

PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIES 2013

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.

1. Increase state based 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 enables states to collect data on the impact of Alzheimer's disease using the existing state Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). Two modules are available: the Cognitive Impairment Module and the Caregiver Module.

Including these two modules in the state BRFSS will: (1) provide the research, caregiving and public health communities with a better understanding of the burden of cognitive impairment and Alzheimer's disease; and (2) identify opportunities for reducing the impact of this devastating disease.

2. Increase early diagnosis of Alzheimer's

As many as half of people with dementia have never received a diagnosis. Early detection and diagnosis are essential to providing the best medical care and outcomes for those with the disease. Actions that must be taken to increase early diagnosis include:

- Increased efforts to educate the public and the medical community about the warning signs of possible dementia and the benefits of early diagnosis
- Development of best practices aimed at early detection and diagnosis as well as at reducing the burden of co-morbid conditions in individuals with Alzheimer's
- Education of health care professionals on the importance of discussing memory issues with their adult patients and on how to assess cognition during a primary care visit

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 diseases and disorders. 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.

- 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