

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE:

A Call to Action for Organizations



The African American community is strong and resilient. Institutionalized racism drives the unequal distribution of power and resources, resulting in health, social, economic, environmental, and structural disparities for people of color. Among those disparities is the disproportionate occurrence of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.



The number of older African Americans in Washington is growing. By 2040, this population is estimated to increase from about 43,000 to about 80,000 (83%).



African Americans are 2 to 3 times more likely to have Alzheimer's disease than the non-Hispanic white population.



African Americans are more likely to be misdiagnosed or diagnosed with Alzheimer's in the later stages of the disease.

Institutional racism leads to multiple factors that put African Americans at risk for Alzheimer's and other dementias, including:

- Education and income inequalities
- Limited or no access to health care
- Increased stress and heart problems
- Untreated high blood pressure and diabetes

Certain factors may impact diagnosis and treatment of African Americans, such as:

- Perceptions about what is normal aging and what is not
- Mistrust of the health care system due to past mistreatment, which may delay access to care and assessment
- Cognitive screening tools that are not culturally appropriate

WAYS YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN HELP

Health, civic, faith, and social organizations in Washington play a critical role in improving the brain health of African Americans. Here are a few strategies and example action steps. The icons direct you to useful resources below.

1 Increase public awareness about disparities in Alzheimer's disease, risk factors, and impact. **C D G**

Faith communities can: Host Memory Sundays to share information about ways to reduce chances of developing dementia. **D**

2 Promote healthy aging and brain health. **B C G**

Civic and community organizations can: Share information about local Area Agencies on Aging and the Alzheimer's Association, and offer the *Dementia Road Map: A Guide for Family and Care Partners*. **F**

3 Provide guidance and support for dementia caregivers in navigating service systems. **C F**

4 Promote health care access for early detection, diagnosis, and treatment. **A C G**

Health and aging providers can: Share information about chronic disease self-management programs and offer classes for exercise, cooking healthy meals, and affordable grocery shopping. **B F**

5 Educate about the connections between chronic disease (diabetes, heart disease, hypertension) and dementia and help people manage such conditions. **B C F G**

6 Include Alzheimer's, dementia, and healthy aging in organizational, state, and local government plans. **B C F**

7 Encourage African Americans to participate in dementia-related research studies. Information from research can help find better treatments for Alzheimer's and identify culturally tailored strategies to address Alzheimer's and other dementias. **E**

Consider these questions: Do staff and programming represent the communities served? If not, review hiring criteria and the unconscious bias of the hiring committee. Survey customers to determine if services are meeting needs or if gaps exist. Does programming represent customers' languages, foods, customs, and choices? **G H**

8 Examine your organization's protocols, policies, and procedures for conscious and unconscious bias. **H I**

RESOURCES

A Screening Diverse Populations
<https://www.actonalz.org/screening-diverse-populations>

B Administration for Community Living, Brain Health
acl.gov/brain-health

C Alzheimer's Association
alz.org

D The Balm in Gilead, Inc. – Memory Sundays
brainhealthcenterforafricanamericans.org/about-memory-Sunday/

E Participating in Alzheimer's Research: for yourself and future generations
order.nia.nih.gov/sites/default/files/2017-07/Participating_Alzh_Research_508_0.pdf

F Community Living Connections
memorylossinfowa.org

G Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Alzheimer's Disease and Healthy Aging Program
cdc.gov/aging/publications/features/Alz-Greater-Risk.html
cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain/issue-maps/early-detection.html

H Human Impact Partners Project
healthequityguide.org

I Foundational Practices for Health Equity – Learning and Action Tool
astho.org/Health-Equity/Documents/Foundational-Practices-for-Health-Equity/