

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The State of Florida's "Project: VITAL" Will Connect Florida Seniors to Their Families Through Virtual Technology to Help Mitigate the Effects of Social Isolation

A Partnership Between The Florida Department of Elder Affairs and The Alzheimer's Association is Bringing New Communication Abilities to Assisted Living Facilities

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., April 8, 2020 — Today, Governor DeSantis and Elder Affairs Secretary Richard Prudom announced the launch of Project: VITAL (Virtual Inclusive Technology for All), which utilizes virtual technology to relieve the difficult symptoms of social isolation for residents in Assisted Living Facilities (ALF) and nursing homes. The Florida Department of Elder Affairs is partnering with the Alzheimer's Association and other industry leaders to distribute tablets statewide to residents in order to bring families together virtually and help mitigate feelings of isolation.

"In order to protect our Florida residents especially our elders, from the dangers of COVID-19, we have enacted social distancing measures to keep people safe," **said Governor Ron DeSantis**. "Project VITAL utilizes methods of personalized communication tools such as video call connections, online support tools, and customized applications to allow residents to continue connecting with their loved ones during these tough times through various virtual platforms."

Project VITAL was created under guidance provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) regarding infection control and prevention of COVID-19 to nursing homes and facilities for the health and safety of all residents. The project will be funded with resources received by the Department from federal coronavirus response efforts.

During the initial pilot phase, project leaders will work with 150 care communities and supply two tablets per community along with virtual training on how to use the equipment, platform, and applications as well as proper sanitization of each tablet from resident to resident.

“Through this unique project, the Florida Department of Elder Affairs is leveraging customized technology and resources to continue building on the current care and support infrastructure for seniors in our state,” **said Secretary Richard Prudom, Florida Department of Elder Affairs.**

“Through Project: VITAL, the Department has collaborated with our state’s healthcare community to enact the best practices for support, care, education, and awareness to all those who are suffering the effects of social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. We're hoping the use of these customized tablets will facilitate critical connections with families during these challenging times and hope the project is effective with making positive family connections that we can use for sustainable models in the future.”

“Project: VITAL has provided the Alzheimer’s Association the opportunity to extend our reach to not just those living with dementia, but to all seniors in Florida who are vulnerable to the negative effects of social isolation,” **said Alzheimer’s Association Florida Regional Leader, Angela McAuley.** "Ask the facility how you can have contact with your family member. Options include telephone calls, video chats, or even emails.

Families are advised to check with the facility regarding their procedures for managing COVID-19 risk. At this time, it is advised to ensure that your facility has your emergency contact information as well as backup information of another family member or friend.

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About the Florida Department of Elder Affairs

The Florida Department of Elder Affairs, the State Unit on Aging, helps Florida’s elders to remain healthy, safe, and independent. The Department provides most direct services through its Division of Statewide Community-Based Services, which works through the state’s eleven Area Agencies on Aging and local service providers to deliver essential services to a vital segment of the population. For more information, please visit www.elderaffairs.org.

About the Alzheimer’s Association

The Alzheimer’s Association leads the way to end Alzheimer’s and all other dementia – by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia. Visit www.alz.org.

