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.¹ 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.²

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.³ More than one in four adults over age 65 fall each year, yet only half share this with their doctors.⁴ In 2018, over 35.6 million falls were reported,⁵ 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.⁶ 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.

¹ Available at https://www.cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/lonely-older-adults.html
³ https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/falls/data/deaths-from-falls.html
⁴ Available at https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/falls/adultfalls.html
⁶ 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