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NEWS RELEASE

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Technology Puts New Face On Alzheimer's Disease

It has been 100 years since Dr. Alois Alzheimer first described the symptoms and disease we have come to know as Alzheimer's disease. New research and technologies have allowed us to make significant progress in learning more about the disease, and treatments for symptoms, with ninety percent of what is known about Alzheimer's disease having been learned in the last 15 years. This November, the nation will mark the 23rd annual National Alzheimer's Disease Month (NADM). Governor Granholm has also proclaimed November as Alzheimer's Disease Month in Michigan, where over 200,000 people have the disease or a related dementia. The Alzheimer's Association and its local chapters around Michigan will sponsor a variety of activities throughout November to increase knowledge of the disease and to promote the progress made in treatment and prevention.

President Reagan, who died in 2004 after battling the disease, signed the proclamation in 1983 that designated November as National Alzheimer's Disease Month. When he did so, fewer than two million Americans had the disease. Today, the estimated number of individuals with Alzheimer's disease has more than doubled to four and a half million, and by 2050, between 11 and 16 million people will likely have Alzheimer's unless a cure or prevention is found. Upon diagnosis at age 83, Ronald Reagan became this nation's idea of what Alzheimer's disease was. However, the face of Alzheimer's is changing.

Alzheimer's disease is considered to be early onset if an individual is younger than 65 when symptoms first appear. Early onset Alzheimer's can strike someone as early as their 30s, 40s and 50s. Newly analyzed data from the Health and Retirement Survey (HRS) indicates there may be half a million Americans under age 65 who have dementia or cognitive impairment at a level of severity consistent with dementia. While early *onset* is a diagnosis of the disease when the person is younger than 65, early *stage* is the disease phase at which the capacity to perform complex tasks, e.g., planning a dinner for guests or paying bills and managing finances, may be affected and memory loss begins to be noticeable. This includes those persons with early onset, who develop dementia under age 65, who are still in the early stage.

"With new technology allowing us to detect Alzheimer's in its earlier stages we're redefining the face of the disease," said Dr. Danny Yarger, Iron County Community Hospital, and member of the Steering Committee of the Dementia Coalition's Primary Care Network. "Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging, nor is it a disease confined to the elderly. It is important to educate people as to the warning signs of the disease as well as raise funds to support continued research as an earlier diagnosis provides us a better understanding of the disease and allows us more time to treat it."

The Alzheimer's Association is the world leader in Alzheimer research and support. Through a national network of advocates and chapters, it advances research, improves services and care, creates awareness of Alzheimer's disease and mobilizes support. The Alzheimer's Association chapters in Michigan will be holding educational programs and candlelight vigils during November. To check on NADM activities near you call 1-800-272-3900.

Families and individuals who want more information about current research trials and treatments, as well as services available to persons with dementia in Michigan should call 1-800-272-3900. The Michigan Dementia Coalition is the coordinator of a statewide public awareness campaign focusing on dementia and memory loss. WorriedAboutMemoryLoss.com is an educational campaign showcasing the facts of memory loss and dementia, and resources available in Michigan for persons with dementia and their caregivers. For more information online, connect to www.WorriedAboutMemoryLoss.com. For more information on the Michigan Dementia Coalition and the Primary Care Dementia Network, contact Micki Horst, Michigan Public Health Institute at (517) 324-7318.