Dementia Risk Reduction

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Introduction

Under the BOLD Infrastructure for Alzheimer’s Act, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has awarded grants to state, local, and tribal public health agencies to undertake public health programs, interventions, and services related to Alzheimer’s and other dementias. The focus of “Core Capacity” awards is on planning and capacity building, including the creation or updating of Alzheimer’s strategic plans.

In order to advance a timely and effective response to the Alzheimer’s crisis, Alzheimer’s plans allow states, localities, and tribes to identify and recommend policies and actions that are tailored to the unique gaps and needs in their particular jurisdictions. Alzheimer’s plans should be comprehensive, both in their development and in their content. This means they should be created through a jurisdiction-wide, multi-agency, collaborative process that involves a variety of external stakeholders, including those living with the disease, private entities, and groups representing diverse populations. And it means the plan recommendations should cover the entire spectrum of needs of those with dementia and their caregivers.

That spectrum begins with primary prevention: reducing the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Three sources provide ideas and suggestions for risk reduction recommendations that Core Capacity states could include in Alzheimer’s plans: (1) the work of the Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI), including the Public Health Road Map; (2) the provisions of previously-published state Alzheimer’s plans; and (3) initiatives already undertaken by public health agencies. To assist Core Capacity awardees in developing their Alzheimer’s plans, this report compiles the best risk reduction recommendations from all three sources.

For further information, advice, or assistance, please contact the Public Health Center of Excellence on Dementia Risk Reduction at CenterOfExcellence@alz.org.
Risk Reduction Recommendations
Healthy Brain Initiative Road Map

The Healthy Brain Initiative State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia: The 2018–2023 Road Map provides guidance to public health agencies on actions they can take to promote cognitive health. These actions are centered around four key public health domains: Educate & Empower, Develop Policies & Mobilize Partnerships, Assure a Competent Workforce, and Monitor & Evaluate. Below are the risk reduction-related components of the Road Map that could be included as recommendations in Alzheimer’s plans.

Educate & Empower
Create an Informed Public

- Educate the public and increase awareness about brain health and cognitive aging.

- 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.

Key activities:

✓ Work with provider groups to normalize discussions about cognitive health and modifying risk factors.

✓ Integrate dementia risk messaging into other public health messaging, such as that around head injury, exercise, and diabetes.

Competent Workforce
Improve Care for People with Dementia

- Educate health care professionals about the importance of treating co-morbidities, addressing injury risks, and attending to behavioral health needs among people at all stages of dementia.

Key activity:

✓ Educate providers and health systems on the connection between the higher risk of cognitive decline among those with chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity.

Develop Policies & Mobilize Partnerships
Translate Science into Practice & Policy

- Promote the use of effective interventions and best practices to protect brain health.

Key activity:

✓ Provide ongoing training or resources to the public and health care professionals on the latest guidance/research pertaining to dementia risk factors.

Monitor & Evaluate
Improve Decision Making Using Data

- Use data gleaned through available surveillance strategies and other sources to inform the public health program and policy response to cognitive health, impairment, and caregiving.

Key activities:

✓ Leverage medical claims data, death certificate data, aging networks, and/or community needs assessments to evaluate common risk factors or co-occurring conditions in your population.

✓ Identify “hot spots” in your population where the prevalence of various risk factors is highest, and overlay that data with demographic information to identify underrepresented populations in greater need.
Risk Reduction Recommendations
State Alzheimer’s Plans

Since 2007, state Alzheimer’s plans have provided an important framework and accountability for future action on key issues related to the disease. In many states, the planning process has involved identifying specific strategies and programs related to risk reduction, which then were used to create recommendations included in their plans. While some of the below recommendations taken from previously-published plans may not have been fully implemented, they still provide helpful ideas for actionable risk reduction activities.

Improve Planning

• Support, fund, and promote the re-establishment of a comprehensive state public health plan to include cognitive health in its strategies or recommendations where appropriate.

• Integrate brain health strategies and recommendations into state and local public health plans.

Develop Partnerships

• Establish and mobilize a broad network of partners in the areas of business, education, manufacturing, and other community-based employers and organizations to implement and promote brain health and wellness programs.

• Coordinate with organizations that are actively working to reduce risk factors such as diabetes and heart disease to promote disease prevention and brain health.

• Collaborate with related public health efforts (e.g. diet, exercise, co-morbid conditions, etc.) to encourage possible risk-reduction strategies.

• Forge partnerships among the state’s existing public health programs aimed at reducing potential environmental factors and other health-related problems such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes, including identifying grant funding opportunities from the state, local agencies, and foundations and disseminating grant funding across various researchers in the state and their respective institutions.

• Promote strategic partnerships among associations, government agencies, insurers, other payers, private industry, public organizations, and elected officials to support and advance research and policy relevant to cognitive health.

• Partner with community organizations to disseminate evidence-based educational materials for the public around healthy aging and accessing health care proactively. Include organizations such as tribal centers, community and senior centers, faith-based organizations, hospitals and health plans, YMCAs and parks departments, secondary schools and institutions of higher learning.

• Increase the number of organizations that will promote information on the relationship between brain health and overall health in their communications and activities.

Educate Providers

• Develop a compendium of targeted preventive brain health fitness screening recommendations and education for health care professionals to establish brain health fitness benchmarks and promote brain health fitness.

• Establish brain health fitness continuing education credits for all health care professionals.

• Develop multimedia education programs to promote recommendations for health care professionals and the public regarding brain health fitness.
Risk Reduction Recommendations
State Alzheimer’s Plans (continued)

Educate the Public

• Inform and educate the public about healthy aging, including links between brain health and nutrition, exercise, stress management, and oral health/periodontal disease.

• Develop a centralized online portal for educational resources and online programs, including information regarding prevention of Alzheimer’s disease and other related dementias through diet, exercise, management of chronic illnesses like diabetes, hypertension, cessation of smoking, social engagement, and other lifestyle modifications.

• Request that all state and local public health organizations provide content specific to healthy aging, brain health, and Alzheimer’s disease/dementia, including internet links to national, state, and local resources.

• Develop employee education and support outreach for public and private sector businesses to promote brain health.

• Coordinate efforts to disseminate evidence-based messages about risk reduction for preserving cognitive health, such as the benefit of exercise, healthy eating, and chronic disease management.

• Identify and disseminate research findings on promotion of brain health and reduction of risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease.

• Develop evidence-based public messages around promoting healthy aging and brain health, while ensuring messages are culturally/ethnically appropriate and designed to reach statewide populations including persons with limited English.

• Develop a web-based clearinghouse that provides information and resources on Alzheimer’s disease and overall brain health for the public and health care sectors.

• Promote community awareness through the implementation of health promotion campaigns including culturally sensitive messaging.

• Emphasize the benefits of healthy lifestyle choices in the prevention of Alzheimer’s disease, including exercise and healthy eating, and proper treatment of chronic conditions.

• Include information on minimizing risk factors in public service announcements to increase awareness of Alzheimer’s disease, targeting at-risk populations.

• Create culturally competent public service announcements to raise the level of public education about brain health and the warning signs of Alzheimer’s and other dementias, some of which should specifically target populations with disproportionately higher rates of these diseases.

• Using culturally appropriate communications, educate and raise awareness about brain health and risk reduction strategies.

• Develop a communications strategy to increase public understanding of cognitive health and the connection between improved heart health and improved brain health. Messages should be multipronged, science based, and targeted to all.

• Expand the use of the brain health curriculum in schools.

• Target the higher prevalence of Alzheimer’s and other dementias among older African Americans and Hispanics through education on diabetes and high blood pressure.

• Encourage a wellness agenda that includes a brain-healthy lifestyle, inclusive of exercise, nutrition, cognitive activity, and social engagement as key protective factors against Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias.
Risk Reduction Recommendations
State Alzheimer’s Plans (continued)

• Target outreach to counties with large ethnic populations to ensure brain health information disseminated among minority populations.

• Develop a public outreach plan that shares information about social determinants and lifestyle risks, and what people can do to achieve risk reduction as individuals, and as communities.

Expand Programs

• Promote a quality diet through provision of nutrition education programs.

• Provide nutrition counseling by registered dietitians to older adults determined to be at high nutrition risk.

• Consider providing programs that are intellectually and cognitively stimulating, including a physical activity component, in areas of the state where there is a critical mass of individuals with younger-onset Alzheimer’s.

• Provide physical and mental activity programs using evidence-based programs designed for older adults.

• Provide chronic disease self-management programs using evidence-based health promotion programs.

• Promote brain health initiatives to reduce risk factors, especially in diverse communities.

• Promote self-management tools to encourage healthy lifestyle choices (e.g. healthy diets, increased physical activity, weight management, sleep health, and smoking cessation).

• Encourage wellness across the lifespan through prevention and risk reduction activities that improve brain health.

Integrate Messaging

• Integrate dementia awareness training into existing heart, stroke, and diabetes education programs.

• Integrate brain health messages into other health improvement efforts in community settings frequented by older adults. Include grassroots dissemination of messages, particularly those that build capacity within the community.

• Incorporate messages on brain health, ADRD, and caregivers’ needs into plans of state and local government, health and social service organizations, research and educational institutions, businesses and faith communities.

Promote Policy Change

• Develop white papers to educate policymakers on brain health fitness.

• Identify and implement public policy changes at the state and local levels that would encourage and promote brain health (e.g. pilot nutrition and physical activity programs).

• Support efforts to increase funding and/or legislation for brain health fitness, prevention, awareness, and education.

• Identify and support funding opportunities to address and advance brain health fitness.

• Strengthen and maintain community infrastructure that reinforces brain-healthy behaviors.
Risk Reduction Recommendations
Public Health Agency Activities

Over the last several years, various state and local health departments have taken action in their communities to address cognitive decline and dementia risk reduction. Below are recommendations that could be included in Alzheimer’s plans based on the public health educational and programmatic activities that agencies across the country have undertaken.

Using Data

• Use BRFSS data to create materials and infographics on the prevalence of dementia risk factors to share at health fairs, webinars, conferences, and other events.

Partnerships

• Collaborate with faith-based groups on community education efforts to promote dementia risk reduction among higher risk populations.

• Collaborate with local Alzheimer’s Association chapters to develop public service announcements about ways to reduce risk of Alzheimer’s.

• Partner with academic, medical, and other organizations on community events and outreach to raise awareness of cognitive health among higher risk populations.

Online Resources

• Add a brain health section to the public health department’s website.

• Create a brain health campaign on the public health department’s website. Include quizzes and toolkits to educate on specific risk reduction activities, including diet, physical activity, and cognitive and social engagement.
  • Build an Alzheimer’s awareness webpage, including information on risk reduction.

Community Programs & Education

• Equip health educators with information and training on Alzheimer’s and brain health.

• Send information to, and otherwise educate, health care providers on the importance of addressing dementia risk reduction with their patients; include links to relevant resources for providers.

• Provide updates, raise awareness, and educate on cognitive health via meetings, training webinars, and newsletter articles for providers, health plans, and community-based organizations.

• Leverage social media/digital campaigns and culturally appropriate messaging to increase awareness of risk factors for Alzheimer’s and other dementia among high risk groups.

• Distribute Spanish-language resources to promote risk reduction among Hispanic populations.

• Create LGBT-inclusive messaging for Alzheimer’s risk reduction public awareness campaigns.

• Develop brain health awareness campaigns and community education events.

Integrating Messages

• Incorporate brain health messaging into existing health campaigns focused on smoking cessation, diabetes, and cardiovascular health.