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**Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health Care Seeks Actions**

**To Address Alzheimer’s disease**

**March 13, 2020**

**Statement of James R. Balda**

**President & CEO Argentum**

**Senate Finance Health Care Subcommittee**

**Seeks Actions to Address Alzheimer’s disease**

On behalf of Argentum, which advocates for excellence in senior living, we thank you for reaching out for input on this very important topic impacting older Americans. Argentum is the leading national association exclusively dedicated to supporting companies operating professionally managed, resident-centered senior living communities and the older adults and families they serve. Argentum member companies operate senior living communities offering assisted living, independent living, continuing care, and memory care services to older adults.

Since 1990, Argentum has advocated for choice, independence, dignity and quality of life for all seniors. Argentum has worked with the senior living industry in all states to advance industry best practices and regulations to ensure that all senior living communities continue to provide high quality care and quality of life as well as appropriate supports and services to the diverse array of residents served, including the challenges associated with serving residents with Alzheimer’s and related dementias.

The economic impact of senior living in this country is nearly a quarter of a trillion dollars annually. Our industry cares for nearly one million seniors and employs 767,800 workers. The silver tsunami that will sweep the country in the next decade as the baby boomers age will increase the demand for senior living.

Caring for a population that includes seniors who are cognitively impaired offers many challenges. However, senior living has demonstrated best practices and innovations to ensure cognitively impaired residents age with dignity and choice.

For background, the senior living industry is regulated in every state. Some senior living communities are free standing memory care communities and some have special floors for these residents. The numbers of the almost one million assisted living residents with some type of cognitive impairment is a staggering 42%. The progression of the disease varies and many communities have programs targeted for the Mild Cognitively Impaired (MCI) to those in the end of life with the disease.

Taking care of the resident is important, but this disease is equally tragic for the family. Senior living communities offer support groups so that families can build relationships with others going through this experience and receive the ongoing support they need during this difficult time.

**Recommendations**

Senior living providers support a care to cure approach. We support additional funding for research to find treatment, prevention and ultimately a cure. But equally important is to provide the care to the over five million people currently living with this disease.

**Problem**

While senior living is approximately 50% of the cost of skilled nursing care, and less expensive than 24/7 home care, most consumers are not financially prepared to pay for their future long-term services and supports (LTSS). Unfortunately, one in three Americans have less than $5,000 saved for retirement, and less than 8% have purchased long-term care insurance. Unless something is done, the 74 million baby boomers will be unable to pay for their future LTSS. The lack of savings will be especially crippling for the over five million individuals suffering from Alzheimer’s and related dementia who need LTSS the most.

**Educate Consumers**

Many individuals are not aware that Medicare does not pay for long term services and supports and that Medicaid is only for severely financially impoverished. An awareness campaign should be implemented to educate consumers of all ages about the cost and need tor financially prepare for future LTSS.

**Incentives to Save**

Members of Congress have started to recognize the importance of incentivizing consumers to plan and save for future LTC needs. There is no one solution to this crisis, and Congress is looking at multiple approaches. Proposals we support are:

* The SECURE Act, signed into law last year, delayed dates of 401(k) and IRA mandatory minimum distributions from age 70½ to 72.
* Establish a tax vehicle similar to 529C accounts  used  to save for college tuition for LTCSS
* New Medicare Part E to cover LTSS (Congressman Pallone)
* New Medigap option to cover LTSS (Congressman Neil)
* Expanding the use of Health Saving Accounts (HSA) and Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) to pay for senior living services. (Currently LTC expenses are not eligible for reimbursement with HSA or FSA accounts.)
* Allowing retirement funds to be used to purchase LTC insurance (Senator Toomey)

**Medicaid Home and Community Based Services Waiver**

While the majority of senior living residents are private pay, 17% are covered under a Medicaid home and community based services waiver. CMS defined home and community based setting in 2014; however, there have been some challenges with how the rule applies to dementia residents. The rule is based on person-centered principles of choice, and independence, which we support. However the rule does need to recognize that some modifications are necessary for cognitively impaired individuals living in congregate settings. Requiring locks on doors that dementia residents can’t remember how to use, stoves in rooms that could pose a danger, or prohibiting secured settings because they don’t allow community integration, are well intentioned but misguided requirements. Reducing areas of risk actually allows memory impaired residents more independence not less. A secured setting allows individuals the freedom to safely move around and enjoy their environment. Senior living will continue to work with CMS to understand the needs of this special population and ensure the rule is implemented appropriately.

**Advancing Best Practices in the Care of Residents with Dementia**

Until a cure is found, providing quality care and quality of life for individuals with Alzheimer’s and related dementias is a top priority for senior living providers. This disease does not have to prevent people from living a life with meaning and purpose, experiencing joy, and independence.

In January 2016 Argentum began a project to identify best practices in the care of residents with dementia. In August of 2016 we released [a report that described 39 transformational, breakthrough or incremental innovations](https://www.argentum.org/images/alfa/PDFs/EMR/EMR%20MC.pdf) as well as those tried and true practices. They address nutrition and dining, programming, environmental design, staff training and technology. In December of 2016 another Argentum [report was released proving a deeper dive on 6 programs transforming operations](https://www.argentum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/AQ_Issue-1comp.pdf) and service delivery for dementia residents. Argentum’s goal is to identify successful innovations and disseminate them so that they may be replicated to help improve the lives of dementia residents residing in senior living. All of the best practice approaches have the added benefit of being non pharmacological. Below are a few excerpts from these two publications.

**LIFE’S A STAGE: THE SCRIPTED IMPROV PROJECT Hearthstone Alzheimer Care, Woburn, MA** | **scriptedimprov.com**

The Scripted-IMPROV™ Drama Program was developed by Hearthstone’s Research Division as part of a two-year clinical trial funded by the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute on Aging. The Scripted IMPROV Project is an interactive, semi-scripted improvisational theater experience that has been specifically designed to be engaging and interesting to people living with dementia. The project incorporates research-based facilitation and communication techniques appropriate for those with memory challenges. Funded by the National Institute on Aging, the project is among the first and largest Phase 2 Clinical Trials of a major non-drug intervention for Alzheimer’s and related dementias. Positive effects on improved quality of life, lowered anxiety, and increased active engagement have been documented.

**THE ALZHEIMER’S POETRY PROJECT Alzheimer’s Poetry Project, Brooklyn, NY | alzpoetry.com**

The Alzheimer’s Poetry Project is a nonprofit that works to improve the quality of life of people living with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia by facilitating creative expression through poetry. Some remember poems from their past (including songs) well enough to recite them. The program also provides social outings for participants, giving them the opportunity to enjoy time with people in similar situations. In addition to improving quality of life for residents, a study also showed the program improved medical students’ interactions with those living with dementia. Students involved in the study progressed from seeing the dementia participants negatively to seeing them as funny, cheerful, and “still human beings.” Gary Glazner, the founder and Executive Director of the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project has written the book, Dementia Arts: Celebrating Creativity in Eldercare (Health Professionals Press, 2014). The book can serve as a guide for healthcare professional interesting in using non-pharmaceutical interventions to improve the quality of life of people living with dementia and their relationships with caregivers. A paper was submitted in December 2009 by Lynn Green to the School of Graduate Nursing at Wesleyan University in Marion, Indiana. This paper takes the Alzheimer’s Poetry Project (APP) as its subject and is the first formal research into their performance and writing techniques. The APP is involved in research to better understand how non-pharmaceutical interventions may improve the quality of life of people living with dementia.

**NAMASTE CARE Namaste Care, founded in Bennington, VT | namastecare.com**

Namaste Care™ was originally designed for residents in nursing homes with advanced dementia who were not able to actively participate in other programs. Now it can be found in assisted living communities and hospice organizations worldwide. Namaste Care is based on the power of loving touch and provides compassionate, end-of-life care. Research reveals that although management disruption occurred across all care homes adopting Namaste Care, the program helped reduce the severity of behavioral symptoms, pain, and occupational disruptiveness. In care homes with strong leadership, adequate staffing, proficient nursing, and good medical care, Namaste Care can improve quality of life for people with advanced dementia by decreasing behavioral symptoms. The End-of-Life Namaste Care Program for People with Dementia, published by Health Professions Press, is in its second edition published in May 2013.

**LED LIGHTING Lighting Research Center, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute | irc.rpi.edu**

In an effort to help residents better tolerate lights during the night, the Lighting Research Center conducted a study using innovative lighting designs and advanced technologies, including LEDs, photo sensors, and occupancy sensors, to help seniors in long-term care environments maintain independence and be more comfortable. In a pilot demonstration study at Schuyler Ridge Residential Health Care, a 120-resident skilled nursing community in Clifton Park, New York, LRC researchers installed automated LEDs. The energy-efficient lighting solutions were intended to improve the comfort and care of seniors, assist the nursing staff in their nightly rounds, and help residents navigate community hallways. Residents in that community reported that getting out of bed at night was difficult because lighting controls were out of reach, a fact that contributes to falls. Surveys conducted with patients and staff before the LED lighting installation showed that most patients were awakened at night by nurses turning on the overhead lighting, which was considered too bright and glaring. Beyond their individual homes, residents said it was difficult to navigate the 74,000-square-foot community and its similar common areas. The Lighting Research Center team designed an automated lighting system meant to quell disturbances while still helping patients safely get out of bed at night. The goal was for nurses to have enough lighting to do their jobs at night and provide color-coded lighting that would help residents distinguish hallways. The team installed LED lights in four resident rooms, bathrooms, and one hallway. Researchers mounted amber-colored lights around door frames, under beds, around bathroom doors. They also added an occupancy sensor that showed illuminated when residents got out of bed or nurses entered the room. Residents reported no problems with sleep disturbance or discomfort with the new lights. Nurses confirmed that there was enough light in the bedrooms to perform their rounds and said the automated lighting was convenient and useful. In the hallways, nurses and residents reported that the lighted handrail enhanced the look of the hallway and served as a way-finding guide.

**COLOR, SCENT, MUSIC, AND CARE LCB Senior Living, Norwood, MA | lcbseniorliving.com**

Designs at LCB Senior Living utilizes the latest research in color to foster positive behaviors, smells to increase cognitive abilities, music to improve engagement, and care approaches to ensure successful outcomes. For example, lime green is used for uniforms because it is the last color we lose the ability to see. This helps resident identify whom to seek out when they need help or assistance, and has reduced wandering behaviors, agitation, bathroom related accidents, and even sun downing. The LCB Reading Series also uses an enlarged lime green font, which has shown a 33% increase in reading ability. Yellow plates encourages eating without fostering overeating, and the color yellow provides more contrast with foods. Black sheets can help residents leave the bed and instead become engaged with others. Contrasting-color toilet seats help residents navigate the bathroom, and a contrasting wall prevents an all-white room from being perceived as circular. The smell of pine releases a neurotransmitter called glutamate, which improves memory and concentration. Smells such as cinnamon can increase food intake for those who need reminders to eat, while lavender in the evening decreases sun downing. Relaxing music also helps with sun downing and eases residents to sleep.

**TEL-GE CARE INNOVATIONS QUIETCARE (SMART SENSOR TECHNOLOGY) Intel-GE Care Innovations, Roseville, CA | careinnovations.com**

To ensure its staff delivers the highest levels of care to residents, Eskaton Senior Living turned to Intel-GE Care Innovations™ remote monitoring system, QuietCare. Installed in each resident’s unit, QuietCare uses small wireless sensors to learn the daily living patterns of every occupant. This smart system enables Eskaton’s staff to follow each resident’s status around the clock. With the data provided by QuietCare, staff learned the patterns of individual residents, and how to spot out-of-the-ordinary events. By identifying unusual activity patterns, caregivers could recognize emerging health problems earlier and take action. Two years after installation of the monitoring system, Eskaton experienced increased staff efficiency, better cost control, the early detection and treatment of urinary tract infections, and an enhanced rate of medical compliance

**BRAIN HEALTHY COOKING PROGRAM Senior Living Residences, Boston, MA** **|seniorlivingresidences.com**

The Brain Healthy Cooking Program is a research-based nutrition program focused on the documented connection between diet and brain health. A healthful diet is now widely acknowledged to boost cognitive function and even potentially delay the onset of dementia. Several large-scale scientific studies of the Mediterranean Diet, as well as smaller studies on specific foods and spices, point to the important role of diet in the cause, prevention, and management of Alzheimer’s disease. The Mediterranean Diet has also been proven to reduce strokes, heart attacks, and deaths due to heart disease. Because it helps to regulate blood sugar, it is also ideal for seniors managing diabetes. The Brain Healthy Cooking Program was in development for three years and launched in 2009, just as the first widely reported large scale study on the Mediterranean Diet was concluded.

**FRESH BITES Unidine, Boston, MA | unidine.com/resources/fresh-bites-memory-care-nutrition-program**

The foodservice industry could improve ways to address the special needs of memory care residents who struggle with utensils or who may be easily distracted from the table and their meal. Common interventions include staff feeding and offering only child-like finger foods, but Unidine instead provides an innovative program called Fresh Bites. Fresh Bites combines culinary artistry and science to increase nutritional intake, decrease weight loss, and improve quality of life while empowering memory care residents to dine with dignity. Unidine dietitians and chefs transform everyday menus into nutritionally dense, bite-sized portions. Innovative, edible vessels made from fresh, natural ingredients deliver an impressive and growing variety of delicious recipes that can be easily managed without utensils. A hearty but complicated menu of tossed salad, lasagna, steamed broccoli, and pie becomes an easily and eagerly consumed Fresh Bites meal. Unidine leverages the latest scientific research on diet, nutrition, and dementia to guide the development of this memory care nutrition program. Our recipes use specific “brain boosting” ingredients like turmeric, broccoli, cabbage, green tea, blueberries, and dark chocolate, which may prevent or reverse cognitive decline. Visual menus, trained dementia practitioners, and modified dining environments help families and caregivers connect with Alzheimer’s patients, while nutritionally balanced meals help maintain their weight and health.

**A Memory Café** [**www.jfcsboston.org/MemoryCafeToolkit**](http://www.jfcsboston.org/MemoryCafeToolkit)

A Memory Café is a welcoming social gathering for individuals living with dementia, their family, friends and professional caregivers. 2016 marked the 20th anniversary of the first Alzheimer’s Café, started by Dr. Bere Meisen in Holland. Memory (or Alzheimer’s) Cafés began spreading throughout the United States in 2008, although there are still many regions with few or none. Cafés stand out as a cost-effective, joyful model for reducing social isolation. Cafés engage participants with dementia due to any under-lying condition and at any stage, including individuals who have not been diagnosed, and they also offer enjoyment, support and social connection to their care partners. Cafés bring in students and community members as volunteers and hosts, and thus support the broader dementia friendly community movement, which emphasizes public awareness about dementia and reduction in stigma. Jewish Family & Children’s Service (JF&CS) of Boston started the second memory café in Massachusetts in March 2014. In response to an outpouring of interest in this model, six months later it launched the Percolator Memory Café Network to encourage the efficient and coordinated development of high-quality memory cafés throughout Massachusetts. By helping providers to collaborate rather than compete, the Percolator has dramatically increased access to this social and creative engagement model.

The intent of all of these best practices is that they can be customized and replicated in senior living communities across the country.

Thank you, Senators Toomey and Stabenow, and other members of the Committee for your leadership in this important area. We look forward to continuing to work together to find a cure for Alzheimer’s as well as providing quality care to those currently impacted by the disease.

If you have any questions please contact Dan Samson, Director of Government Relations at dsamson@argentum.org.