

Alzheimer's Association: Alzheimer's and dementia death rates climb during COVID-19 pandemic

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MILWAUKEE, WI - DECEMBER 8, 2020 - A recent Alzheimer's Association analysis of CDC data indicates that during the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a 13.9% increase in deaths from Alzheimer's and dementia in Wisconsin, compared to the five-year average. This is a vulnerable population and the above average deaths far exceeds other categories reported by the CDC.

"Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing "excess deaths" of those living with Alzheimer's and dementia," says Michael Bruhn, Director of Public Policy, Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter. "Families with a loved one in a facility have been hit hard by the pandemic and COVID-19 is altering normal patterns of mortality. The Alzheimer's Association is concerned about this alarming trend and is calling on state lawmakers to implement rapid testing and other safety protocols to protect these vulnerable individuals."

Through the end of October, there have been at least 34,851 more deaths due to Alzheimer's or another dementia nationwide than would be expected normally. This significant trend could be due to one or more of the following factors:

- A lack of easy and accessible COVID-19 testing, especially early in the pandemic, that caused COVID-19 deaths to be inaccurately recorded as deaths due to other causes (such as Alzheimer's disease).
- The vulnerability of these individuals: older seniors, often living in communal settings (nursing homes and assisted living facilities) and often having underlying chronic conditions.
- Indirect causes due to the pandemic, including overburdened health care

systems, fear of seeking treatment, or other causes related to economic shut-downs and stay-at-home orders.

Pandemic-related challenges may have also accelerated disease-related decline for older seniors living in a long-term care setting. The adverse impact of social isolation and limited social engagement for this vulnerable population has been overwhelming. The only way to overcome social isolation is to ensure every long-term care community has access to rapid testing for all residents, staff and visitors.