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Promotores: Community members helping one another

There is a certain irony – and tragedy – to the fact that one of the population groups most at risk for Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia is among those least familiar with it and least likely to seek medical help.

The Colorado Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association is working to remedy that situation by recruiting a unique group of volunteers: mothers and grandmothers drawn from the Spanish-speaking community, who can help educate their friends and neighbors and introduce them to information, programs and services available to them at no charge.

The first in a series of education sessions for community members will be held Friday, Oct. 12, from 4 to 7 p.m. at Denver’s Centro San Juan Diego, 2830 Lawrence St., where Alzheimer’s Association staff will conduct a meeting, share facts about the disease and solicit community input.

A 50 percent higher risk

Hispanic/Latinos are 50 percent more likely to develop Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia than their non-Hispanic white counterparts, and the Alzheimer’s Association estimates that the number of Hispanic elders living with dementia in the U.S. could increase more than six-fold by 2050 to 1.3 million.

A 64 percent higher incidence of diabetes among the Hispanic population is one of the factors leading to the higher Alzheimer’s rates, along with lower levels of education (which is believed to offer a protective effect against dementia). Also, age is the single greatest risk factor for Alzheimer’s, and life expectancy for Hispanics is expected to reach 87 by 2050, surpassing all other ethnic groups in the U.S.

Adding to those facts is the acceptance in much of the Hispanic community of cognitive impairment and dementia as a normal part of aging. That contributes to a lower likelihood that Hispanics will seek medical care or services from organizations like the Alzheimer’s Association.

“I did not know what Alzheimer’s was until today,” one Denver woman told Marlene Franco, Diversity and Inclusion coordinator for the Colorado Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association, at a recent community education program. “It is scary that we (Latinos) are at higher risk of developing it, and that there is no cure.”

Upon learning of recent research that showed lowering blood pressure can help significantly reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer’s, another woman remarked: “I’ve had three family members with dementia, so I’m glad there is something I can do to reduce my risk.”

The Promotores Project

Faced with the higher risk factors for the Hispanic community, combined with a lack of health and community resources in these communities, the Alzheimer's Association is actively recruiting volunteers for its Promotores Project. The goal is to train "familiar faces" in the community with facts about the disease and knowledge of resources that are available, including those provided at no charge by the Alzheimer's Association.

The Promotores Project will focus on specific neighborhoods within the Denver metro area with high Hispanic population: Highlands/Sunnyside, Barnum/MarLee/Athmar/Harvey Park/Westwood, North Aurora, Globeville/Elyria/Swansea, and West Colfax/Sun Valley.

"The Alzheimer's Association is committing significant resources toward research to find a cure," said Franco. "But until that time, we can help families better understand this horrible disease and how it affects their loved ones, and give them tools to help them better cope with the changes that lie ahead."

Persons interested in learning more about the Promotores Project should contact Marlene Franco at mfranco@alz.org or call 303-813-1669, ext. 269.

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Alzheimer's Association

The Alzheimer's Association Colorado Chapter is the premier source of information and support for the more than 71,000 Coloradans with Alzheimer's disease, their families and caregivers. Through its statewide network of offices, the Alzheimer's Association offers education, counseling, support groups and a 24-hour Helpline at no charge to families. In addition, contributions help fund advancements in research to prevent, treat and eventually conquer this disease. The Alzheimer's Association advocates for those living with Alzheimer's and their families on related legislative issues, and with health and long-term care providers. For information call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 bilingual Helpline at 800-272-3900, or visit www.alz.org/co

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