

Surveillance and BRFSS

Background

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is the world's largest, on-going telephone health survey system, tracking health conditions and risk behaviors in the United States yearly since 1984. It is conducted by all states under the direction of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) with state public health authorities. Two special optional modules that states can include in their annual surveys have been developed on the topics of caregiving and cognitive impairment.

In 2009 and 2011, we have been able to survey for Cognitive Impairment in the population in 19 states, including Illinois. We have also been able to survey in 7 states and the District of Columbia for caregiving, including Illinois. Data is just being widely reported on surveys completed in 2009.

Why is this important?

- Surveillance is used to identify trends, estimate prevalence and burden, and discover patterns of disease
- BRFSS data is used by state decision makers to plan, support, and evaluate health promotion and prevention programs
- States use BRFSS modules to investigate emerging health issues or track other objectives

Like other public health issues, we need to understand in our state the level of incidence and related risk around the subject of cognitive impairment and caregiving. The BRFSS is the best way in which we can assess this information in the public health arena and policy makers in every state have relied on the BRFSS data to determine state approaches to address the public health needs of all state residents.

Public health has been able to achieve major victories through surveillance activities – by monitoring and tracking disease, we are able to appropriately respond

with policy and programming. Our state is unprepared to deal with the crisis of Alzheimer's disease unless we know exactly the extent of the disease, associated risk factors, and potential for intervention.

What do we want to happen?

We want the state to enhance Alzheimer's disease data collection and analysis by providing funding for inclusion of the cognitive impairment and caregiving modules in the BRFSS survey in the collection and analysis of data that will help to quantify the problem of Alzheimer's disease and the burden on caregivers. Understanding the epidemiology of Alzheimer's and the caregiver burden will not only help researchers learn more about the disease, it will help Illinois determine how to provide the most effective and efficient services.

What action do I need to take?

Talk to your state legislators regarding the importance of surveillance on cognitive impairment and caregiving. Tell them:

- An estimated 5.4 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease – a number that could reach as many as 16 million by 2050. However, the public health community lacks information on the specific burden of AD and its presence in our state.
- Surveillance is key to understanding the burden of Alzheimer's and other dementias.
- For the first time, Alzheimer's disease and dementia have been included in Healthy People 2020, which sets priorities for the nation's health. Illinois is responsible for helping to reach those objectives – but surveillance is the first key step. We have to understand the problem before we can address it.

What is dementia?

Dementia is a general term for a decline in mental ability severe enough to interfere with daily life. Memory loss is an example. Alzheimer's is the most common type of dementia.

What is Alzheimer's Disease?

Alzheimer's is a type of dementia that causes problems with memory, thinking and behavior. Symptoms usually develop slowly and get worse over time, becoming severe enough to interfere with daily tasks.

Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging, although the greatest known risk factor is increasing age, and the majority of people with Alzheimer's are 65 and older. But Alzheimer's is not just a disease of old age. Up to 5 percent of people with the disease have early onset Alzheimer's (also known as younger-onset), which often appears when someone is in their 40s or 50s.

We enhance care and support

The Alzheimer's Association works on a global, national and local level to enhance care and support for all those affected by Alzheimer's and related dementias. We are here to help.

We advance research

As the largest non-profit funder of Alzheimer's research, the Association is committed to accelerating progress of new treatments, preventions and ultimately, a cure. Through our partnerships and funded projects, we have been part of every major research advancement over the past 30 years.

We advocate

The Association is the leading voice for Alzheimer's disease advocacy, fighting for critical Alzheimer's research, prevention and care initiatives at the state and federal level. We diligently work to make Alzheimer's a national priority.

We serve the entire state of Illinois. The Illinois Chapter Network, made up of volunteers, is the leading advocate for legislation and public policy at the state level on behalf of more than half a million residents 210,000 people with Alzheimer's, as well as family members and caregivers.

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VISION

A world without Alzheimer's disease.

MISSION

To eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research; to provide and enhance care and support for all affected; and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health.