

The Healthy Brain *Initiative*

**A National Public Health Road Map
to Maintaining Cognitive Health**

Executive Summary



alzheimer's 
association

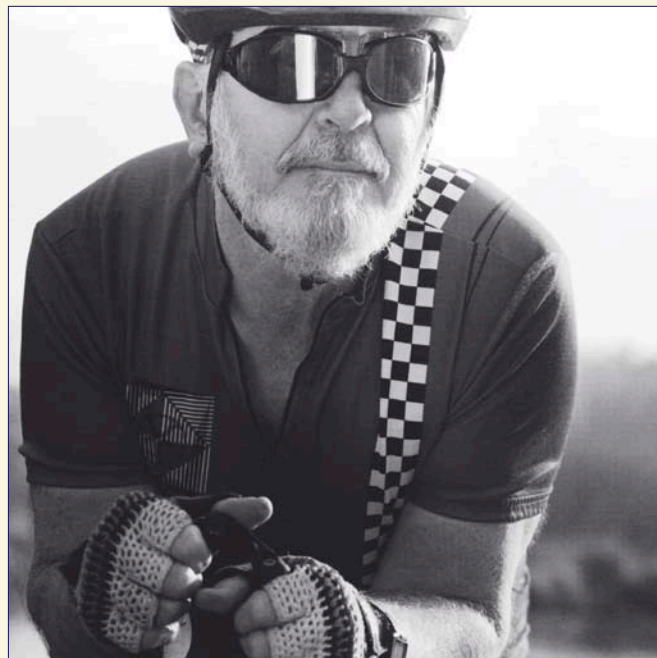
Executive Summary

In Fall 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Alzheimer's Association formed a new partnership to examine how best to bring a public health perspective to the promotion of cognitive health. To assist with this Healthy Brain Initiative, the Partners worked closely with the National Institute on Aging and the Administration on Aging to convene a multidisciplinary Steering Committee and an even wider array of invited experts from concerned public and private sector organizations. Together we examined the current state of knowledge regarding the promotion and protection of cognitive health, identified important knowledge gaps, and defined the unique role and contributions of public health. We focused on vascular risk factors and physical activity because of their association with cognitive outcomes, adopted a strategic framework, and embarked on an intensive process to generate the actions offered in this *National Public Health Road Map to Maintaining Cognitive Health*.

The Road Map recognizes current social trends and other factors that affect cognitive health from a public health standpoint: an aging population, growing fear and concern expressed by many people as they age about their potential loss of cognitive function, increasing societal burden from cognitive decline, greater caregiver burden, and a continued lack of awareness about cognitive health among consumers and providers alike.

With this backdrop, we offer a lofty but achievable long-term goal:

To maintain or improve the cognitive performance of all adults.



To accomplish this goal, we propose a set of 44 actions that are firmly grounded in science, emphasize primary prevention, assume a community and population approach, and are committed to eliminating disparities in personal health and health care for racial or ethnic groups. It is critical to note that each priority action is based on a detailed, scientific rationale, with implementation to be based on demonstrated effectiveness of specific interventions. These actions should therefore be considered in the context of the rationales presented in Section V of the Road Map. Within the full set of actions are 10 priorities worthy of immediate attention:

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- Determine how diverse audiences think about cognitive health and its associations with lifestyle factors.
 - Disseminate the latest science to increase public understanding of cognitive health and to dispel common misconceptions.
 - Help people understand the connection between risk and protective factors and cognitive health.
 - Conduct systematic literature reviews on proposed risk factors (vascular risk and physical inactivity) and related interventions for relationships with cognitive health, harms, gaps and effectiveness.
 - Conduct controlled clinical trials to determine the effect of reducing vascular risk factors on lowering the risk of cognitive decline and improving cognitive function.
 - Conduct controlled clinical trials to determine the effect of physical activity on reducing the risk of cognitive decline and improving cognitive function.
 - Conduct research on other areas potentially affecting cognitive health such as nutrition, mental activity, and social engagement.
 - Develop a population-based surveillance system with longitudinal follow-up that is dedicated to measuring the public health burden of cognitive impairment in the United States.
 - Initiate policy changes at the federal, state, and local levels to promote cognitive health by engaging public officials.

- Include cognitive health in *Healthy People 2020*, a set of health objectives for the nation that will serve as the foundation for state and community public health plans.

It is our hope that these 10 priority actions will serve to focus the nation's resources on addressing risk and protective factors for promoting cognitive health over the next 3-5 years. As a living and flexible document, the Road Map represents both a call to action and a guide for implementing an effective coordinated approach to moving cognitive health into public health practice. The key to success lies in continuing and expanding research; developing and channeling resources; working to develop or strengthen partnerships with like-minded organizations; designing collaborative operational plans of action; and establishing systems to track progress, facilitate communication, and exchange information.

Continued vigilance on this issue, and timely translation of research findings into community action, will assure that we reap the potential rewards that public health can offer in improving quality of life among adults and reducing societal costs for health care and other services.

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Available at www.cdc.gov/aging and www.alz.org



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Alzheimer's Association

The Alzheimer's Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer care, support and research. Our mission is 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. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's.

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