

**Opening Statement
Senator Susan M. Collins
Special Committee on Aging**

**“The Arc of Alzheimer’s: From Preventing Cognitive Decline in
Americans to Assuring Quality Care for Those Living with
Dementia”**

March 29, 2016

**Good afternoon. I am delighted to convene
this annual hearing to assess the arc of
Alzheimer’s – from preventing cognitive decline to
assuring quality care for those living with
dementia.**

**It’s always so inspiring to sit here and look out
at the sea of purple. But it’s also a reminder that
this terrible disease has affected each and every
one of you in some way. Over the years, I have**

met family members who have sacrificed so much for their loved ones living with the disease. I have met Americans living with Alzheimer's with courage and determination; many of you are here today, and I welcome you.

Two years ago, I met Bob O'Keefe from Waterboro, Maine. Alzheimer's ran in Bob's family. His father and older brother both had it, so Bob decided to get tested early. He received the diagnosis in 2009. Immediately, he became a fighter. He walks daily and reads a couple of books a week. He organizes support groups in his small, rural town. He told me, "there are days that

are overwhelming.” But he stressed, “Never quit – every day is a new day.”

Today, we should ask: what can we do to help people like Bob? Given our rapidly aging population, we cannot afford to do nothing.

Alzheimer’s is a devastating disease that exacts a tremendous personal and economic toll on individuals, families, and our health care system.

Approximately five and half million Americans are living with Alzheimer’s disease, including 27,000 in Maine, and that number is soaring as our overall population grows older and lives longer. If

current trends continue, Alzheimer's could affect as many as 14 million Americans by 2050.

In addition to the human suffering it causes, Alzheimer's is our nation's costliest disease. The United States spends more than \$259 billion per year, including \$175 billion in costs to Medicare and Medicaid. It is the only one of our nation's most deadly diseases without an effective means of prevention, treatment, or a cure. If we do nothing, the Alzheimer's Association forecasts that this disease will cost the United States an astonishing \$1.1 trillion by 2050.

We are making progress. In 2011, the National Alzheimer's Project Act, known as NAPA, which I co-authored with then-Senator Evan Bayh, became law. It created a National Plan to combat Alzheimer's that is updated annually. NAPA focuses our efforts to accelerate progress toward better treatments, a means of prevention, and ultimately, a cure.

In the biomedical world of research, we are also making progress. Scientists are conducting prevention clinical trials that never would have been possible, even just a few years ago. Today, through advances in imaging technologies, we are able to identify some of those most at risk for

Alzheimer's and test interventions before symptoms develop.

Although we do not yet know how to prevent Alzheimer's, we are advancing in our understanding of the disease. Its progression does not happen overnight. It is preceded by years, and perhaps decades, of changes in the brain and a continuum of changes in behavior, including cognitive decline. A growing body of evidence suggests that lifestyle factors could decrease the risk of cognitive decline. Today, we will learn about the state of the research on factors such as cardiovascular risk, physical activity, diet, sleep, social engagement, and cognitive training. If we

start today, a public health approach to improve brain health may well be possible.

For those living with Alzheimer's disease today and given the rising projections for the future, we ask: are we equipped to provide the best care across various settings? From homes to hospitals, we know that the number of geriatricians falls short of the growing demand. We will discuss innovative approaches to delivering dementia training to health care providers across the spectrum from primary care physicians and nurses to social workers and community health workers.

Family caregivers are an especially important part of the picture. Last year, more than 15 million Americans provided 18 billion hours of unpaid care to family members and friends with Alzheimer's disease – this is valued at more than \$230 billion. We will shine light on how to better support those providing dementia care inside our communities.

When I look at the arc of Alzheimer's, I recognize both the progress we have made and how far we still have to go. We have come a long way in advancing research through more robust funding. Last Congress, we increased funding for Alzheimer's research by 60 percent, to almost \$1

billion. The fiscal year 2017 appropriations bill, as reported, would take us to nearly \$1.4 billion. Yet, experts have calculated that we need \$2 billion a year in research funding to achieve our goal of preventing and treating Alzheimer's by 2025. We certainly cannot afford to go backwards at a time of such great urgency and progress. That is why I strongly oppose the Administration's plan to slash funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

I thank our witnesses for joining us today and now turn to Ranking Member Casey for his opening statement.