

Why Los Angeles' leading Alzheimer's nonprofit chooses to stand on its own: Susan Disney Lord

By Susan Disney Lord

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The board of the Alzheimer's Association, California Southland Chapter recently decided to disaffiliate from the [national Alzheimer's Association](#). We are now [Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles](#). Along with other large chapters, including New York City, Orange County, San Diego, and New Jersey, we have lost faith in national's leadership and their use of the funds we send to them.

As a local board our mission is to serve a diverse local population by providing care consultations, support groups, programming and other support for individuals and families both directly and through partnerships with other organizations, in addition to working on advocacy and raising money for research. There is so much need for support here in the greater Los Angeles area, we feel compelled to do as much as we can expand our services. This is consistent with our donors' desire to know how their contributions are being used.

So I was deeply disappointed when the national organization voted in October 2015 to consolidate all of their independent chapters into one large 501(c)(3). Over the last year we watched the national organization go through a strategic planning process which they claimed to be transparent, yet ended with a result that seemed to completely disregard any input we and most other chapters had given. When the Chapter delegates voted on the consolidation in early October, the vote was split 27-27. This clearly shows a lack of Chapter support for the plan.

When our Board looked at the public 990 reports which the national office filed from 2005 through 2013, to our dismay we saw that national's payroll went up 143 percent, from \$18 million to \$45 million. Rent went up 178 percent, from \$2.5 million to almost \$7 million, and travel expenses went up an astounding 347 percent, from \$1.5 million to \$6.9 million. Meanwhile research grants went down from \$21 million to just over \$13 million, a drop of 38 percent.

Rather than continue to send 40 percent of our locally-raised funds to support a national office which is not accountable to us in any way, we prefer to take control of 100 percent of our funds and direct them more effectively. We do not agree with the national organization's plan to provide local support through a centralized 800 phone number and online resources. We believe that supporting families affected by this disease requires person to person contact and connections.

We like to say that our name has changed, but our mission hasn't. As Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles we are respecting our donor's contributions by keeping every dime here in the local area. We have a new independence which gives us the ability to expand our programming, to be nimble, creative, and responsive to local needs, and we will have greater capacity to partner in new ways with local nonprofits and businesses.

We look forward to continuing our 35-year commitment to dementia care through the communities we serve in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties as Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles. We hope that you never need us, but if you do, we are just a phone call away at 844.HELP.ALZ.

Susan Disney Lord chairs the development committee for Alzheimer's Greater Los Angeles Board of Directors.

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