

Reducing Stigma Through Culturally Responsive Education

Cameron County Public Health

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Quick Summary

Using culturally tailored education to increase awareness and reduce stigma

Cameron County Public Health developed and delivered a bilingual, culturally responsive dementia education series in partnership with trusted community organizations. This approach increased community engagement, strengthened trust and expanded training across sectors, improving awareness of brain health, early detection and available supports.

Public understanding of dementia is shaped by many influences including personal experiences with family members, public awareness efforts and culture. Cameron County, located on the Texas-Mexico border, is a predominantly Hispanic and Latino community with a cultural emphasis on familism — the unity, interdependence and mutual support within families. However, conversations about brain health, dementia and caregiving are often limited, leading to stigma.

In Texas, **Cameron County Public Health (CCPH)** identified an opportunity to strengthen public awareness of brain health, dementia risk factors and the value of early detection and diagnosis through its participation in the **Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI) Road Map Strategist Program 2023 cohort**. CCPH prioritized addressing dementia-related stigma and ensuring the dissemination of accurate, accessible information.

Implementing Culturally Responsive Community Education

CCPH expanded community education efforts by employing culturally responsive messaging and materials tailored to the needs of its local population. CCPH developed Brain Briefs, a three-part presentation series addressing:

1. Introduction to Alzheimer's and other dementias
2. The importance of early detection and diagnosis
3. Key considerations and supports for caregiving

To enhance reach and foster trust, CCPH partnered with organizations respected by the community to be champions for the Brain Briefs initiative. Presentations were delivered in both English and Spanish, with adaptations to reading level, visual design and interactive components to ensure clarity and accessibility.

HBI Road Map Strategist Program

Building local leadership to advance the public health approach to dementia

The Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI) Road Map Strategist Program supports **local health departments** in advancing the public health approach to brain health, dementia and caregiving. Through funding, education and technical assistance, the program equips experienced public health professionals to **serve as systems change agents** guided by the [HBI State and Local Road Map for Public Health, 2023-2027](#).

The HBI Road Map Strategist Program is led by the Alzheimer's Association in partnership with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO).

The materials were developed consistent with national public health best practices while also reflecting local cultural norms, values and linguistic preferences. Continuous evaluation refined the educational content improving quality, inclusivity and overall effectiveness.

Impact and Sustainability

The Brain Briefs initiative increased conversations about brain health and dementia throughout the community and between family members. This success strengthened relationships between the health department and the public, building trust and positioning CCPH as a reliable resource for information on dementia. The initiative also led to broader training efforts, including dementia education for CCPH clinical staff, health care providers, first responders and community-based organizations.

Building on CCPH's participation in the HBI Road Map Strategist Program, the department secured a five-year federal cooperative agreement through the BOLD Program, positioning dementia as a priority topic. The funding expanded local services, deepened partnerships and strengthened internal capacity, including the addition of two dementia resource specialists funded through a state grant to bolster community-level support.

Lessons Learned

- » **Trusted community organizations as messengers:** Trusted local organizations served as bridges to the community, helping reduce hesitancy and opening spaces for education and awareness. The support of these organizations increased community engagement and provided insight into the cultural context of dementia, allowing messaging to be tailored in ways that honored community values and experiences.

“Ultimately, our success began with the Strategist Program — doors have been opened up, our reach has extended and we are making a larger impact in our community.”

–Shiann Moraida
Cameron County Public Health,
2023 HBI Road Map Strategist

- » **Education as foundation:** Education emerged as an accessible, empowering entry point into conversations about dementia. Even though dementia is a complex condition, introducing it as one part of the broader brain-health picture helped the community better understand it. This foundation encouraged individuals to discuss dementia openly, consider early detection and support healthier aging.
- » **Working with nontraditional partners:** CCPH worked with nontraditional partners that addressed brain health indirectly, such as those focused on nutrition and physical activity. This approach opened opportunities for diverse champions, including exploring brain health education in schools, addressing concussion awareness among student athletes, and providing nursing facilities, health care providers, and first responders with education to better support people living with dementia.

Learn more about the public health approach to dementia at alz.org/publichealth



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