Opening Statement

Alzheimer's: New Directions in Biomedical Research and Caregiving

Senator Susan Collins

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Good morning, and welcome to all the individuals, families, and organizations from all across the country who have come to our nation's capital to advocate for better treatments and, ultimately, a means of prevention and a cure for Alzheimer's disease, as well as for more support for caregivers.

In the fight against Alzheimer's, you are the champions. Your advocacy has ushered in an era of hope paired with action against this devastating disease. Since we gathered last June, through your diligent work, in a matter of months we successfully pushed the landmark *BOLD Infrastructure for Alzheimer's Act* across the finish line. Today, this law marks a new public health approach for this disease. It will promote early diagnosis and improve treatment and care for millions for whom the disease is a reality day in and day out.

The statistics remain stark. A new CDC report shows that the rate of Americans dying from dementia has more than doubled in our country since the year 2000. An estimated 5.8 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's, costing our nation $290 billion a year, including $195 billion in costs to Medicare and Medicaid. If we continue along this trajectory, Alzheimer's is projected to claim the minds of nearly 14 million Americans, and surpass $1 trillion in costs by 2050.

While scientists and medical professionals are working hard on an effective treatment and cure, recent clinical trials have, unfortunately, ended in a string of failures. Just last month, two more major trials targeting amyloid deposits in the brain were halted. For decades, many researchers have been targeting amyloid, the hallmark sign of Alzheimer's disease.

But today, due to advancements in brain imaging, we know that some people exhibit rampant amyloid plaques, yet never develop the disease. So, while amyloid remains an important part of ongoing research, and I remain hopeful that new trials starting earlier in the disease process will produce better news, the record funding that we have provided will allow our medical researchers to pursue other promising approaches.

I am delighted that last year, a bipartisan coalition, of which every member on this Committee is a part, worked hard to achieve a $425 million increase in federal funding for Alzheimer's research — that was the largest increase in our nation's history. And I can see Dr. Hodes smiling broadly at that. With our total investment at more than $2 billion for Alzheimer's this year, we are on a strong path forward, and we are not going to turn back. This year, as we have before, I expect Congress to once again reject the President's unwise request to cut the funding for the National Institutes of Health.

The robust funding that Congress has provided is enabling scientists to explore a myriad of new pathways that could lead to earlier detection and potential therapies. From the ocular and the cardiovascular, to the genome and the microbiome, to the immune and the lymphatic system, researchers are leaving no system unexamined and no cell unturned.

While we continue to forge ahead to accelerate biomedical research, we face the reality that this disease is affecting millions of American families. BOLD, now signed into law, marks a milestone toward building the public health infrastructure we need to better support individuals, families, and communities.

Support can make all of the difference. Tom O'Connor, a caregiver from Portland, Maine who is with us today, told us, "When we got the diagnosis, we were shocked and didn't know where to start." When he was referred to community partners, he received the information he needed and was able to put a plan in place to make the time ahead better for himself and for his wife, who is battling Alzheimer's.

Diagnosis is the first step that can empower individuals and families to understand changes in the brain. But, developing a plan for care can make the journey so much better. Care plans can also help to reduce co-morbidities, prevent hospitalizations, and improve life not only for those living with the disease but also for their caregivers.

As the BOLD approach spreads to communities across America, we must continue to develop federal policy to better support all Americans with Alzheimer's and their families. Last year, I heard from constituents facing early-onset Alzheimer's that it can be difficult to access necessary supports simply due to not meeting the age thresholds for various federal programs.

This year, I am leading the reauthorization of the *Older Americans Act* along with Ranking Member Senator Casey. Last week, I introduced a bill that would ensure that key services in the *Older Americans Act*, such as the National Family Caregiver Support Program, will also serve those with Alzheimer's who are younger than age 60.

Whenever I ask family caregivers, which included my own mother, about their greatest needs, the number one request that I hear is for more respite care. So today, I am also introducing the *Lifespan Respite Care Act* with Senator Tammy Baldwin to help communities and states provide respite care for families.

From accelerating research to advancing care, every year that we gather as one sea of purple, we make waves.

And by the way, I want to thank Michael Hartt for giving me a sash today to wear. Thank you, Michael.

While Alzheimer's robs our loved ones of precious memories, I stand with you to do everything we can to make Alzheimer's itself a memory one day. Thank you.

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