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New Data Show Alzheimer's Disease is an Emerging Health Threat Among LA County Older Adults

Equally Concerning is the Burden of Care Placed on Family Caregivers

LOS ANGELES – Today the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and the Alzheimer's Association, California Southland Chapter, released two reports showing the projected number of older adults living with Alzheimer's disease will increase over the next two decades. The Public Health report also describes for the first time the sheer number of family members caring for loved ones with the disease everyday.

"As the baby boomer generation ages so does their risk for Alzheimer's disease," said Dr. Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. "We estimate that more than 325,000 baby boomers living in the county today are expected to develop Alzheimer's disease during their remaining lifetimes. This will place a heavy burden not only on family caregivers but also on our ability to provide health services and long-term care."

Combined with current and future population trends, the face of Alzheimer's disease will change dramatically in the next twenty years. Among Latinos and Asians/Pacific Islanders, Alzheimer's disease will nearly triple during that same timeframe.

"Alzheimer's disease poses a huge societal burden. It is a time bomb that is set to explode during our lifetimes," said Debra Cherry, PhD, executive vice president of the Alzheimer's Association, California Southland Chapter. "There are more than 5 million Americans with Alzheimer's, and more than 147,000 live in LA County. The impact of the disease requires an honest and public discussion. We need to mobilize support and we need more funding for research toward treatment and a cure."

Alzheimer's disease is overwhelmingly a family matter. According to the Public Health report, more than 300,000 LA County adults reported providing care in the past 30 days to someone with Alzheimer's disease or a memory loss disorder. More than one-third of these caregivers reported spending the equivalent of a part-time job (20 or more hours per week) providing care.

“While much more needs to be done, in terms of research, there are steps that individuals can take now to adopt healthy lifestyles that can reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s and related memory loss,” said Fielding. “Early diagnosis and treatment are also essential, as are programs that support both the patient and the caregiver.”

Alzheimer’s disease is the seventh leading cause of death in LA County; it is the sixth leading cause of death for Californians. The data also show that in California between 2003 and 2005, one in five Alzheimer’s deaths (20 percent) occurred in LA County.

The Alzheimer’s Association report can be found online at www.alz.org/californiasouthland. The Public Health report can be found online at www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ha.

The Alzheimer’s Association, California Southland Chapter, is a donor-supported, voluntary health organization committed to research, care and support for those living with Alzheimer’s disease and their families in the counties of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino. For more than 27 years, the chapter has provided critical services and programs to hundreds of thousands of Alzheimer’s affected-families in California Southland communities. These services and programs include care consultations, support groups for caregivers, the Medicare+Safe Return Identification Registry™, and a 24-hour helpline is available at 1-800-272-3900. The Alzheimer’s Association also provides education for health care professionals, caregivers and the general public; advocacy for improved public policy and legislation; and financial support to increase research to find the cause and cure for this devastating disease. For more information, visit www.alz.org/californiasouthland.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>

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