

September 3, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2468 Rayburn Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

We are writing to respectfully request that the next Congressional coronavirus relief package include a minimum of \$10 million for the Administration for Community Living (ACL) engagement of the aging services network to implement and sustain evidence-based falls prevention programs and \$4 million for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control programming and research to prevent older adult falls.

During the coronavirus pandemic, it is all but certain that increasing numbers of older adult falls are going unreported. Like all Americans, older adults are observing social distancing to maintain their health, and they are also susceptible to the health effects of social isolation including increased risk from dementia, heart disease, stroke, depression, anxiety, and suicide.<sup>1</sup> There are also specific correlations between the physical and mental health effects of isolation and increased fall risk. For example, depression was associated with a 47% increase in falls.<sup>2</sup>

Older adult falls are common, costly, and often preventable. They represent the leading cause of injury-related death among adults age 65 years of age and older.<sup>3</sup> More than one in four adults over age 65 fall each year, yet only half share this with their doctors.<sup>4</sup> In 2018, over 35.6 million falls were reported,<sup>5</sup> and of those, 8.4 million resulted in an injury that limited regular activities for at least a day or resulted in a medical visit.<sup>6</sup> Sadly, an older adult dies from a fall every 19 minutes.

The community-based interventions supported with ACL investments are transitioning to a digital environment in cases where they can safely be implemented in the home. CDC tools for clinicians and other health care partners to identify and address falls and fall risk continue to be crucial for telemedicine engagement. Digital programming and telemedicine also create opportunities to reach larger numbers of older adults, and a lack of funding is the primary obstacle to reaching all who need and could benefit from falls prevention interventions.

In addition, reducing the number of preventable falls decreases the burden on our healthcare system.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html>

<sup>2</sup> Burr, Jeffrey and Lien Quach "Social Isolation and Falls Risk Among Community Dwelling Older Adults: The Mediating Role Of Depression," *Innovation in Aging*, Volume 3, Issue Supplement\_1, November 2019, Page S293, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geroni/igz038.1078>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/data/deaths-from-falls.html>

<sup>4</sup> Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/falls/adultfalls.html>

<sup>5</sup> Moreland B, Kakara R, Henry A. Trends in Nonfatal Falls and Fall-Related Injuries Among Adults Aged ≥65 Years — United States, 2012–2018. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:875–881. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6927a5>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

This helps ensure providers have the capacity to treat elderly COVID-19 patients, who are the most vulnerable population during this pandemic. Congressional support is needed.

Given the continued escalation of elderly falls during the coronavirus pandemic, we collectively request a minimum of \$10 million for ACL and \$4 million for CDC to increase support for proven interventions and strategies. We believe the direct effects of COVID-19 and the resulting need for social isolation among older adults warrants at least a portion of the funding be provided as a crucial emergency investment. This request is a relatively small investment in a population that is disproportionately suffering from the impact of COVID-19. We hope you will join with us in support for this funding.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Aging Research  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
Alzheimer's Foundation of America  
AMDA: The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine  
American Association on Health and Disability  
American Geriatrics Society  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Physical Therapy Association  
America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP)  
Bipartisan Policy Center Action  
Brain Injury Association of America  
Community Catalyst  
Easterseals  
Green & Healthy Homes Initiative  
Home Modification Occupational Therapy Alliance  
Lakeshore Foundation  
Meals on Wheels America  
National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)  
National Association for Home Care and Hospice  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)  
National Association of RSVP Directors  
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators  
National Council on Aging  
National Osteoporosis Foundation  
National Safety Council  
National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI)  
PatientLink  
Prevent Blindness  
Prevention Institute  
Safe States Alliance  
ThinkFirst Foundation  
Trust for America's Health  
WISER