi-partisan effort, in 2010. One of the goals of the plan is to effectively treat and/or prevent Alzheimer's disease (AD) by 2025. Although the law instructs the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop a strategic plan to address the epidemic of AD, and to update the plan annually, a critical piece is missing from the original plan. It is important to include outcome-driven objectives, recommendations for priority actions and coordination of all federally funded programs which address research, care, and services. However, a projection of the level of funding is needed to reach the important goal of treatment and prevention of AD by 2025. As a result, the Alzheimer's Accountability Act (S.2192/H.R.4351) would require the scientists at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to submit an annual research budget proposal directly to Congress, specifying the resources needed to meet the established research milestones and timelines.

Statistics recently released by the Alzheimer's Association point out the need for the additional legislation. There is no question that this disease, part of a group of dementias, has reached epidemic proportions. More than 5 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease; someone in the United States develops the disease every 67 seconds. One in three seniors will die of Alzheimer's disease or another dementia; approximately 500,000 die each year. AD kills more people than breast and prostate cancer combined. Women in their 60's are two times more likely to develop AD during their lifetime than breast cancer. AD is the 6th leading cause of death, and the only one in the top 10 that cannot be prevented, cured, or even slowed.

The cost to society is staggering, even if we just look at the financial burden. Sixty percent of caregivers are women. In 2013, 15.5 million caregivers provided an estimated 17.7 billion hours of unpaid care valued at \$220 billion. What happens when the caregivers need care? It is estimated that 19 percent of women who are caregivers quit work due to caregiving duties, adversely impacting their retirement futures. Caregivers are more likely to die before the patient due to the stress of caregiving. AD is considered the most expensive condition in the nation. In 2014, it is estimated that direct costs of AD will reach \$214 billion, including \$150 billion of Medicare dollars. (See www.alz.org/factsandfigures for more information).

The Alzheimer's Association is calling us to ask our Senators and Representatives to support the Alzheimer's Accountability Act. This disease is likely to affect all of us in some way; it would be to our advantage to support research to eliminate this disease. The Alzheimer's Association website and local organizations have a wealth of information, both for the disease sufferers, their families and caregivers. Consider learning more about Alzheimer's disease today, and how to support this important legislation.