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Subject: Public Health E-News: IOM Identifies Risk Reduction Strategies for Cognitive Health

IOM Highlights Behaviors to Reduce Risk of Cognitive Decline

Three key behaviors can protect cognitive functioning and promote healthy aging in older adults, according to a new report released by the [Institute of Medicine](#). *Cognitive Aging: Progress in Understanding and Opportunities for Action* examines “cognitive aging” – the gradual and variable changes in mental functions that occur with age – and notes that based on the

current state of the science, the risk of cognitive decline can be reduced by:

- Being physically active;
- Managing cardiovascular risk factors, including high blood pressure, diabetes, and smoking; and
- Regularly discussing and reviewing with a health care provider those health conditions and medications that might influence cognitive health.

The report notes that individuals might also be able to protect their brains by being socially active, engaging in life-long learning, and getting adequate sleep.

The Road Map

The CDC Healthy Aging Program and the Alzheimer's Association partnered to develop an updated Road Map for the public health community to address cognitive health, Alzheimer's disease, and the needs of caregivers through 35 actions.

Public Health Agenda

The Alzheimer's Association has identified three key elements of an Alzheimer's public health agenda: surveillance, early detection, and promotion of brain health.

The 10 Warning Signs

The Know the 10 Signs campaign is a national education effort to increase awareness of the warning signs of Alzheimer's disease and the benefits of early detection and

The report encourages public health officials to disseminate key messages and promote activities that help maintain cognitive health. This mirrors an action item included in the *Public Health Road Map*, which was jointly developed by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and the Alzheimer's Association. The Road Map outlines 35 action steps for the public health community to promote cognitive functioning, address cognitive impairment, and meet the needs of caregivers – including disseminating messages about risk reduction.

Four Million Households in 13 States Have Individual Experiencing Memory Problems

One in eight households in 13 states have at least one adult experiencing increased confusion or memory loss (ICML), according to new data from the [Cognitive Module](#) of the 2011 [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#) (BRFSS). The [data](#), published in *Preventing Chronic Disease*, also show that in the 13 states, 5.4 percent of households reported all adults in the home experienced ICML. Based on these results, the authors estimated that 4 million U.S. households across the 13 states have one or more adults with ICML, potentially affecting more than 10 million individuals. These data highlight the magnitude of cognitive decline and the need for public health officials to take action. For example, the authors note, “increasing awareness about recognition of signs and symptoms of cognitive decline . . . can allow household members to seek medical advice and plan for future needs.”

Another [article](#) published in the journal found those aged 45 and older with ICML and functional difficulties – that is, those whose memory problems caused them to give up household activities or regularly interfered with their ability to work, volunteer, or engage in social activities – were significantly more likely to face greater health issues than those with ICML but no functional difficulties. Specifically, the data, from 21 states that used the BRFSS Cognitive Module in 2011, found they were more likely to report frequent poor health, frequent poor mental health, limited activity due to poor physical or mental health, and a need for more assistance. Interestingly, those with ICML and functional difficulties were younger than those with ICML and no functional difficulties, leading the authors to note the need for “examination of cognitive health issues at younger ages.”

Funding Available for BRFSS Module Usage in 2016

Two optional modules of the annual state-based [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System](#) (BRFSS) provide essential information for understanding

diagnosis.

Contact

For more information on the Healthy Brain Initiative, the public health agenda, or Alzheimer's disease in general, contact [Molly French](#) or check out [alz.org/publichealth](#).

forward to any interested colleagues.

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