**IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Thursday, 23rd April 2020**

**Alzheimer National Helpline launches new free Dementia Nurse and Dementia Adviser call-back service to deal with increased need during COVID-19 crisis**

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland’s National Helpline is expanding with a ***new free call-back service*** which offers people with dementia and family carers from anywhere in Ireland the opportunity to book a 1:1 session with a Dementia Nurse or a Dementia Adviser during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The ASI is very thankful to ***Minister for Health Simon Harris*** for launching the new service this morning with this video message: <https://tinyurl.com/ycmvmbj8>

The helpline, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, is experiencing increased calls from people with dementia and their family carers who are feeling increasingly isolated in their own communities. From January to March alone, **1,496** service users contacted the helpline.

Since the COVID-19 emergency, the issues on these calls include difficulties adapting the new routine and to ***new challenges*** connected to sleep disruption, increased confusion, frustration and lack of motivation and concerns about personal care and continence management to name but a few.

In addition, recent research undertaken by The ASI points to experiences of ***loneliness***, social-isolation,

fear and anxiety among people with dementia and their carers, as well as increasing behavioral

changes, such as agitation, distress and sleep disturbance among those with dementia.

This new service offers ***1:1 telephone or video conference call*** with a Dementia Nurse or a Dementia Adviser. This creates a space for people with dementia and their families to raise issues that may be arising for them during the cocooning phase of the COVID-19 Emergency including:

* Coping with changes the person with dementia may be experiencing and strategies to cope
* Changes in behavior resulting from the absence of their existing routine – for example, pacing, restlessness, agitation and sleep disturbance
* Issues that may be arising regarding nutrition and hydration
* Continence management
* Carer stress, recognising and strategies for coping day to day

Thousands of people with dementia and their carers cannot access many services at this time. This is ***devastating***. In addition, research carried out by The ASI has found that there is widespread feelings isolation, loneliness, boredom, anxiety and fear among people with dementia and family carers.

People with dementia and their family carers who want to avail of this new service ***please contact*** the National Helpline to make an appointment which is open six days a week Monday to Friday 10am–5pm and Saturday 10am–4pm on 1800 341 341. Email at helpline@alzheimer.ie or via Live Chat at [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie/)

***The Alzheimer Society of Ireland CEO, Pat McLoughlin said:*** *“This pandemic has been a perfect storm for people with dementia. The closure of our day centres in particular, along with social clubs, Alzheimer cafés, face-to-face carer training has really hit people hard. They have nowhere to go each day to keep them active and stimulated. We know that people with dementia and their family carers are feeling isolated and are fearful right now, but The ASI is here to help. This new virtual 1:1 service will be an added element to our National Helpline Service, which is quality assured. This ensures we are maximising existing resources while delivering an added support to people with dementia and their families during the COVID-19 national emergency. We have been able to do this due to the support of both the HSE and the Minister for Health Simon Harris.”*

***The Alzheimer Society of Ireland Head of Enterprise Risk Management, Compliance and Dementia Advisory Services, Samantha Taylor said:*** *“The COVID-19 National Emergency has impacted people with dementia and their families in a variety of ways and created real challenges, not only to follow the guidelines and stay safe, but also for coping with living with dementia day-to-day. This new service will offer people with dementia and their carers expert 1:1 information and support and can be booked for a time that suits them. We are really delighted to be able to offer this new service nationwide, if people need support, please get in touch.”*

The ASI continues to support people with dementia and their families as our ***Home Care***, ***Dementia Advisers***, ***Alzheimer National Helpline*** and ***Online Family Carer Training*** are all still running. In addition, the ASI is implementing new ways of providing ASI supports remotely to our clients and their families such as regular telephone calls and activity packages for people to use in their own homes.

The ASI has developed some ***tip sheets*** to help support people with dementia and their families in a challenging and rapidly changing situation including the following:

* *Tips for vulnerable adults*
* *Tips for supporting vulnerable people in the community*
* *Tips for nursing home restrictions*
* *Prepare & Care: A simple, step by step guide to caring for a loved one living with dementia*

**Website:**

[www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ieSince this crisis has started staff in The ASI have made 3,486 telephone calls to clients or their main carers; 997 calls to family members where needed; and 206 follow-up calls to Public Health Nurses.)

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**ENDS**

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***About The Alzheimer Society of Ireland (ASI):***The ASI is the national leader in understanding and providing dementia-specific supports and services. With a national network of over 120 specialist services, 900 staff and 300 volunteers, each year they provide almost 900,000 hours of community-based, dementia-specific care throughout Ireland. For more information see [www.alzheimer.ie](http://www.alzheimer.ie)

**ABOUT DEMENTIA**
• The number of people with dementia in Ireland is expected to more than double from 55,000 today to 141,200 in 2050.\*
• Dementia is an umbrella term used to describe a range of conditions which cause changes and damage to the brain.
• Dementia is progressive. There is currently no cure. Dementia is not simply a health issue but a social issue that requires a community response.
• The majority of people with dementia (63%) live at home in the community. Over 180,000 people in Ireland are currently or have been carers for a family member or partner with dementia with many more providing support and care in other ways.
• There are 11,000 new cases of dementia in Ireland each year. That’s at least 30 people every day and anyone can get dementia - even people in their 30s/40s/50s.\*\*
• 1 in 10 people diagnosed with dementia in Ireland are under 65.
• The overall cost of dementia care in Ireland is just over €1.69 billion per annum; 48% of this is attributable to family care; 43% is accounted for by residential care; formal health and social care services contribute only 9% to the total cost

*Figures referenced to Cahill, S. & Pierce, M. (2013) The Prevalence of Dementia in Ireland*

*\*Figure referenced from Alzheimer Europe (2020)* *Dementia in Europe Yearbook 2019 ‘Estimating the prevalence of dementia in Europe’*

*\*\*Figure referenced from Pierse, T., O’Shea, E. and Carney P. (2018) Estimates of the prevalence, incidence and severity of dementia in Ireland.*