



From: Daniel C. Zotos, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy
Alzheimer's Association, MA/NH
To: Rep. Ruth Balsler, Sen. Pat Jehlen, Joint Committee on Elder Affairs
Date: May 15, 2020
Re: **Testimony RE: Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis on Aging Adults in Massachusetts and the Alzheimer's Association's COVID-19 LTC Policy Recommendations**

Good Afternoon Chairwomen Balsler and Jehlen and Members of the Committee:

My name is Daniel Zotos and I am the Director of Public Policy & Advocacy for the Alzheimer's Association MA/NH. The Alzheimer's Association would like to thank the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs for its longstanding commitment to vulnerable populations in the Commonwealth and for its recent action on critical COVID-19 legislation regarding reporting and disclosure.

The Alzheimer's Association represents over 5.8 million Americans age 65 or older living with Alzheimer's and related dementia with 130,000 individuals and 340,000 caregivers impacted right here in the Commonwealth.

People living with Alzheimer's and other dementia are at increased risk of having serious complications relating to COVID-19 due to their typical age and likelihood of coexisting conditions. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older adults and those with serious chronic medical conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease are at higher risk of getting very sick from this virus. More than 95 percent of people with Alzheimer's disease have other chronic conditions. This includes 38 percent of people with Alzheimer's that also have heart disease and 37 percent that also have diabetes.

As the nation continues to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, people living with dementia, their families, and caregivers continue to work through extreme challenge and hardship. These challenges are being strongly felt in long-term care settings. Nursing homes and assisted living communities are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis, where **48% of nursing home residents are living with dementia, and 42% of residents in residential care facilities, including assisted living communities, have Alzheimer's or another dementia.** Residents with dementia are particularly susceptible to COVID-19 due to their typical age, their significantly increased likelihood of coexisting chronic conditions, and the community nature of these settings.

Across the country more than 2 million people live in long-term and residential care communities. These residents, their family members and staff are in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented great challenges including the inability to access necessary testing and resources, inaccurate reporting and more. According to some estimates, more than 27,000 residents and workers have died from the coronavirus at nursing homes and other long-term care communities nationwide. The virus so far has had a profound impact here in the Commonwealth, with over 17,000 cases of residents/healthcare workers in Long-Term Care Facilities and over 3,200 deaths.

The Alzheimer's Association has outlined policy solutions to: enhance testing in community settings; implement necessary reporting; develop protocols to respond to a rise in cases; and ensure care communities have the necessary equipment (i.e. PPE)

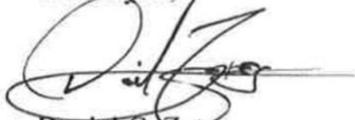
- Every nursing home and assisted living community must be equipped with the onsite capability to verify that all residents, staff and visitors are free of COVID-19 infection, whether or not they are symptomatic.
- Reporting mechanisms must be improved. All cases of COVID-19 infections, remissions and deaths in care communities will be reported immediately and accurately. Additionally, following all appropriate privacy safeguards, this reported data should be freely and immediately accessible.
- Care communities must also be ready for surges. Any reported cases should trigger careful, ongoing monitoring and, if conditions warrant, “strike teams” will be employed to the facility to provide needed support until the outbreak is appropriately contained and eliminated.
- Policymakers must ensure all nursing homes and assisted living communities have full access to all needed PPE, testing equipment, training and external support to keep them COVID-19 free.

The Alzheimer's Association strongly supports the essential first steps outlined in *An Act relative to long term care facility and elder housing COVID-19 reporting* put forward by this committee and hope to see its swift enactment. We remain committed to working with the Legislature and various stakeholders to more quickly realize the critical aforementioned policy solutions. Please find an accompanying document titled *Improving the State and Federal Response to COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Settings* that further outlines these four critical priority areas.

Additionally, we know that caring for a loved one during the coronavirus outbreak can add stress for dementia caregivers. We wanted to be sure you and your constituents were aware of the Alzheimer's Association free [24/7 Helpline](https://www.alz.org/247helpline) at 800.272.3900, which is staffed by masters-level clinicians and offers translation services in more than 170 languages. This Helpline provides confidential care consultations to assist individuals with decision-making, crisis situations, and disease education information. The Alzheimer's Association encourages you to share the Helpline, our COVID-19 Tip Sheet at [alz.org/COVID19](https://www.alz.org/COVID19) (also [available in Spanish](#)), and guidance for long-term and community-based care settings with your constituents to ensure high-quality dementia care continues during the COVID-19 crisis.

If you have questions about these or any other Alzheimer's-related issues, please do not hesitate to contact me by email dzotos@alz.org or phone **(617) 448-7497**. Thank you again for your support. We deeply appreciate your commitment to vulnerable populations, including those impacted by Alzheimer's and all dementia, during this challenging time and always.

Thank you,



Daniel C. Zotos

Director of Public Policy & Advocacy, Alzheimer's Association MA/NH