

Combating Alzheimer's Disease: A Public Health Approach for Indian Country

Alzheimer's Disease: A Public Health Crisis that Demands Action

Alzheimer's is the most under-recognized public health crisis of the 21st century. The disease affects Americans across all walks of life and all communities. The inclusion of Alzheimer's disease in *Healthy People 2020* – the nation's health prevention and promotion goals for the next decade – confirms that Alzheimer's is a pivotal public health issue, requiring bold action before the crisis worsens.

American Indians and Alaska Natives are particularly at risk for developing dementia.

1 in 3 elders suffer from dementia.

Elders with: have a: increased risk of developing dementia.

Depression	42 %
Stroke	32 %
Diabetes	24 %

Increase early diagnosis of Alzheimer's

Action 1

Fewer than half of all people who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, or their caregivers, are aware of the diagnosis. Early detection and diagnosis – and knowing of the diagnosis – are essential to ensuring the best medical care and outcomes for those affected by the disease. *Healthy People 2020* has set of goal of increasing the percentage of individuals with the disease or their caregivers who are aware of the diagnosis. Tools and resources are available for these actions to increase early diagnosis, including:

- Educating the public and the medical community about the warning signs of possible dementia and the benefits of early diagnosis
- Educating health care professionals on the importance of discussing memory issues with their adult patients and on the use of validated cognitive assessment tools
- Placing links on public health agency web sites to local, state, and national dementia resources

Educate the public about risk reduction

Action 2

There is a growing scientific consensus that regular physical activity, management of certain cardiovascular risk factors (such as diabetes, smoking, and hypertension), and avoidance of traumatic brain injury can reduce the risk of cognitive decline and may also reduce the risk of dementia. Especially in the absence of a disease-modifying treatment, efforts are needed to increase public awareness and education about known and potentially modifiable risk factors of cognitive decline and dementia. Risk reduction messages for preserving cognitive health can be integrated into public health policies, campaigns, strategies, and action plans.

Messaging and community educational resources are available that can be adapted to a tribe's unique culture.

Learn more about each other

Action 3

Molly French, director of public health for the Alzheimer's Association, welcomes your calls. We'd like to learn more about your community's priorities and discuss how the *Public Health Road Map* could be useful. Contact Molly at 202.638.8674 or mfrench@alz.org. Also, background information and videos, research, tools, and resources are available at the Public Health Alzheimer's Resource Center (alz.org/publichealth) and the Healthy Aging Program, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov/aging).

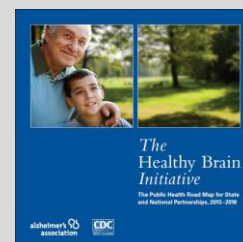
The Public Health Road Map

In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Alzheimer's Association released *The Healthy Brain Initiative: The Public Health Road Map for State and National Partnerships, 2013-2018* to advance cognitive health as a vital, integral component of public health.

The *Public Health Road Map* identifies 35 specific action items that public health agencies can do to promote cognitive functioning, address cognitive impairment, and help meet the needs of caregivers.

Organized into four domains:

- ***Monitor and Evaluate***
- ***Educate and Empower the Nation***
- ***Develop Policy and Mobilize Partnerships***
- ***Assure a Competent Workforce***



View the complete report at alz.org/publichealth.