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CONTACT: Mike Lynch, Alzheimer’s Association, 312-335-5710, mlynch@alz.org
Alzheimer’s Association media line, 312-335-4078, media@alz.org

Alzheimer’s Association Special Report Highlights Advances in Research Leading to the Next Frontier in Alzheimer’s Disease Diagnosis and Treatment

– The 2017 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures Report Provides Additional Data Related to Caregiving, Costs, Prevalence, Burden and Death –

CHICAGO, March 7, 2017 – Advances in research may allow for the diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease before symptoms of Alzheimer’s dementia begin. Today the Alzheimer’s Association released the 2017 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures Special Report that highlights the growing importance of biomarkers in improving how we identify and diagnose Alzheimer’s disease.

“By the time cognitive symptoms appear in an individual with Alzheimer’s disease, years of irreversible brain damage have likely occurred,” said Dr. Maria Carrillo, Chief Scientific Officer for the Alzheimer’s Association. “Biomarkers have the potential to identify individuals with Alzheimer’s-related brain changes before cognitive impairment is evident, just as we use biological changes like elevated levels of blood pressure or cholesterol to identify those at risk of a heart attack. We envision a future in which Alzheimer’s disease – like cardiovascular disease – will be viewed and treated as a chronic condition that can be readily identified with biomarkers and managed before irrevocable disability occurs.”

A biomarker is a measurable indicator within the body that can be used to accurately and reliably indicate the presence of disease. Researchers are investigating several promising indicators as biomarkers for Alzheimer’s disease, including brain imaging of amyloid plaques, changes in brain volume and measures of tau and amyloid in spinal fluid. By using certain biomarkers, researchers and clinicians can now distinguish between Alzheimer’s disease and other causes of dementia, offering a potential path toward earlier diagnosis and treatment of those with the disease.

Using biomarkers for the diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease has several important implications, according to the report:

• **It will have a marked impact on Alzheimer’s research.** Broader use of biomarkers will allow researchers to identify which individuals to enroll in clinical trials to test new therapies and to enroll individuals with the disease-related brain changes that potential treatments are targeting. Biomarkers also allow researchers to monitor the effects of these treatments.

• **It will change how we estimate incidence and prevalence of Alzheimer’s.** It will add a population of individuals who are currently not included in estimates, such as people with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) who have Alzheimer’s-related biomarkers and therefore MCI due to Alzheimer’s (a proportion that may be as high as 56 percent of those with MCI), and it will
remove a population that currently is included – people with dementia but no Alzheimer’s biomarkers (estimated to be as high as 30 percent of the dementia population).

- **It will allow all stakeholders to understand the true number of people living with this disease.** Epidemiologists, demographers and biostatisticians will use newly informed prevalence and incidence estimates to calculate other statistics, such as the numbers of people providing care and support for someone with the disease, the costs of care, and mortality, which will inform policy making and resource allocation.

The *2017 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* report indicates that about 5.3 million people age 65 and older (about 10 percent of this age group) have Alzheimer’s dementia in the U.S. today. This total was developed using existing methods to calculate incidence and prevalence, in which investigators make a series of assumptions to estimate incidence and prevalence, rather than count it.

With the evolution of Alzheimer’s research, the progress being made in the area of biomarkers has the potential to more accurately identify people with disease-related brain changes, at an earlier point in the biological process. Research to validate biomarkers for Alzheimer’s disease is one of the most active areas in Alzheimer’s science.

“Ultimately, our goal is to use biomarkers to identify and treat individuals at the earliest stage of this continuum so that no one needs to suffer the devastating effects of late-stage Alzheimer’s dementia,” said Dr. Carrillo.

Full text of the Alzheimer's Association *Facts and Figures* report, including the accompanying special report can be viewed here. The special report will also appear in the April 2017 issue of *Alzheimer’s & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association*.

**About 2017 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures**
The Alzheimer's Association 2017 *Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* report is a comprehensive compilation of national statistics and information on Alzheimer’s dementia and related dementias. The report conveys the impact of Alzheimer’s on individuals, families, government and the nation’s health care system. Since its 2007 inaugural release, the report has become the preeminent source covering the broad spectrum of Alzheimer’s issues. The *Facts and Figures* report is an official publication of the Alzheimer’s Association.

**About the Alzheimer’s Association**
The Alzheimer’s Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer’s disease through the advancement of research, to provide and enhance care and support for all affected and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer’s. For more information, visit the Alzheimer’s Association at alz.org or call the 24/7 helpline at 800-272-3900.