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HHS Updates Physical Activity Guidelines

New guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services encourage adults to engage in 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each week with muscle-strengthening exercises at least two days during the week in order to stay healthy. The second edition of Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans highlights the long-term benefits of physical activity, including improved brain health, reduced risk of chronic conditions (including cancer, heart disease, and diabetes), reduced risk for fall-related injuries in older adults, and reduced risk of excessive weight gain.

Notably, the advisory committee that shaped these guidelines extended their evidence review to cognitive health issues — including subjective manifestations of brain activity including mood, attention, and memory. The review stated that there is strong evidence demonstrating that more physical activity reduces the risk of cognitive decline, improves certain aspects of overall cognitive functioning among the general population, and may even improve cognition among people living with dementia.

Public health practitioners can utilize these guidelines to enhance both the physical and cognitive health of their communities. The Healthy Brain Initiative’s State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia: The 2018-2023 Road Map recommends integrating existing health communications with brain health messaging to protect cognition and reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Practitioners can learn more about brain health and risk reduction and utilize readymade, evidence-based messages across a variety of common health promotion and health education topics.

ROAD MAP ACTION ITEM E-2
Integrate the best available evidence about brain health and cognitive decline risk factors into existing health communications that promote health and chronic condition management for people across the life span.

The Road Map

The CDC Alzheimer’s Disease and Healthy Aging Program and the Alzheimer’s Association updated the Healthy Brain Initiative Road Map for the public health community — learn how 25 actions can help promote brain health, address cognitive impairment, and support the needs of caregivers.

Alzheimer’s Public Health Curriculum

A free curriculum to introduce undergraduates to Alzheimer’s as a growing public health issue.
Intensive Blood Pressure Control Lowers Risk of MCI

The risk of developing mild cognitive impairment (MCI) among older adults can be significantly reduced through intensive blood pressure control, according to research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. First presented at the 2018 Alzheimer’s Association International Conference® (AAIC), researchers found that older adults who maintained a lower systolic blood pressure (targeted to be ≤120 mm Hg) had a 19 percent lower rate of developing MCI than older adults with a higher systolic blood pressure (targeted to be ≤140 mm Hg). The study authors also noted a positive trend indicating potential reduction in dementia, though further study is needed to better understand this possible connection.

The Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT) was a randomized clinical trial examining older adults at increased risk for cardiovascular disease, but without diagnosed diabetes, dementia, or previous stroke. One-third of the participants were African American and 10 percent were Hispanic. Using a combination of antihypertensive medications, researchers examined differences between the lower, intensive blood pressure goal and a higher, standard target goal.

Due to the overwhelming benefits of the SPRINT intervention on cardiovascular health, the study was stopped early before a full evaluation on the effects of blood pressure control on reducing dementia could be measured. To better understand this promising connection, the Alzheimer’s Association is funding SPRINT MIND 2 — a two-year extension of the trial to add people to the study and follow them for more time. The aim of this extension is to better analyze the connection between blood pressure and dementia with the hope of a more definitive conclusion on dementia risk reduction potential.

The HBI Road Map recommends state and local public health leaders promote the use of effective interventions — like aggressively controlling systolic blood pressure — to protect brain health and encourage healthy aging. Accelerating Risk Reduction and Promoting Brain Health: A HBI Issue Map outlines the case for taking public health action to educate communities about the ways to protect cognition and provides successful state examples to encourage action. Public health practitioners can also utilize the community education resources from the National Institute on Aging and the Administration for Community Living or promote the Mind Your Risks public awareness campaign developed by the National Institutes of Health.
Expanded Public Health Infrastructure May Reduce Misinformation

Public health and healthcare professionals have a responsibility to protect their communities from the increase in “pseudomedicine” — supplements or medical interventions marketed to improve cognition or protect against dementia but lacking credible efficacy data — according to an editorial published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Pseudomedicine that lacks the scientific rigor and evidence base needed to support common claims of cognitive benefits are frequently costly, often unregulated, and potentially harmful. The authors encourage the healthcare workforce to become educated on sources of reliable information of brain health to address these claims and provide the best care possible.

This rise in misinformation affirms the need for robust public education efforts on Alzheimer’s and brain health. The *Building Our Largest Dementia (BOLD) Infrastructure for Alzheimer’s Act* (P.L. 115-406) — bipartisan legislation signed into law last year — is designed to activate a full-fledged public health response to Alzheimer’s by authorizing a major expansion of the Alzheimer’s public health infrastructure across the country.

The BOLD Infrastructure for Alzheimer’s Act authorizes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to establish centers of excellence that expand and promote the evidence base for effective population-based interventions to improve dementia outcomes. The agency can also offer funding to state, local, and tribal public health departments to promote cognitive health and risk reduction, increase early detection and diagnosis, and better address the needs of caregivers. Just as significant, the legislation aims to improve collection, analysis and timely reporting of data on cognitive decline and caregiving related to Alzheimer’s to inform future public health actions. Stay tuned to this newsletter for further developments of the BOLD Infrastructure for Alzheimer’s Act.

**HBI Road Map: Opportunities and Resources for Action**

Additional learning opportunities and resources are available to help public health leaders implement actions of the Healthy Brain Initiative’s (HBI) *State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia: The 2018-2023 Road Map*. Jointly developed by the Alzheimer’s Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the HBI Road Map offers public health leaders a flexible menu of 25 actions to promote brain health, improve care for people living with cognitive impairment, and better support caregivers. Practitioners can now use the following to prepare their communities for Alzheimer’s and other dementias.
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

BRAIN HEALTH

Brain Health Course — The American College of Preventive Medicine created a Brain Health Course to educate physicians and health care professionals about the benefits of blood pressure control and other modifiable risk factors as a possible mechanism for reducing the risk of future cognitive decline. The course includes descriptions of brain health conditions and associated risk factors, and it provides an in-depth overview on risk reduction and management of factors associated with brain health. Learners can create a free login account and take the course at no cost and physicians can obtain 1.0 CME/MOC for completing this course.

ASTHO Connects — From the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the ASTHO Connects Series on Brain Health is a three-part webinar designed to inform state and territorial health officials and their staff about the critical role of public health in supporting aging adults. On Monday, March 25, 2019 from 3:00-4:00 pm ET, Conversation and Cup of Joe will feature states currently working to implement brain health and Alzheimer’s disease programs in their jurisdictions. The webinar will include data on subjective cognitive decline and caregiving as well as examples of how to include actions of the HBI Road Map into state public health work. Register in advance.

RESOURCE GUIDES

Issue Maps — Three topic-specific issue maps delve in-depth on current public health issues that address Alzheimer’s and other dementias. Each issue map offers compelling data on the topic, succinctly explains the need for action, suggests related HBI Road Map actions, and provides case studies to demonstrate successful interventions. Issue maps are available on the following topics:

- Advancing Early Detection — outlining the population health benefits of early detection and diagnosis
- Supporting Caregivers — outlining a public health approach to help meet the needs of dementia caregivers
- Accelerating Risk Reduction and Promoting Brain Health — outlining ways public health can reduce the risk of cognitive decline across the community
Implementation Guide — Designed for public health practitioners, *Planning for Action: Initial Steps for Implementing the Healthy Brain Initiative Road Map* outlines six planning steps to help get started, develop an action plan, and begin implementation of the HBI Road Map. The guide helps public health leaders align HBI Road Map issues to current state and local priorities. Easy-to-use worksheets and resources aid prioritization, planning and promotion of HBI Road Map actions.

Dissemination Guide — The Dissemination Guide offers media engagement templates to help public health practitioners quickly disseminate information on the HBI Road Map. The guide includes media templates, sample social media posts, talking points, and key facts.

Disaster Planning Toolkit — From the National Alzheimer’s and Dementia Resource Center (NADRC), *Disaster Planning Toolkit for People Living with Dementia* is written to help people living with dementia, their family members, and their caregivers understand what to expect in the event of a disaster and how to prepare for it. The toolkit is made up of seven tip sheets and checklists for persons living with dementia, their families, and others who interact with them, including friends and neighbors.

Mortality Among Spousal Caregivers

Nearly one in five people who care for their spouses with Alzheimer’s or another dementia die before the care recipient, according to a recent study. Examining 17 years of data from the Health and Retirement Study, researchers found that 18 percent of spousal caregivers for people with dementia died prior to their husband or wife with dementia.

**ROAD MAP ACTION ITEM E-3**

Increase messaging that emphasizes both the important role of caregivers in supporting people with dementia and the importance of maintaining caregivers’ health and well-being.
Caring for a person with Alzheimer’s creates or aggravates health problems among caregivers — in 2017 alone, dementia caregivers had an estimated $11.4 billion in additional health costs due to the physical and emotional impact of caregiving. A major focus of the HBI Road Map is to support the needs of caregivers through several recommended actions including better public awareness about the importance of maintaining caregivers’ health and increasing the use of care planning services for families impacted by dementia. Supporting Caregivers: A HBI Issue Map outlines the case for taking public health action on dementia caregiving — including how care planning services can help families identify and support additional caregivers should a primary caregiver no longer be able to do so — and provides successful state examples to encourage action.

**Quick Look: Increased Attention to Alzheimer’s**

More and more attention is being paid to Alzheimer’s and other dementias as an increasingly pressing issue and a chronic condition that needs a public health approach.

- The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) published a LegisBrief highlighting state-based action against dementia to increase early detection and diagnosis as well as enhance workforce education.
- The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at CDC released their Chronic Disease in America infographic, highlighting Alzheimer’s disease as one of the leading causes of death and disability and encouraging Americans to engage in healthy behaviors.