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## Happy National Public Health Week!

Traditionally, Alzheimer's disease has been viewed as only an aging issue – not as the public health crisis it has become. So, during this National Public Health Week, the Alzheimer's Association is highlighting our public health agenda and the ways we work with state and national partners to achieve meaningful progress against Alzheimer's from a public health perspective.

This edition of Alzheimer's Public Health News details steps public health officials can take in the fight against Alzheimer's disease. For a printed copy of the Alzheimer's Public Health Agenda, click on the link in the sidebar.

### What can be done - and what should be done now

In the United States, there are 5.4 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, including 5.2 million people age 65 or older and 200,000 people under the age of 65. Caring for people with Alzheimer's and other

### Public Health Agenda



The Alzheimer's Association has identified three key elements of an Alzheimer's public health agenda: surveillance, early detection, and

promotion of brain health.

### The Road Map



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the

dementias will cost the United States an estimated \$200 billion in 2012, including \$140 billion paid by Medicare and Medicaid. The 2012 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report details the growing prevalence and escalating impact of Alzheimer's on individuals, caregivers, families, the government, and the nation's health care system – clearly defining Alzheimer's as a public health crisis that must be addressed now.

One important first step in addressing Alzheimer's as a public health issue was the inclusion, for the first time, of Alzheimer's disease in Healthy People 2020. But much more is needed to address Alzheimer's as the crisis it truly is.

### Step 1. Learn the Facts

Watch this video about the burden and impact of Alzheimer's disease and share it with your public health community. Then email [us](#) and let us know how you shared the information.

### Step 2. Increase surveillance through the BRFSS

Obtaining a more definitive picture of Alzheimer's is essential to any successful strategy to combat the disease. Recent work by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now enables states to collect data on the impact of Alzheimer's disease using the existing state Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey.

Two modules are available:

- The Cognitive Impairment Module — providing extensive demographic, geographic and socioeconomic data regarding cognitive impairment.
- The Caregiver Module — providing data regarding characteristics of caregivers as well as the problems they face.

Including these modules in the state BRFSS will (1) provide the research, caregiving and public health communities a better understanding of people with cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's; and (2) identify opportunities for reducing the impact of this devastating disease. In addition, it will enable state and federal lawmakers to make better decisions in developing Alzheimer's-related policies. Funding is available on a limited basis to support the inclusion of these modules. Email [us](#) to learn more.

### Step 3. Promote brain health

Primary prevention is the ultimate public health imperative. Prevention strategies are key to reducing the occurrence of a number of major

Alzheimer's Association formed a partnership to examine how best to bring a public health perspective to the promotion of cognitive health. The resulting publication, *The Healthy Brain Initiative: A National Public Health Road Map to Maintaining Cognitive Health* outlines 44 priority actions to guide the public health community in surveillance, prevention research, communication, and policy.

### The 10 Warning Signs



The Know the 10 Signs campaign is a national education effort to increase awareness of the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease and the benefits of early detection and diagnosis.

### Contact

For more information on the Healthy Brain Initiative, the public health agenda, or Alzheimer's disease in general, contact [Catherine Morrison](#).

diseases and disorders. Admittedly, more work needs to be done in understanding cognitive health and impairment — and more behavioral and risk reduction research is needed to develop effective strategies to lower the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

However, research has emerged showing that healthy living — including regular physical activity and attention to heart health — not only has a positive impact on avoiding a variety of cardiovascular conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, but may also benefit an individual's cognitive health.

As a result:

- Public health officials must undertake public health campaigns to promote brain health and healthy living practices.
- State and federal lawmakers must increase funding for behavioral and risk reduction research.

An enhanced investment in research and a public health campaign will elevate the prospects of lowering the risk of cognitive impairment and ultimately Alzheimer's disease.

#### **Step 4. Increase early detection of Alzheimer's**

Half or more of all people with Alzheimer's disease have not been diagnosed. While there is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, early detection is the best way to provide better medical care and outcomes. It offers the best opportunities for early intervention and maintenance of independent living, including support of healthy living that may lessen secondary disorders and enhance quality of life.

Early detection may also increase use of community-based services, delaying and reducing use of more costly healthcare services as well as the caregiving burden on families.

Actions that must be taken to increase early detection include:

- Increased efforts to educate the public and the medical community about the warning signs of possible dementia and the benefits of early detection.
- Development of best practices aimed at early detection and risk reduction of co-morbid conditions in individuals with Alzheimer's.

To take action against Alzheimer's in your community, or for more information on the Healthy Brain Initiative, the public health agenda, or Alzheimer's disease in general, contact [Catherine Morrison](#).

For additional information or questions, please contact [catherine.morrison@alz.org](mailto:catherine.morrison@alz.org).  
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**Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's**

Formed in 1980, the Alzheimer's Association is the world's leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer's care, support and research.