

Statement on National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month, 2017

November 1, 2017

President Ronald Reagan declared the first National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month in 1983. Eleven years later, President Reagan was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, which eventually claimed his life. While President Reagan's experience raised our collective awareness about this cruel disease, Americans today are, sadly, no less vulnerable to its ravages. The slow, steady decline of those living with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias continues to affect Americans from all walks of life.

Alzheimer's disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. An estimated 5.3 million Americans age 65 and older have Alzheimer's disease, and nearly 14 million Americans may suffer from it by 2050. Thousands live with early-onset Alzheimer's and other related types of dementia. For these Americans struggling with the disease as it gradually erodes their ability to think, learn, and remember, we must all do our best to alleviate suffering, open our hearts, and provide loving care. Additionally, our institutions must pursue research and other opportunities to help eradicate the disease in the future. We can and must do better.

This month, we also acknowledge the millions of caregivers currently assisting those with a diagnosis of dementia. They know firsthand that the cost of such a diagnosis is measured not just in dollars and cents, but also in the emotional and physical effort required to help loved ones. There is a light on the horizon, however, as our Nation's scientific, medical, and caregiving communities are breaking new ground in the fight against Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Advancements in computing, genetics, and imaging technologies are facilitating greater collaboration among researchers around the world.

The United States Government is committed to supporting cutting-edge research that will help people with Alzheimer's through activities such as the National Institutes of Health's Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative, and the Exceptional Unconventional Research Enabling Knowledge Acceleration (EUREKA) prize competitions. Congress endorsed both of these efforts last year in the bipartisan 21st Century Cures Act. In addition, this past month, the Department of Health and Human Services convened a national research summit focused on improving quality of care, services, support systems, and outcomes for people suffering from dementia and their caregivers. Through public-private efforts like this and many other initiatives, we are helping to speed up diagnosis of dementia to find new and innovative opportunities to apply medicine and to detect hallmarks of this disease well before symptoms of memory loss occur.

As we applaud the important research and clinical work occurring across our Nation and around the world, we also recognize that cures to Alzheimer's disease and associated forms of dementia cannot come soon enough. Therefore, we press forward in our efforts, knowing that each breakthrough builds greater understanding of the problem and generates exciting potential to help those who are suffering.

Categories: Statements by the President : National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month.

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