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**CONTACT:** Toni Williams, 202.638.8666; [toni.williams@alz.org](mailto:toni.williams@alz.org)

**LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO IMPROVE DIAGNOSIS OF ALZHEIMER'S  
AND STRENGTHEN CARE PLANNING**

**Washington, D.C., April 6, 2011** – As the leading voluntary health organization advocating for Alzheimer's care, support and research, the Alzheimer's Association® applauds the introduction of the "*Health Outcomes, Planning, and Education (HOPE) for Alzheimer's Act*," (S. 738/H.R. 1386), which seeks to improve detection and diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias and provide access to information and support for newly diagnosed individuals and their families. The Association also commends Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Representatives Edward Markey (D-Mass.) and Christopher Smith (R-N.J.) for their leadership in introducing this important legislation. The introduction of this legislation signals an understanding of how the absence of a formal diagnosis of Alzheimer's deprives individuals of treatments and services that could improve symptoms and help maintain their independence for as long as possible and makes the job of caregivers more difficult.

"Increasing evidence indicates that early diagnosis of Alzheimer's and timely intervention is important, both for people with the disease and their caregivers. The later in the disease process individuals receive a diagnosis, the more likely they are to miss opportunities to make key treatment, care and planning decisions," said Robert Egge, the Alzheimer's Association's Vice President of Public Policy.

Alzheimer's and dementia is a common, costly, and often unrecognized problem in older adults. According to the Association's *2011 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* report, as many as half of those meeting specific diagnostic criteria for dementia never received a diagnosis – and some evidence suggests it could be as high as 80 percent. To provide better medical care and outcomes for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias, the conditions must be detected and diagnosed, followed by care planning and connection to critical services and resources. Also important, a formal and documented diagnosis can begin an important family dialogue about care, financial and legal decisions.

"These conversations allow families to better plan for predictable problems, avoid crises, and maintain the best possible quality of life for their loved one," said Egge. "Studies show that when Alzheimer's families work with medical professionals to design a care plan, have access to critical information and are referred to medical and support services, it decreases patient behavioral and psychiatric symptoms and family caregiver anxiety, depression and stress."

With an estimated 5.4 million Americans living with Alzheimer's today and the baby boomer generation growing older – age being the greatest risk factor for the disease – this legislation is a significant step in ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries have access to a broad array of services that include, initial detection of possible dementia, diagnostic evaluation and care planning.

Another key element of the newly introduced HOPE for Alzheimer's Act is the documentation of dementia in medical records. Documentation helps ensure health care providers know they are treating a person with Alzheimer's or other dementia, which is especially critical when a patient is transferred from one care setting to another. Additionally, most people with Alzheimer's and other dementias have one or more other serious medical conditions. Cognitive impairment caused by Alzheimer's and other dementias can greatly complicate the management of other conditions, resulting in more hospitalizations, longer hospital stays, and higher costs. Documentation of cognitive impairment in the medical record allows health care providers to adapt treatment regimens accordingly and provide optimal care for Medicare beneficiaries with dementia and other chronic conditions.

The Association is grateful to Senator Stabenow for crafting this legislation and Senator Collins and Representatives Markey and Smith, who also serve as chairs of the Alzheimer's Congressional Task Force. Their sustained leadership on advancing issues that are critical to the growing Alzheimer's community is vital and appreciated. The Association urges members of Congress to co-sponsor and support this important legislation.

### **Alzheimer's Association**

The Alzheimer's Association is the world's 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 [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org).

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