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State Promotes Awareness about Alzheimer's Disease and Thanks Caregivers and Offers Resources for Support

State hosts Nov. 16 and 17 conferences in Springfield for caregivers and families of Alzheimer's patients

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department on Aging kicked off two days of conferences to address issues of Alzheimer's Disease. Today's full-day **Alzheimer Awareness Family Caregiver Conference** is geared towards care partners, friends and family of individuals with memory loss disorder. Tuesday's conference, **Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders**, is for Alzheimer's professionals to focus on "Synchronizing Science and Support."

"With the numbers rising of people suffering from Alzheimer's, there is a greater demand for caregivers, said Illinois Department on Aging Director Charles D. Johnson. "To address this and other related issues, the state presents the conferences each year to look at the challenges and ways to better help."

The conferences, at the Crown Plaza in Springfield, are sponsored by the department in conjunction with the Alzheimer's Association – Greater Illinois Chapter, the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and Center for Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders.

Alzheimer's is an incurable neurological disorder that destroys the brain's memory cells. It is the most common form of dementia. It also causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior and can be severe enough to affect work, lifelong hobbies or social life. Alzheimer's gets worse over time, and is the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States. There are more than 35 million people in the world with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. And the number of people with Alzheimer's disease is predicted to nearly double every 20 years. Here in Illinois there are estimated to be more than 210,000 with the disease.

There are many organizations, like the Alzheimer's Association, that help seniors and family members cope with and combat the disease. The Alzheimer's Association provides supportive programs and services to people with Alzheimer's and their caregivers. In addition, they offer special programs such as assistance to individuals with Alzheimer's who live alone, people living with early-onset Alzheimer's, rural and/or multicultural outreach, care coordination services, and training programs for families and professionals. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling 1-800-272-3900 or by contacting their local chapter at www.alz.org.

In addition to observing November as **Alzheimer's Awareness Month**, it is **National Family Caregivers Month**. In recognition, Illinois Department on Aging Director Charles D. Johnson thanks caregivers for making an extra effort to help family members.

“Caregiving is fundamental to families because the assistance of caregivers can define the quality of life for families. This month is Family Caregivers Month which is a good time to educate family caregivers about available resources,” said Director Johnson.

The Illinois Department on Aging has set up more than 100 Caregiver Resource Centers across the state. Through partnering with the 13 Area Agencies on Aging and local service providers, family caregivers receive information, assistance, training, counseling and respite care through the Family Caregiver Support Program.

Family caregivers serve as a critical component in providing the long term care for older adults. Caregivers may need to help their loved ones with a broad range of activities, such as bathing, dressing, cooking and eating. In addition, caregivers may have to assist with legal and financial matters, such as making medical decisions, paying bills, handling investments and budgeting accounts.

Director Johnson also notes this is the beginning of the holiday season. As the holidays provide more time for families to spend time together, the Department encourages taking the time to look for signs that could indicate that older relatives might need assistance. Some of these signs include:

- Decreased mobility, forgetfulness
- Neglected personal hygiene
- Change in appetite
- Unfilled and/or unopened medical prescriptions
- Lack of home maintenance
- Unusual display of unopened mail

They may also notice that their loved one seems to be mishandling their finances, for example not paying their bills or losing money.

For more information about program services to assist older adults in Illinois and their caregivers, contact the Department on Aging Senior HelpLine at 1-800-252-8966, TTY (hearing impaired use only): 1-888-206-1327, or e-mail: aging.ilsenior@illinois.gov.

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