



COUNTY of SAN DIEGO

HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

CASE STUDY

DEVELOPING and SUSTAINING A REGION-WIDE DEMENTIA RESPONSE

BACKGROUND

Over the last decade, Aging & Independence Services (AIS), a division of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), has increased focus on the public health impacts of Alzheimer's and other dementias. In 2014, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors (BOS) established the [Alzheimer's Project](#) (the Project), an ambitious initiative that aims to enhance research, provide comprehensive services and supports to families affected by dementia, and increase the education and training of health care providers to better serve their patients with cognitive impairment.

Since then, AIS has expanded the Project to serve more individuals, provided specialized services, and begun work on more fully integrating the needs of older adults into the whole HHSA response.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The Project aims to fully address dementia through collaborative action. Experts from the government, academia, health care systems, and allied community groups pursue recommendations across four key areas — grouped into roundtables:

- » **Public awareness** — the *Public Awareness & Education Roundtable* aims to increase knowledge of dementia and its impact on every San Diegan.

Importance of Champions

Many individuals have contributed to the success of the Alzheimer's Project over the years. The initial impetus of the initiative, however, can be traced back to a single, motivated elected official, Dianne Jacob. During her tenure on the Board of Supervisors, Jacob advocated for major investment into the response to dementia, supporting caregivers, and promoting research. It was through her position and by generating community support that Jacob helped secure initial funding for the Project and ensured annual appropriations to continue the work. Her dedication to addressing dementia helped cultivate and grow the Project, provide vision for the future, and generate additional support, ensuring it had the resources necessary to provide a robust public health response.

- » **Providers** — the *Clinical Roundtable* focuses on improving early detection and diagnosis, and enhancing training of health care providers throughout the county.
- » **Care, supports, and services** — the *Care Roundtable* concentrates on improving the impact and delivery of care, supports, and services to all affected by dementia.
- » **Research** — the *Collaboration4Cure Roundtable* unites local scientists and experts to identify strategies that support Alzheimer's research toward finding a cure.

LESSONS LEARNED from LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS:
BEST PRACTICES on ALZHEIMER'S

The Project is led by a steering committee with representatives from the BOS, major health systems in the area, and the HHSA executive team, while County staff support the roundtables. Additionally, the Project aligns with the county-wide [Live Well San Diego](#) initiative, a strategy to promote healthy, safe, and thriving environments and reduce health disparities. This institutional support ensures decisionmakers throughout HHSA, as well as the county, are involved and are invested in advancing the Project's goals.

EARLY and CONTINUING SUCCESS

The Project has seen numerous advances across each of the four key areas since 2014. Major accomplishments include:

- » Integration into [Age Well San Diego](#) and the [Aging Roadmap](#). These two related initiatives incorporated the aims and goals of the Project into their broader, population-based frameworks.
- » The development of *Physician Guidelines for Screening, Evaluation and Management of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias*, meant to assist primary care physicians in supporting those impacted by dementia. This led to the creation of AlzDxRx — a point-of-use mobile app for health care providers to better diagnose Alzheimer's and all dementia. Dissemination of the app helps improve early detection throughout the county.
- » Creation of Alzheimer's Response Teams (ART) — mobile crisis units specially trained on how to respond to the unique communication challenges and vulnerabilities of those living with dementia.
- » Launched the FIRST Project (First Identify and Refer, then Serve and Track), comprehensive

early detection and case management services for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Building upon these successes, AIS received a two-year, competitive grant from the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). The grant allows AIS to further expand its reach, services, and impact by aligning their current work with the Healthy Brain Initiative's [State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia: The 2018-2023 Road Map](#). The existing successes, infrastructure, and collaboration of the Project primed HHSA and AIS to be a competitive applicant.

DATA and PUBLIC HEALTH

HHSA has a robust data collection and analysis division and AIS is utilizing those capabilities to further work on dementia and cognitive health. The Project pulls data from existing resources to inform the program's goals and measure progress. With the next phase of the Project further elevating this work, additional analysis is planned to better reach underserved populations and ensure success.

One area of expansion is incorporating cognitive health and dementia thoroughly in the community health assessment. A robust community-conducted needs and gap analysis (like the [Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships](#) (MAPP) process from the [National Association of County and City Health Officials](#) (NACCHO)) allows for community-sourced ideas that better address health, including how to reduce the risk of cognitive decline and improve support for people living with dementia.

This case study was developed as part of a collaboration between the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency ([Aging & Independence Services](#)), the Boston Public Health Commission ([Healthy Homes and Community Supports](#)), and the Alzheimer's Association ([Public Health Department](#)).



For more information on the public health response to Alzheimer's, visit alz.org/publichealth