

Action Plan on Alzheimer's and Healthy Aging

May 2018

Addressing Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders (ADRD) is a public health priority for Vermont

In the U.S. over 5 million people have Alzheimer's. Every 65 seconds someone in the nation develops Alzheimer's, with the majority of the disease and caregiving impacting women. In Vermont, Alzheimer's is the sixth leading cause of death which is one of the highest death rates in the country. According to the Alzheimer's Association, there are 13,000 Vermonters age 65 and older who have the disease and another 30,000 Vermonters who are caregivers of those impacted. The seriousness of Alzheimer's as a public health priority will only increase; by 2025 it is estimated that the number of Vermonters with the disease will increase by 31 percent and the medical costs by 36 percent. The costs at the family, community and medical level are significant. In 2018 Medicare alone will pay \$106 million for caring for Vermonters with Alzheimer's.

In collaboration, the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) and the Vermont Department of Health have created a brief action plan to advance activity and support of Alzheimer's and healthy aging in Vermont. As an extension of the State Plan on Aging, this action plan highlights priority areas on which our departments can make progress between 2018 and 2019, regardless of additional resources.

Along with Alzheimer's, enhancing and supporting healthy aging is also a public health priority for Vermont. The intent of the steps below is to increase the public's awareness and linkages to resources, strengthen the state's infrastructure, and increase the likelihood of healthy aging.

Reframing Aging in Vermont: Focus on Healthy Aging

Aging is a natural process that has been commonly viewed as more of a challenge than an opportunity. In fact, aging offers many opportunities for individuals, communities, partners and state agencies to access and benefit from the experience, perspectives and talents of mature adults. While increasing age is an influential factor in increased risk of Alzheimer's, research is indicating it is a myth that aging will lead to becoming cognitively impaired and diminished. Nationally, the rate of Alzheimer's decreased in 2015, which may be due to improvements over the last several decades in prevention and treatment of heart disease through changes in diet and smoking. Informed by research on how lifestyle modifications and policies that promote health can improve health among all ages, there is an opportunity to delay or prevent Alzheimer's, improve quality of life, and contribute to a healthy brain and healthy aging environment in Vermont. These action steps seek to contribute to these objectives:

- Build Messaging into Health Department Programming: Health promotion is a key component of creating improved health outcomes. Raising awareness, knowledge and engagement at the community level contribute to creating strong social norms, protective factors and a healthier environment.
 - **The Health Department has a new 3-4-50 Initiative** that first creates an epiphany on the impact of chronic disease in Vermont and then calls on all sectors to act. 3-4-50

stands for three behaviors – smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise – that contribute to four chronic diseases – cancer, lung disease, heart disease and type 2 diabetes – which are the cause of more than 50 percent of all deaths in Vermont. The Department and its Local Health Offices are engaging workplaces, school and childcare centers, faith communities, retailers, clinics and hospitals to sign-on to 3-4-50 — committing to action steps that will improve health. Addressing these three modifiable behaviors where Vermonters live, work, learn and play increases the likelihood of living longer, healthier lives.

- **Action Step:** The Health Department will use the 3-4-50 message to show how addressing modifiable risk behaviors can decrease the risk of cognitive decline. Physical activity, a healthy diet and smoking cessation are shown to improve both heart health and brain health. Messaging can include the benefit of healthy brain promotion throughout the life course and how family-friendly activities can contribute toward this goal.
- **June is Alzheimer’s and Brain Health Awareness Month.** The Health Department is a credible source of health information on communicable diseases, emergency response, emerging health risks and chronic disease prevention and management topics.
 - **Action Step:** The Health Department will host or plan one or more Grand Rounds each year to highlight Alzheimer’s as a public health priority and will work with members of the Governor’s Commission on Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders to identify speakers. Grand Rounds can increase medical providers’ awareness of the availability and utility of valid screening tools such as the “Vermont mini-cog” screening tool, the value of Medicare reimbursement for dementia care planning, and the framing of Advance Directives that incorporate cognitive status concerns. The Department will also use skill-building Spotlight Sessions for selected workforces to recognize and address the needs of individuals and families impacted by Alzheimer’s. The Health Department may be able to use the first responder Alzheimer’s Association training for first responders for its own EMS network.
 - **Action Step:** The Departments of Health and Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living will plan and implement public health messaging through traditional and social media channels (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Press, PSAs) during Alzheimer’s and Brain Health Awareness month. Opportunities include:
 - Messaging on the importance of preventing concussions in youth sports and following treatment protocols.
 - Raising awareness of the protective factor of regular exercise for reducing stress, offering socializing opportunities, and raising an

individual's heart rate and delivery of healthy oxygen levels to heart and brain.

- Linking Vermonters to free resources for quitting smoking and reducing exposure to secondhand smoke through 802Quits and its incentivized pregnancy protocol, text and other supports, and the Nurse Family Partnership.
 - Providing community and medical providers with talking points on the value of early detection of Alzheimer's to improve quality of life and connection to state and local resources for both individuals living with dementia and family caregivers who may benefit from additional supports.
 - Messaging around the importance of social connectedness and engagement and other strategies for relieving depression and maintaining cognitive health.
 - Identification of resources for older Vermonters related to exercise, nutrition, and opportunities for social and community connection.
- **November is National Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month and National Family Caregiver Awareness Month.** Often overlooked is the substantial financial and time commitment that caregivers give to Vermonters with Alzheimer's.
- **Action Step:** The Departments of Health and Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, in collaboration with community stakeholders, will launch community presentations and disseminate materials to increase understanding of the role of caregivers and what programs are available to support their emotional, financial, physical and mental well-being. Partners may include the Area Agencies on Aging, Alzheimer's Association, AARP Brain Health Ambassador Program, Senior Centers, Local Health Offices, SASH, the UVM Center on Aging and more.

Dissemination can include innovative materials (e.g. placemats) that speak to the value caregivers bring to individuals and communities and links to resources throughout care homes, facilities and visiting nurse organizations.

Department Programming Offers Integration Opportunities to Address Alzheimer's

The Departments of Health and Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living are committed to doing more to integrate the Commission on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders' recommendations into our programming and grantmaking. Our objective is to raise the concerted effort to highlight Alzheimer's as both a public health and a healthy aging priority. Through integrating and prioritizing the Commission into state plans and workforce development curriculum and training, Alzheimer's can be more clearly

prioritized and embedded in Agency of Human Services' programming to improve health, enhance quality of life, and reduce disease burden.

- Identify Approaches to Integrate Alzheimer's and Related Dementias into the state plans for aging, disability and state health improvement.
 - Training can build capacity to address Alzheimer's among participants trained by these grants and foster partnerships to work together to reduce its burden on individuals and families. For example, the Disability Grant is bringing in experts who are knowledgeable about how to increase culturally-appropriate awareness and response to diminished cognitive abilities through alterations in programming and interventions.
 - **Action Step:** The Departments will identify and implement one or more training opportunities through resource support, available in Health's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Disability Grant and the Department of Disability, Aging and Independent Living's Lane Grant, to increase workforce and partner understanding of Alzheimer's.
 - Disseminating preliminary drafts of state plans is an important way to gather community input and stakeholder requests. Many state plans are for a multi-year timeframe, making their dissemination in draft form to stakeholders a priority.
 - **Action Step:** The Departments will circulate and collect community, partner and stakeholder input on their aging, disability and state health improvement plans.
 - Vermont's State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) is a five-year blueprint that sets both the broad categories and specific objectives for meeting Healthy Vermonter goals. The SHIP represents strategic priorities by focusing on preventable conditions or lifestyle behaviors that can help improve numerous health outcomes, including heart and brain health.
 - **Action Step:** Vermont's new State Health Improvement Plan will focus on increasing health equity and decreasing health disparity. The state's 3-4-50 initiative highlights how the three modifiable behaviors, if prioritized through funding, community engagement and program integration, can significantly contribute to a healthier Vermont for all ages. One of the priority populations included in 3-4-50 are Vermonters with cognitive disabilities.
 - **Action Step:** The Health's Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention will use the new State Health Improvement Plan to prioritize and leverage surveillance, evaluation, communication and program resources to increase likelihood of population-level lifestyle changes that benefit heart and brain health, including Alzheimer's and healthy aging in Vermont.

- The Older Americans Act of 1965 was passed to support states in developing comprehensive and coordinated systems and services to older Americans, including local Area Agencies on Aging. In 2016, Congress reauthorized the Act through FY 2019.
 - **Action Step:** If H.608, an act for creating an Older Vermonters Act working group, is passed in the Vermont legislature, the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living will coordinate a new workgroup to plan, gain input for and draft an Older Vermonters Act, with a focus on healthy aging.

Departmental Infrastructure Creates Dementia-Capable Grantees and Workforces

While strengthening its workforce capacity to address Alzheimer's and create healthier aging, the Departments can utilize resources to set standards and offer training to do the same for its partners.

- **Action Step:** The Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living will work with Area Agencies of Aging around creating a dementia- capable workforce.
- **Action Step:** The Department of Health will utilize its Spotlight series, Chronic Disease Designee and Extended Director meetings to hold discussions and disseminate information and trainings to increase awareness and capacity to address dementia and preventive lifestyle behaviors including 3-4-50.
- **Action Step:** The Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living will work with the business community to promote workplace policies that support and accommodate the needs of working caregivers.
- **Action Step:** The Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living will take recommendations from the Governor's Commission on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders to strengthen its licensing standards and training requirements for staff of long-term care facilities, including nursing homes, residential care and assisted living.