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Area Agency on Aging celebrates FDA approval of Alzheimer's drug

ST. JOSEPH — The Food and Drug Administration fully approved the first drug shown to slow down Alzheimer's disease this week, sparking hope for millions of people living with the disease across the country.

"The approval of Leqembi will make it possible for people with Alzheimer's to live longer, more independent lives," said Christine Vanlandingham, CEO of Area Agency on Aging. "As we work to make Southwest Michigan a Dementia-Friendly Community, we're encouraged by this progress."

Dementia is a general term for impaired ability to remember, think, or make decisions that interferes with doing everyday activities. Alzheimer's disease is the most common type of dementia. Though dementia mostly affects older adults, it is not a part of normal aging.

"Southwest Michigan has an increasing percentage of older adults," Vanlandingham said. "We know that the risk for dementia increases as we age, and that more and more people will need access to this drug, and other supports to age with dignity and purpose."

The FDA's approval this week also comes with the news that Leqembi should be widely covered by the federal Medicare health insurance program, which primarily serves adults age 65 and older.

"More people who are in the early stages of the disease will have access to the drug – and be able to afford it," Vanlandingham said.

Area Agency on Aging launched a Dementia Friendly Communities movement in 2022 in an effort to remove the fear, stigma and isolation associated with a dementia diagnosis.

"The vision is that people impacted by a dementia diagnosis are seen as vital and valued members of our community," Vanlandingham said.

Area Agency on Aging offers a variety of services and supports for people with dementia and those caring for people with dementia, including several free upcoming Dementia Friends classes. This one-hour informational session is designed to help you understand how to better communicate and support those with dementia.

“A Dementia Friend is someone who learns about dementia and then turns that understanding into action. We all have a part to play in creating dementia-friendly communities,” Vanlandingham said. “To date, we have over 150 Dementia Friends trained in Southwest Michigan.”

In addition, the local Alzheimer’s Association chapter holds a Caregiver Support Group at our Campus for Creative Aging, 2920 Lakeview Ave., St. Joseph, on the second Tuesday of each month.

“Our Dementia Minds Support Group, as well as our SAVVY Caregiver class, are two more great places to find support for those living with dementia,” Vanlandingham said. “Through a wide range of choices, we want people of all ages affected by dementia to feel loved, cared for and supported.”

For more information on how we can support a dementia diagnosis, and to sign up for the free classes and support groups, visit www.AreaAgencyonAging.org or call 800-654-2810.

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About Region IV Area Agency on Aging Region IV Area Agency on Aging is a private, not-for-profit corporation. Established in 1974 for the business of developing age supportive commerce and services, it plays a major role in planning, funding, and delivery of a host of services. Empowerment and independence of community members are driving themes behind its efforts. Designated by the State of Michigan to receive federal Older Americans Act funds for planning and development, the agency manages an array of government contracts for service delivery in southwest Michigan. Its primary service area includes Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. For more information about the RIVAAA, visit www.areaagencyonaging.org