**Media Contact:**

**Jackie Dilworth**

410-654-1000

JDilworth@physiatry.org

**INSPIRATIONAL 2,000-MILE WALK, CANADA TO KEY WEST, SPOTLIGHTS THE IMPACT OF EXTREME WEATHER ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

**San Juan, PR**--- “Canada to Key West,” a 2,350-mile walk to raise awareness about the impact of increasingly frequent extreme weather events will kick off on June 21, 2019, the day of the summer solstice. The Association of Academic Physiatrists is a co-sponsor of the walk, which focuses on improving disaster preparedness for people with disabilities and will raise funds to benefit United Spinal Association.

The mission of Canada to Key West is being highlighted in a session on climate change and its potential impact on people with disabilities this week at the Association of Academic Physiatrists Annual Meeting in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico was devasted by Hurricane Maria in 2017, and thousands of citizens were left without power, clean water, medical supplies and access to medical services for months. Puerto Ricans with disabilities were the most vulnerable of all during the disaster and its aftermath.

Canada to Key West was founded by an AAP member and will include professionals in academic medicine whose goal is to raise awareness about extreme weather and how it affects persons with physical and cognitive disabilities. Drs. Marcalee and Craig Alexander will walk the 2350-mile route to rehabilitation hospitals along the way in Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Richmond and Charleston to engage with academic partners about the need for more effective mechanisms and planning to help people with disabilities during extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, floods, polar vortices and heat waves. In addition, local community members are asked to join the quest, walk or roll in conjunction with participants, mayors’ offices on disabilities, and community groups.

An estimated one in five people lives with a disability today. These individuals are more vulnerable during extreme weather events and their aftermath. It can be difficult to impossible for someone with a disability to evacuate during a disaster. Along the walk, participants would like to bring together government, academic and community members together to discuss communications and response plans to aid people with and without disabilities during extreme weather events. Moreover, the goal is to forge new partnerships between consumers with and without disabilities, academicians and clinicians that care for persons with disabilities to address how extreme weather is impacting people now and what we need to do in order to decrease further mishaps.

“I find it terrible that you can find hundreds of pictures of pets being rescued in floods or hurricanes, but you never see the person in the wheelchair, because often, they are not saved,” says Marcalee Alexander, MD, the walk’s founder. “Moreover, polar bears are considered the symbol of climate change, and we don’t acknowledge that people with disabilities are being affected now. I want to find the unsung heroes with disabilities that have faced extreme weather disasters, so they can tell their stories.”

The Canada to Key West walk will begin on historic Campobello Island, New Brunswick, Canada, where former U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had a summer home. Pres. Roosevelt contracted polio as a young man and spent the remainder of his life with paralysis; he was a strong advocate for rehabilitation research. The walk will continue through major cities on the East Coast, ending in Key West, Fla.

On Sept. 22, 2019, “The Day for Tomorrow” has been designated as the day for people to show their support for persons with and without disabilities and the challenges we all face now because of extreme weather events. This is the day before the United Nations’ climate summit and autumn solstice. On that day, the team will have made their way to Washington, DC. While the original plan was only for the 2350-mile journey, based upon requests to participate, the plan grew to encouraging teams to walk and roll around the US and the world for this crisis without borders. Alexander would like The Day for Tomorrow to be an annual event. Moreover, a documentary to highlight the cause and plans to work to develop a nonprofit that will provide telerehabilitation services without cost to persons with new or preexisting disabilities related to extreme weather are also in the works.

Readers and interested parties can create a walk team at [www.canadatokeywest.org](http://www.canadatokeywest.org), says Alexander. Visit the walk’s social media pages on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram to follow developments and get involved.

*The Association of Academic Physiatrists (AAP) is a professional society with a mission to create the future of academic physiatry through mentorship, leadership, and discovery. The only academic association dedicated to the specialty of physiatry, its members are leading physicians, researchers, in-training physiatrists, and professionals in 21 countries and 44 U.S. states. With a keen focus on research and education, the AAP holds an Annual Meeting, produces a leading medical journal in rehabilitation:*[*AJPM&R*](http://www.physiatry.org/?page=AJPMR_journal)*, and leads a variety of programs and activities that support and enhance academic physiatry. To learn more about the Association and specialty of physiatry, visit*[*physiatry.org*](http://www.physiatry.org/)*and follow us on Twitter at @AAPhysiatrists.*