

SENATE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

“The Fight Against Alzheimer’s Disease: Are We on Track to a Treatment by 2025?”

March 25, 2015

Ranking Member Claire McCaskill

Opening Statement

Thank you Chairman Collins. And thank you for your incredible leadership on this Committee and in the Senate on behalf of individuals with Alzheimer’s and those who care for them. They are lucky to have you as a tireless advocate on their behalf. I would also like to thank the many advocates we have here with us today, from all across the country; your spirit is inspiring and with your help we will find a treatment for Alzheimer’s disease. Of course, I want to recognize our Missouri delegation that traveled all this way to have their voices heard on this important issue.

I look forward to hearing testimony today from a member of our Missouri delegation, Kim Stemley. Kim is the primary caregiver for her mother, Dorothy, who was diagnosed with dementia several years ago. Kim’s experience navigating the medical, financial and housing systems to get assistance for her mother is not so different from the experiences of caregivers all across the country. I look forward to hearing her testimony and seeing what we on the Committee can do to help those that are grappling with this serious disease.

At one point, many people believed that Alzheimer’s disease was a normal part of the aging process and that treatment options were either hopeless or unnecessary. We know today, that is just wrong. If we make the right investments now, we can find a treatment. Effective treatments are necessary to alleviate the tremendous human, economic and medical toll that this disease poses on our nation’s families. And we really need to do something soon, because this is a crisis in this country. The total cost of care for Alzheimer’s patients is set to reach \$1.1 trillion

in 2050. Just think about that--\$1.1 trillion. This is not a sustainable cost for individuals, families or our federal budget.

Family caregivers are the unsung heroes of the Alzheimer's epidemic. They provide the largest portion of care for individuals with the disease. Caregivers typically experience more stress, anxiety and lost productivity as a result of their increased responsibilities. While family caregivers provide support for their loved ones for as long as they can, many patients in the later stages of the disease require round-the-clock care and are moved to nursing homes. According to the CDC, nearly half of all nursing home residents in the U.S. have Alzheimer's disease. And with few long-term care financing options, many families depend on the Medicaid program for their nursing home funds. It is estimated that 28% of the Medicaid budget is spent on long-term care services, much of that for Alzheimer's patients. Not to steal Ms. Stemley's thunder, but I know that she depends on Medicaid to help care for her mom. Her mom, who by the way, worked hard all her life and retired with a pension, but that pension is not enough to cover the high cost of nursing home care.

All of that said, those are problems facing a family once they have learned of the diagnosis. Yesterday, the Alzheimer's Association released their 2015 Facts and Figures Report which found that about half of all people with Alzheimer's disease or their caregivers are not aware of their diagnoses. This is incredibly troubling. We can't go back to old days when people were not properly informed of their diagnoses in a misguided attempt to spare them the truth. Not only are many individuals not being alerted of their diagnoses, but many believe that the mortality rate for Alzheimer's patients is much higher than projected. A study done by researchers at Rush University Medical Center found that Alzheimer's is now likely the third

leading cause of death in the U.S., following closely behind cancer and heart disease. We need to tackle this crisis head on and provide families with as much support as we can.

I look forward to hearing the testimony from our distinguished panel of witnesses about how we can confront this looming challenge and our plan for reaching a treatment by 2025.

Thank you again, Chairman Collins for holding this important hearing. I would also like to thank our witnesses and advocates, for taking the time to be here today.