

2018 PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIES

The inclusion of Alzheimer's disease in Healthy People 2020 — the nation's health prevention and promotion goals for the next decade — confirms that Alzheimer's is a pivotal public health issue, requiring bold action before the crisis worsens.

Implement the Public Health Road Map

In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Alzheimer's Association released [*The Healthy Brain Initiative: The Public Health Road Map for State and National Partnerships, 2013-2018*](#) to advance cognitive health as a vital, integral component of public health. *The Road Map* has a menu of 35 specific actions that public health agencies can undertake to promote cognitive functioning, address cognitive impairment, and help meet the needs of caregivers.

Examples include:

- » Fielding the Cognitive and Caregiver Modules of the [*Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System*](#) (BRFSS) and then using the data to inform, improve and enhance public health programming.
- » Collaborating in the development, implementation and maintenance of state Alzheimer's disease plans.
- » Conducting state or local needs assessments related to Alzheimer's and other dementias.
- » Placing links on public health agency websites to local, state, and national dementia resources.

Increase early diagnosis of Alzheimer's

Fewer than half of all people who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, or their caregivers, are aware of the diagnosis. Early detection and diagnosis — and knowing of the diagnosis — are essential to ensuring the best medical care and outcomes for those affected by the disease. [*Healthy People 2020*](#) has set the goal of increasing the percentage of individuals with the disease or their caregivers who are aware of the diagnosis.

Actions that must be taken to increase early diagnosis include:

- » Educating the public and the medical community about the warning signs of possible dementia and the benefits of early diagnosis.
- » Educating health care professionals on the importance of discussing memory issues with their adult patients and the use of validated cognitive assessment tools.

Educate the public about risk reduction

There is a growing scientific consensus that regular physical activity, management of certain cardiovascular risk factors (such as diabetes, smoking, and hypertension), and avoidance of traumatic brain injury can reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Studies show these factors may also reduce the risk of dementia. Especially in the absence of a disease-modifying treatment, an effort must be undertaken to increase public awareness and education about known and potentially modifiable risk factors of cognitive decline and dementia. Risk reduction messages for preserving cognitive health should be integrated into public health policies, campaigns, strategies and action plans.

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