

Opening Statement
Chairman Bill Nelson
Senate Special Committee on Aging
State of Play: Brain Injuries and Diseases of Aging
June 25, 2014

Good afternoon. Thank you for being here today as we discuss a topic that is of increasing concern to both young and old alike – the potential long-term impact of sports-related concussions or traumatic brain injuries.

Traumatic brain injuries, or T-B-I's are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain.

More mild T-B-I's, more commonly known as "concussions," have been the center of increasing discussion within the sports community in recent years as a growing number of current and former athletes say they're suffering from memory loss and other impairments caused by repeated blows to the head.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1.6 to 3.8 million sports- and recreation-related traumatic brain injuries occur in the United States each year. Such head injuries are not limited to just one sport. They occur in a wide range of sports, from football and soccer to wrestling, hockey and baseball.

Over the last few years, much has been done to increase awareness of the risks posed by sports-related concussions. And, thanks to a number of public and private partnerships and initiatives, research is underway

all across the nation to help us better understand the cause and long-term impact of concussions and how we can prevent them. These initiatives involve organizations as diverse as the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Department of Defense, the National Football League, the National Hockey League and the NCAA, to name just a few.

But, while we're making progress, it is important to note that much more research is needed in the area of sports-related T-B-I before we can state with absolute certainty the extent of the link to later chronic brain diseases, like Alzheimer's.

Today we will hear from two former professional athletes who had their careers cut short due to concussions and now wonder how they will function as they grow older.

We will also take testimony from two prominent medical researchers who will discuss the latest research related to TBI and neurological diseases.

Our goal in holding this hearing is to present what we know today and consider solutions for a healthier outlook for those who love to play the game.

And with that, I turn to Senator Collins.