**IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Monday, 25th May 2020**

**New Online Support Group for Family Carers of People with Dementia launched to alleviate increasing pressure points on stressed family carers caused by COVID-19**

The Alzheimer Society of Ireland has launched a new ***Online Support Group for Family Carers of People with*** ***Dementia*** to help alleviate the increasing pressure points on family carers, such as loneliness, social-isolation, fear, stress and anxiety, during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The ASI has carried out research and is receiving new information from our ***Dementia Advisers***, our new online ***Dementia Nurse*** service and calls to our ***Alzheimer National Helpline*** that the pressure points on family carers of people with dementia are increasing and are reaching a critical point.

The public health crisis has been a perfect storm for carers of people with dementia with the closure of our day centres in particular, along with social clubs, Alzheimer cafés, face-to-face carer training. Many carers have ***nowhere to go*** each day to help keep their loved ones active and stimulated. There was a ***crisis*** in dementia care in Ireland long before COVID-19 – but now it’s unthinkable what family carers are going through with no access to vital key supports and services.

However, throughout this public health emergency, The ASI has continued 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. The ASI has already implemented 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 and the recent expansion of our National Helpline which offers a ***1:1 telephone*** or ***video conference call*** with a Dementia Nurse.

Today, The ASI is launching another new service our ***Online Support Group for Family Carers*** which will be a ***dedicated space*** for family carers to find information and resources of interest to them. This will be like our usual face-to-face support groups – but now everything will be online.

***This is a space for family carers to:***

* Talk and share openly with each other, to support each other;
* Ask questions and talk about topics of interest to you;
* Access Discussion Forums and a weekly live video meeting;
* Get support and guidance from our Dementia Advisers and our expert tutors

In addition, each Online Support Group will be a manageable size so people can support each other and carers can log on whenever they want meaning that this support is available 24/7. A Support Group will last for 20 weeks and we aim to establish a Group of 30 carers x 10 groups - 300 people.

People with dementia and their family carers who want to avail of this new service please contact:

* ***Email*** *onlinesupportgroup@alzheimer.ie*
* ***Alzheimer.ie*** to fill out an electronic form
* Contact the ***Alzheimer National Helpline*** 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:*** *“There was a crisis in dementia care in Ireland long before COVID-19 – but now it’s unthinkable what family carers are going through with no access to vital key supports and services. There is a real sense of fear, anxiety and isolation out there and people are crying out for support and this desperate time.* *However, we are still supporting people online or over the phone and are adapting and changing our services to meet people’s needs. Today* *we are delighted to launch the Family Carers Online Support Group which will provide many benefits - both directly to those participating in the Online Support Group, the persons that they are caring for and wider Irish society. Family carers who join the 20-week Online Support Group will get ongoing support from their fellow family carers, and also will benefit from the expert guidance from the course tutor who will be an expert in dementia. This will be a great help to family carers who we know are experiencing an extremely challenging time at this time.”*

***The Alzheimer Society of Ireland’s External Learning & Development Manager, Fergus Timmons said:*** *“This is a great opportunity for family carers who are looking to for online support at this very difficult time. There are huge benefits to this Online Support Group as participants will get support over a much longer period of time than any of the other education and training interventions offered by The Alzheimer Society of Ireland, thus combatting the feeling of isolation and stress that we know many family carers are currently experiencing. This should lead to lower levels of family carer stress, and an improvement in relations between the family carer and the person with dementia under their care. I would encourage anyone who is interested in joining, to please get in touch as soon as possible. Go to* [*www.alzheimer.ie*](http://www.alzheimer.ie) *for more information.”*

***Responding to COVID-19 Public Health Emergency:***

The ASI has developed some ***tip sheets*** and a number of factsheets 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:** https://alzheimer.ie/about-us/coronavirus-covid-19-update/#detail-2

**ENDS**

**For more information contact The Alzheimer Society of Ireland Communications Manager Cormac Cahill** **cormac.cahill@alzheimer.ie** **086 044 1214**

***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.*