

# FACTSHEET

APRIL 2022

alz.org®

## Reducing the Risk of Cognitive Decline

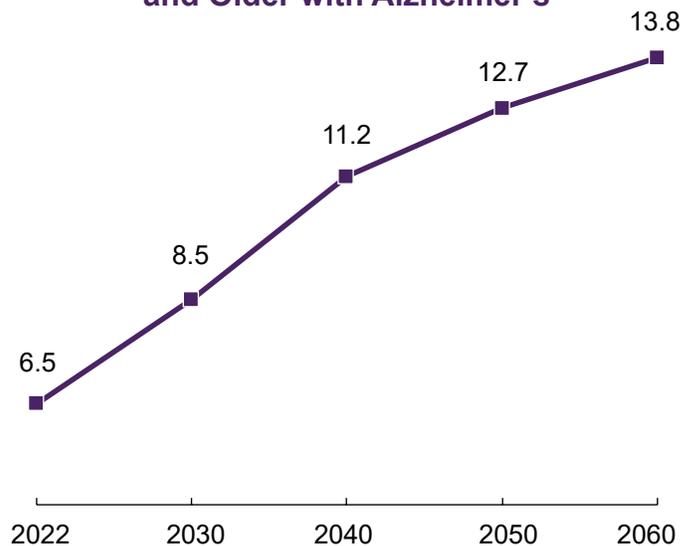
**More than 6 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's, and many more are at risk of developing it or another dementia.**

- A recent systematic review found 16.6% of individuals aged 65 and older have mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Studies indicate that one-third of them will develop dementia within 5 years.
- Nearly 10% of Americans aged 45 and older have subjective cognitive decline (SCD) — self-reported thinking or memory problems that are happening more often or getting worse. SCD is an early warning sign of possible future dementia.
- By 2060, the number of older adults with Alzheimer's is projected to total nearly 14 million.

**While treatments may slow the progression of cognitive decline, steps can be taken now to reduce the risk of developing it.**

- Traumatic brain injury increases the risk of developing certain forms of dementia.
- Addressing cardiovascular health — mid-life hypertension, diabetes, smoking, mid-life obesity, and physical activity — can reduce the risk of cognitive decline and possibly dementia.
- Poor sleep quality and sleep disorders may increase the risk of cognitive decline and dementia.
- A healthy dietary pattern and cognitive stimulation may reduce the risk of cognitive decline.

**Millions of Americans Aged 65 and Older with Alzheimer's**



### What Can Public Health Do?

- Use the best available evidence to build public knowledge about cognitive health across the life course.
- Educate the public about brain health, cognitive aging, and healthy lifestyle changes that should be discussed with a health care professional.
- Promote the use of effective interventions and best practices to promote brain health.
- Educate public health and health care professionals about sources of reliable information on brain health.
- Educate health care professionals about the importance of treating co-morbidities, especially those that are risk factors for cognitive decline.

For more information, visit: [alz.org/publichealth](https://alz.org/publichealth).

## Addressing possible risk factors by the medical and public health communities may improve cognitive health.

- Several retrospective studies have found declining rates of dementia prevalence or incidence in some population cohorts since the 1970s.
- Some of these studies have noted that over the same period, study participants had substantial improvements in management of cardiovascular risk factors and declines in the rates of smoking, heart disease, and stroke.
- A recent randomized controlled trial found that aggressive control of blood pressure significantly reduced the risk of developing MCI.
- Assuming a causal link between 12 modifiable risk factors and Alzheimer's, as many as 40% of all cases of Alzheimer's are attributable to those risk factors.

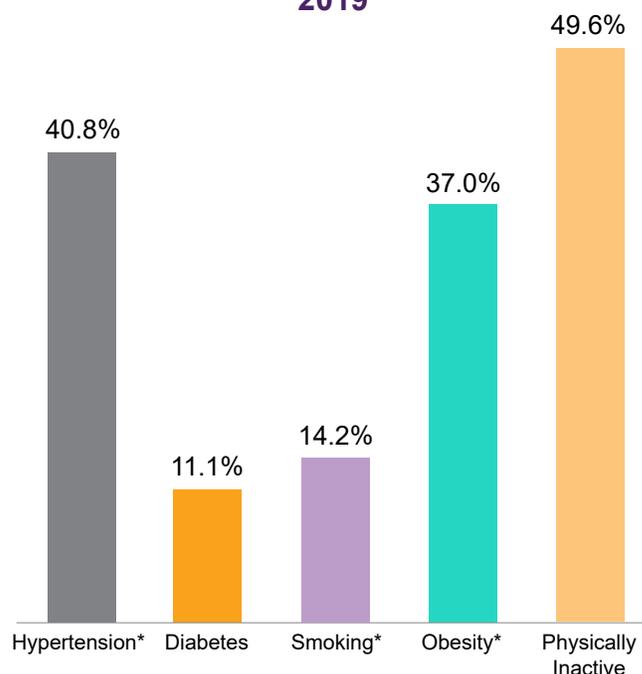
### Public Health Center of Excellence on Risk Reduction

The Public Health Center of Excellence on Dementia Risk Reduction works to help state, local, and tribal public health agencies address risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia. Headed by the Alzheimer's Association, the Center was launched in 2020 with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Specifically, the Center translates the latest science on dementia risk reduction into tools, materials, and messaging that public health agencies can use to reduce dementia risk for all people, including those in diverse, underserved, and higher-risk communities. It offers one-on-one engagement with public health officials to encourage action in their communities; provides technical assistance to help public health officials design, implement, and evaluate risk reduction activities; and publishes online resources on dementia risk factors and what public health can do to address them.

For more information, please visit: [alz.org/publichealth](https://alz.org/publichealth). Or, contact [CenterOfExcellence@alz.org](mailto:CenterOfExcellence@alz.org).

## Prevalence of Dementia Risk Factors 2019



\*Prevalence rates correspond to the relevant ages of risk for each possible risk factor.

## However, these gains may evaporate in the future.

- With the growth in the rates of diabetes and obesity in the United States, any improvement in dementia prevalence and incidence rates could be erased in the future.
- Additionally, the prevalence of hypertension remains high — affecting nearly half of U.S. adults — and on average, less than one-fifth of adults with hypertension have their condition aggressively controlled (systolic blood pressure < 120 mmHg).
- The consequence is that addressing possible risk factors for cognitive decline and dementia may be necessary not only to reduce the occurrence of dementia in the population but just to prevent the current projections from getting worse.