

March 12, 2021

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair DeLauro, Chair Murray, Ranking Member Cole, and Ranking Member Blunt:

We are writing to respectfully request that the FY22 Labor, HHS, Education and Related Agencies bill 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, recent research has found that older adults facing significant social isolation were 24% more likely to fall, and those with the least social contact has a 36% higher risk to be hospitalized due to a fall.<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, 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>5</sup> Sadly, an older adult dies from a fall every 16 minutes.<sup>6</sup>

Several community-based interventions supported with ACL investments have transitioned 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. 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

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

<sup>2</sup> Bu, F., Abell, J., Zaninotto, P. et al. A longitudinal analysis of loneliness, social isolation and falls amongst older people in England. *Sci Rep* 10, 20064 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-77104-z>

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS)

<sup>4</sup> Stevens JA, Ballesteros MF, Mack KA, Rudd RA, DeCaro E, Adler G. Gender differences in seeking care for falls in the aged Medicare Population. *Am J Prev Med* 2012;43:59–62.

<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> Available at <https://wonder.cdc.gov/mcd.html>

\$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 this level of funding. We hope you will join with us in support for this funding.

Sincerely,

1. Alliance for Aging Research
2. Alliance for Retired Americans
3. Alzheimer's Foundation of America
4. AMDA: The Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine
5. American Association on Health and Disability
6. American Geriatrics Society
7. American Occupational Therapy Association
8. American Physical Therapy Association
9. American Postal Workers Union (APWU) Retirees Department, AFL-CIO
10. American Public Health Association
11. America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP)
12. Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
13. Bipartisan Policy Center Action
14. Brain Injury Association of America
15. Community Catalyst
16. Easterseals
17. Gerontological Society of America
18. Green & Healthy Homes Initiative
19. Home Modification Occupational Therapy Alliance
20. Human Factors and Ergonomics Society
21. Lakeshore Foundation
22. Meals on Wheels America
23. National Adult Day Services Association (NADSA)
24. National Association for Home Care and Hospice
25. National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
26. National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP)
27. National Association of RSVP Directors
28. National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
29. National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
30. National Council on Aging
31. National Floor Safety Institute (NFSI)
32. National Osteoporosis Foundation
33. National Safety Council
34. National Senior Corps Association
35. PatientLink
36. Prevent Blindness
37. Prevention Institute
38. Safe States Alliance
39. ThinkFirst Foundation
40. Trust for America's Health
41. WISER