

TESTIMONY OF

RAY LANDIS
ADVOCACY MANAGER
AARP PENNSYLVANIA

REGARDING

THE IMPACT OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE IN
PENNSYLVANIA

BEFORE THE
AGING AND ADULT SERVICES COMMITTEE

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

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Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. AARP shares in the interest and concern about the impact of Alzheimer's Disease on our members, their families, and, in fact, the entire population of Pennsylvania and the United States because of resources needed to care for those burdened by this debilitating disease.

Our role today as part of this panel is to discuss the impact on the Commonwealth's programs and services. As representatives of the Area Agencies on Aging and the Commonwealth's Department of Aging, my fellow panel members Crystal Lowe and Ray Prushnock are on the frontlines as far as administrating and providing these services and can describe how Alzheimer's Disease impacts programs at the state and local level. As an organization whose membership is made up of many who benefit from these programs, AARP has a tremendous interest in ensuring their continued viability. We also see how the impact of Alzheimer's Disease affects our members and their families, not only after they access the Commonwealth's assistance programs, but also before. For many of our members and their families the greatest impact of Alzheimer's begins before help becomes available from these programs, which we believe puts greater stress on the programs in the long run.

The Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures publication notes that 70% of the care provided to those suffering from Alzheimer's comes from family members at home. The strain on these care takers, physically, financially, and emotionally, is enormous. They often put aside their own health care needs in order to continue to provide care for their loved ones. Unfortunately, as we know from countless experiences, delaying health care decisions often leads to more serious, and expensive, conditions. These situations result in further strain on our care systems and available programs.

We believe the Family Caregivers Program in Pennsylvania is a way to address some of the needs of those caring for a family member with Alzheimer's. AARP strongly supports the legislation introduced by Chairman Mundy which has already passed the House and is pending in the Senate which would enhance this important program.

Another example of how Alzheimer's is impacting both individuals and programs and services in Pennsylvania is with prescription drugs. New research on medications to treat Alzheimer's Disease and to at least slow the progression of the disease have shown promise. But there is a cost to these treatments. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that in 2007, 64% individuals taking medications for Alzheimer's reached the Medicare Part D coverage gap, or doughnut hole, which, of course, means that the individual pays all of their prescription drug costs for a time. The gap, which in 2009 begins when an individual has had \$2,700 in total prescription drug costs, is \$3,454 in 2009 and is expected to increase over the next few years.

In Pennsylvania we are extremely fortunate to have the PACE and PACENET programs, which help low-to-middle income seniors with their prescription drug costs. Through the partnership program between Medicare Part D and PACENET, the PACENET benefit, which extends to individuals with incomes up to \$23,500 or married couples with incomes up to \$31,500, covers the costs of prescription drugs in the doughnut hole. Obviously as more Alzheimer's Disease patients are prescribed medications, the costs to our PACENET program will increase. The promise these medications show in stemming the progression of Alzheimer's is wonderful news, of course, and over the long-term it is to be hoped that it can help to reduce the costs of caring for those suffering from Alzheimer's Disease.

The fight against Alzheimer's Disease is one that impacts AARP members and their families on a very personal level. AARP will continue to make information on Alzheimer's available to our membership through as many means as we can – our website links to much of the valuable information available from the Alzheimer's Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and I would be glad to attempt to answer any questions you may have.