Alzheimer’s disease is the medical malady of our time. A symposium in Los Angeles this week that with the aging population is projected to reach 15 million within a generation. There is no cure, nor even a way to slow a progression that can cause a frightening heart disease, from which the number of deaths each year is half a million, from her death in December. The cost of Alzheimer’s is up at $215 billion a year, much of it from home care, and that cost is projected to triple by 2039. Yet, Alzheimer’s lags far behind other major killers in research dollars spent to combat it.

Against that backdrop comes “Mission Forward,” a plan by the national Alzheimer’s Association to restructure along the lines of what a number of other charities have already done. It would consolidate its 54 separately incorporated local chapters into a single chapter run out of national headquarters in Chicago. The intent, says Senior Putnam, the national board chair, is to “enhance performance” in fighting Alzheimer’s by aligning the national organization and all the chapters behind a strategic plan with several major goals, including meeting the needs of caregivers, increasing revenue and increasing federal funding for research.

But “Mission Forward” has not gone down well with fully half of the 14 local chapters, including the Alzheimer’s Association of San Diego Imperial Counties, which, along with 16 other local chapters, are considering breaking off the affiliation with the national organization to become fully independent.

Independence would be a radical step for the local chapters, which are already under strain from the impact of the pandemic and the resulting social distancing. Alzheimer’s disease is a chronic and progressive condition that typically progresses at a faster rate for families with a history of Alzheimer’s in the family. Independence would make it more difficult for the local chapters to provide the high-quality care and support that the families with Alzheimer’s need.

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