

alzheimer's  association®

combating alzheimer's disease: a public health agenda



the compassion to care, the leadership to conquer

Alzheimer's is a public health crisis.

Alzheimer's disease is the most under-recognized public health crisis of the 21st century. Today, an estimated 5.4 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease — the most common form of dementia — and that number will rise to as many as 16 million by 2050.

This devastating disease steals a person's memories, judgment and independence. It robs spouses of lifetime companions and children of parents and grandparents. It destroys the financial security of millions of families and takes millions annually from state and federal budgets.

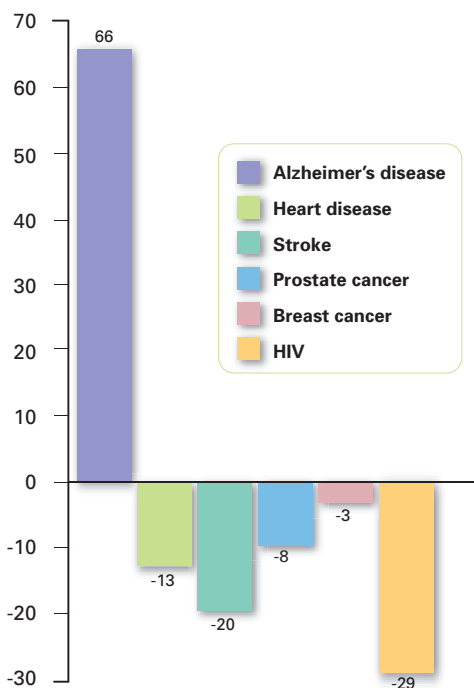
Unless something is done, the future we face is bleak:

- Nursing homes will be overloaded.
- Caregivers will be overworked.
- The healthcare system will be overwhelmed.
- Federal and state budgets will be overtaxed.

The Alzheimer's crisis needs urgent action.

While the number of deaths from heart disease, prostate cancer, breast cancer, HIV and stroke is declining, the number of Alzheimer's deaths is rising.

Percentage change in selected causes of death, 2000-2008



Source: National Center for Health Statistics. *Deaths: Final Data for 2000 and Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2008*

For more information on Alzheimer's statistics, see our *Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures* report at alz.org/facts.

Alzheimer's disease can no longer be ignored.

Alzheimer's disease is a national crisis, affecting Americans across all walks of life and all regions of the country. This devastating disease can no longer be ignored.

- One in eight Americans aged 65 and older have Alzheimer's disease — and another American develops Alzheimer's every 69 seconds. By 2050, someone will develop Alzheimer's every 33 seconds.
- In 2011, state and federal governments are expected to spend a combined \$37 billion in Medicaid costs to care for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias.
- In 2010, caregivers of people with Alzheimer's and other dementias provided unpaid care valued at over \$202 billion. In 38 states, unpaid caregiving topped \$1 billion per year per state.

To achieve meaningful progress against Alzheimer's disease, it must be considered and addressed as a public health crisis.

The inclusion of Alzheimer's disease in *Healthy People 2020* — the nation's health promotion and prevention blueprint for the next decade — is a good first step. But it's not the only step needed to address Alzheimer's as the crisis that it is.

action 1

Increase surveillance through the BRFSS.

Obtaining a more definitive picture of Alzheimer's is essential to any successful strategy to combat the disease. Recent work by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now enables states to collect data on the impact of Alzheimer's disease using the existing state Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey.

Two modules are available:

- **The Cognitive Impairment Module** — providing extensive demographic, geographic and socio-economic data regarding cognitive impairment.
- **The Caregiver Module** — providing data regarding characteristics of caregivers as well as the problems they face.

Including these modules in the state BRFSS will (1) provide the research, caregiving and public health communities a better understanding of people with cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's; and (2) identify opportunities for reducing the impact of this devastating disease. In addition, it will enable state and federal lawmakers to make better decisions in developing Alzheimer's-related policies.

action 2

Promote brain health.

Primary prevention is the ultimate public health imperative. Prevention strategies are key to reducing the occurrence of a number of major diseases and disorders.

Admittedly, more work needs to be done in understanding cognitive health and impairment — and more behavioral and risk reduction research is needed to develop effective strategies to lower the risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease.

However, research has emerged showing that healthy living — including regular physical activity and attention to heart health — not only has a positive impact on avoiding a variety of cardiovascular conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, but may also benefit an individual’s cognitive health.

As a result:

- Public health officials must undertake public health campaigns to promote brain health and healthy living practices.
- State and federal lawmakers must increase funding for behavioral and risk reduction research.

An enhanced investment in research and a public health campaign will elevate the prospects of lowering the risk of cognitive impairment and ultimately Alzheimer’s disease.

action 3 Increase early detection of Alzheimer's.

As many as half of people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias have not been diagnosed. Some studies indicate this number could be as high as 80 percent.

While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, early detection is the best way to provide better medical care and outcomes. It offers the best opportunities for early intervention and maintenance of independent living, including support of healthy living that may lessen secondary disorders and enhance quality of life.

Early detection may also increase use of community-based services, delaying and reducing use of more costly healthcare services as well as the caregiving burden on families.

Actions that must be taken to increase early detection include:

- Increased efforts to educate the public and the medical community about the warning signs of possible dementia and the benefits of early detection.
- Development of best practices aimed at early detection and risk reduction of co-morbid conditions in individuals with Alzheimer's.

Make an impact in the fight against Alzheimer's.

To learn more about the Alzheimer's public health crisis and what can be done, please contact **Catherine Morrison at catherine.morrison@alz.org**.

For more information on the Alzheimer's Association's constituent services, such as our 24/7 Helpline and CareFinder™, please visit **alz.org** or call **800.272.3900**.

The Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.

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