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Local Alzheimer's Advocates gather in Chicago for the Social Security Administration hearing on Compassionate Allowance Initiative

CHICAGO, IL---Several local residents will be among the hundreds of Alzheimer advocates from across the region headed to Chicago for an upcoming Social Security Administration (SSA) hearing.

Social Security officials will consider if individuals under the age of 65 who have younger-onset Alzheimer's disease should be included in its Compassionate Allowance Initiative, a recognized class of medical conditions and diseases that are severely debilitating or life-threatening which prevent individuals from being able to work for at least 12 months. For people under age 65 with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia, their diminished cognitive impairment can quickly reach a point where they can no longer maintain gainful employment.

The Social Security Administration's proactive efforts to "fast track" certain conditions will help to reduce the backlog of disability claims and more importantly ensure those claims that fall under the Compassionate Allowance Initiative will be decided within days instead of months or years. In addition to Alzheimer advocates from Illinois, Alzheimer families from throughout the Midwest will attend the July 29 hearing.

"We applaud Social Security's efforts to improve the disability determination process and expedite the disability claim process," said Erna Colborn, president and CEO of the Greater Illinois Chapter. Those who have younger-onset Alzheimer's disease have great difficulty meeting workforce demands. If they are included under the Compassionate Allowances Initiative, it ensures they won't have to endure the uncertainty of an extended wait for a disability determination and its associated unnecessary, emotionally and financially draining effects."

"The Compassionate Allowance hearing being held next week in Chicago will give us additional insight into how we might better recognize and fast-track the disability applications of people with younger-onset Alzheimer's disease," said Carmen Moreno, Social Security Regional Communications Director. "We have worked closely with the Alzheimer's Association to ensure we hear from the leading experts in the field of Alzheimer's and from those struggling with the disease and their caregivers."

Experts predict by 2010, there will be nearly a half million new cases of Alzheimer disease each year; and by 2050, almost a million new cases each year. Although the majority of Alzheimer cases are individuals age 65 and older, there is still a significant number of individuals under age 65 who are impacted by the fatal, neurodegenerative disease that today has no cure or effective disease-modifying treatments.

"At the end of the process, we certainly hope those with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias will be included under the Social Security's Compassionate Allowance Initiative – that would be the most positive outcome," continued Colborn. "But equally important, is for individuals with Alzheimer's to have the opportunity to participate in these forums to educate government officials about the very real challenges people face every day, especially as they try to navigate the Social Security disability process."

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Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue and an esteemed panel of officials from SSA and the National Institutes of Health will hear from experts in the field of Alzheimer's and related dementias as well as those directly affected by the disease. To talk with local residents who plan to attend SSA's Compassionate Allowance Initiative hearing on July 29, 2009 in Chicago, please contact the Greater Illinois Chapter to arrange an interview. For more information on the hearing, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances

About the Alzheimer's Association - The Alzheimer's Association, the world leader in Alzheimer research and support, is the largest voluntary health organization dedicated to finding prevention methods, treatments and cure for Alzheimer's. Since 1980, the donor supported, nonprofit Alzheimer's Association has provided reliable information and care consultation; created supportive services for families; increased funding for dementia research; and influenced public policy changes. **The Greater Illinois Chapter** serves dozens of counties with offices in Bloomington, Carterville, Chicago, Joliet, Rockford and Springfield. For more information, call our Helpline at 800-272-3900 or visit www.alz.org/illinois.

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