

**Passport to Independence:
Battling the Leading Causes of Disability Among Seniors
Special Committee on Aging Forum
June 10, 1999**

Opening Statement: Senator Charles E. Grassley

Good morning. I am glad to welcome all of you to today's forum. I appreciate your being here to discuss the results of a study that will be released today by the Alliance for Aging Research. I am especially grateful to our distinguished panel of speakers -- many who have traveled a long way to be with us today. I would also like to thank Dan Perry and the staff of the Alliance for Aging Research who have been very helpful in organizing this event.

The study being released today identifies the leading causes of disability in the older population.

These conditions often lead to nursing home care and result in lost independence. Not surprisingly, they are conditions we are all familiar with: Alzheimer's disease, vision loss, incontinence, osteoporosis and osteoarthritis.

They have affected our mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles and grandparents. There probably isn't a person in this room who hasn't been touched in some way by one of these conditions.

Although they are not exclusively tied to old age, the elderly are the group most commonly afflicted. They take a toll not only on the person with the disease, but also on their families and friends who are often left to watch someone they love lose their independence. Families are often faced with caregiving responsibilities that are both financially and emotionally overwhelming.

As we work to prepare for both the aging of the Baby Boom generation and increased longevity there has never been a better time to address these conditions.

In my home state of Iowa, 15 percent of the population is over 65. We have the fifth-largest percentage of elderly in the nation. Though Iowa may have an unusually large percentage of older Americans, we all know that the demographic shift is not unique to Iowa. That is why I am so pleased to have this opportunity to highlight these conditions and look at positive steps that are being taken in both treatment and research to address them.

Today we will hear from experts from the field who will discuss new developments in research and areas of potential for the future. The panelists will also talk about methods to ensure that providers are better trained to assess risk and intervene to prevent the loss of independence.

Our moderator will be the Alliance for Aging Research's, Executive Director, Daniel Perry. In addition, we have many distinguished speakers here today. My hope is that this forum will serve not just as a catalog of the horrors of these conditions, but more importantly as a reminder of the possibilities of new treatments and scientific breakthroughs.

I hope we can all learn something today. I appreciate the panelists' availability to participate in this forum.