



Healthy Aging Services

ANNUAL REPORT
2023-2024



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The San Luis Obispo County Public Health Department's Healthy Aging team provides vital support to help older adults, families, and caregivers maintain health, independence, and overall well-being.

Our comprehensive approach combines robust prevention strategies and strength and balance techniques with brain health education, including early warning signs of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, and ways to improve brain health.

Our Health Education Specialists engage older adults through workshops, classes, and community programs at senior centers, libraries, and local organizations, fostering connection, knowledge, and active living. Staff also provide personalized home safety assessments to reduce fall risks.

With services offered in both English and Spanish, we strive to reach underserved populations with essential resources. Working closely with community partners, we support a safer, more inclusive community where older adults, families, and caregivers thrive.



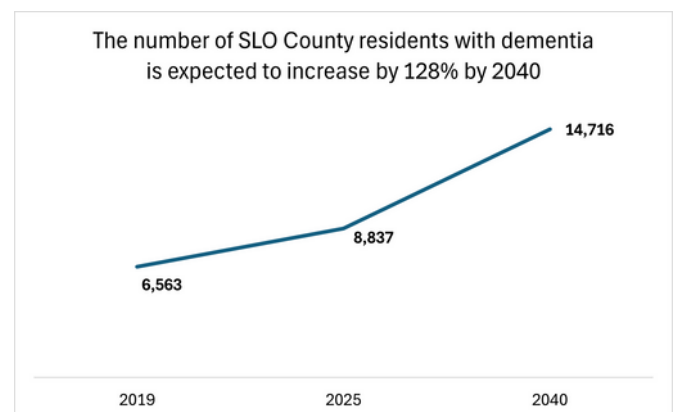
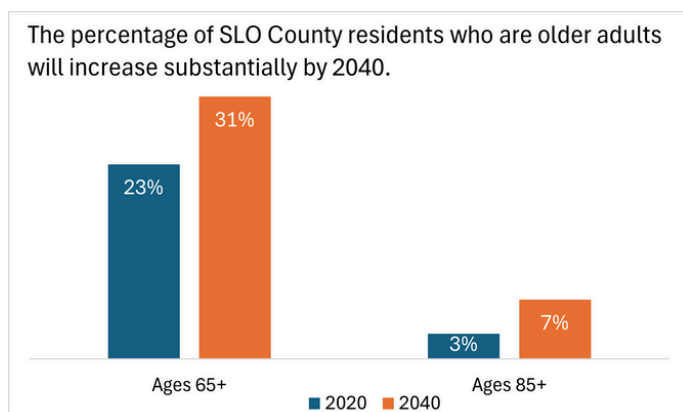
RATIONALE

In recent years, San Luis Obispo (SLO) County has experienced a sharp increase in the number of residents over the age of 65, and this trend is expected to continue.

- SLO County residents over the age of 65 are estimated to increase from 23% of the county's population in 2020 to **31% in 2040**
- Residents ages 85+ are projected to **increase by nearly 200%** and will comprise **7% of the county's population** by 2040
- Due to the increase in the number of seniors, the number of residents ages 65+ who are experiencing dementia is expected to **increase by 128%** from 2019 to 2040
- The Latino population is aging and have more risk factors; the number of Latino residents ages 65+ experiencing dementia is expected to **increase by 258%** from 2019 to 2040
- Low-income adults are at higher risk for dementias due to increased risk factors caused by social determinants of health.

A 2023 needs assessment was conducted by the Healthy Aging team. Input from residents, local data sources, key informants, and SLO County Adult Services Policy Council members showed that there are few local resources to educate the community about brain health while there is strong interest among residents to learn more.

Over 75% of surveyed residents wanted to learn more about brain health and dementia prevention. The community also expressed needs for dementia care resources, expanded caregiver support services, enhanced provider training, and additional services for people living with dementia.



Ross L, Beld M, and Yeh J. Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias, Facts and Figures in California: Current Status and Future Projections. University of CA San Francisco, Jan. 2021. [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CDCB/CDPH/Document Library/Alzheimers%27 Disease Program/151764 Alzheimers Disease Facts and Figures Reportv3 ADA.pdf](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CCDPHP/DCDIC/CDCB/CDPH/Document%20Library/Alzheimers%27%20Disease%20Program/151764%20Alzheimers%20Disease%20Facts%20and%20Figures%20Reportv3%20ADA.pdf)

State of California Department of Finance, P2B County Population Projections, accessed 3/14/23. <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/projections/>

GOALS

The goals of Healthy Aging Services are:

- To empower older adults and their families and caregivers with tools and knowledge to support their health, independence, safety, and overall well-being.
- To reduce falls among older adults, increasing quality of life and independence and reducing EMS and medical costs.
- To lessen the financial, health, and social impacts of dementias among the County's aging population by supporting early detection and intervention for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, reducing preventable dementias through brain health education, and providing caregiver resources.

The Healthy Aging team achieves these goals through classes, workshops, outreach, and individualized home assessments:

- Our Healthy Aging and Fall Prevention classes offer both single workshops and a 6-session series to teach essential skills for preventing falls and improving overall health. This comprehensive program offers practical techniques residents can apply daily to maintain their independence as they age and enhance their health.
- Brain Health workshops are offered throughout the county in English and Spanish, delivering three Alzheimer's Association evidence-based lessons on brain health, understanding dementia, and the 10 warning signs of dementia.
- Comprehensive home safety assessments for older adults allow for safer aging in place, with the identification of personalized modifications to residents' homes that can improve safety and reduce the chance of falls.
- We educate the broader community through social media, e-newsletters, appearances on local media, and Public Health's Healthy Voices online videos.



BY THE NUMBERS...

55%

Average newsletter
open rate

1041

Community members
served

500+

Latino community members
engaged in courses
and outreach

20

Home safety
assessments
conducted for older
adults

787

Workshop and course
participants

40%

Improvement in safety
behaviors for fall
prevention class
participants

100%

Healthy brain workshops
participants who said they
will use what they learned

600

Newsletter subscribers for
monthly newsletter

254

Community members
engaged via outreach

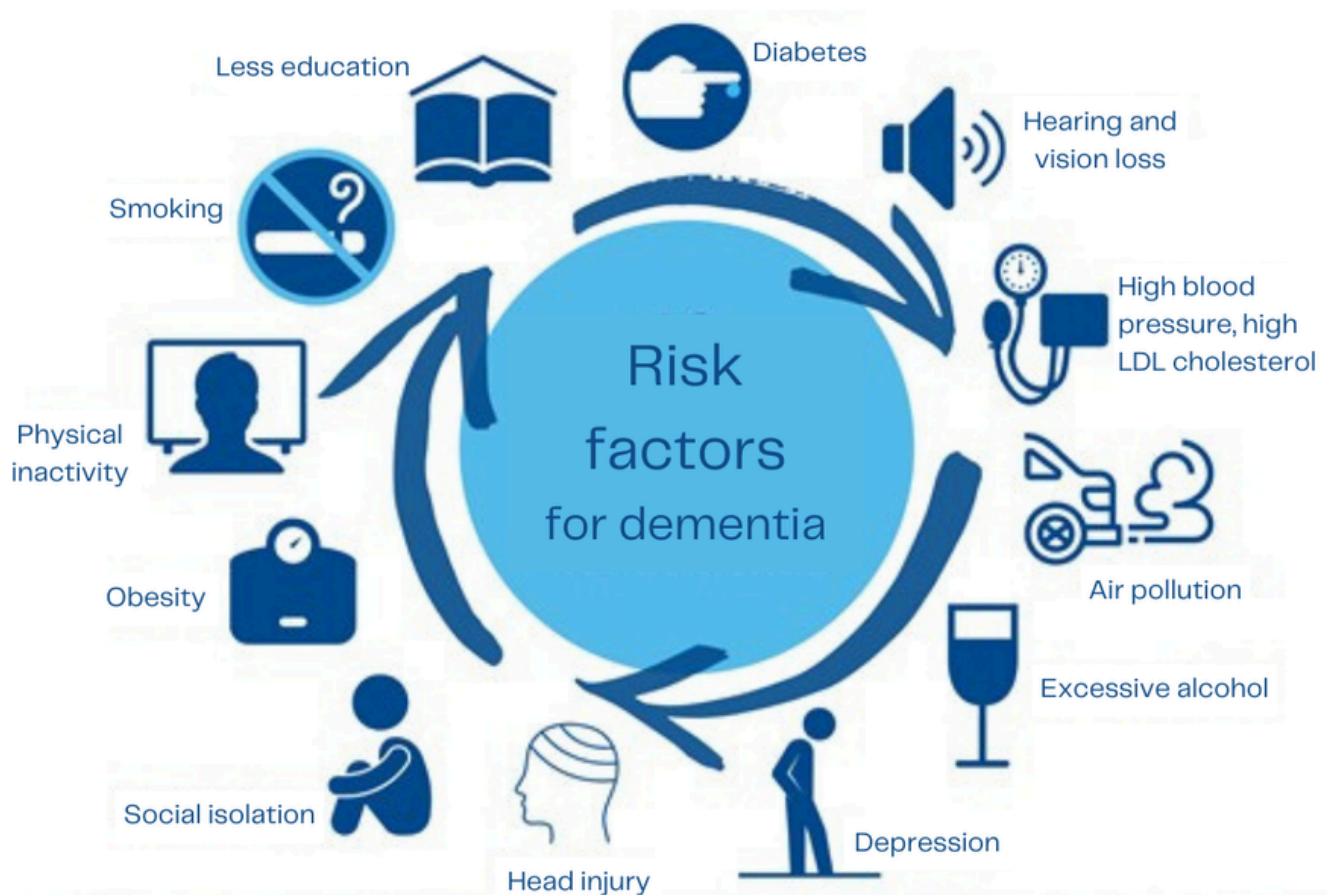
A CLOSER LOOK

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A HEALTHY BRAIN?

Dementia is caused by damage to brain cells that affect the cells' ability to communicate, which can affect thinking, behavior, and feelings. For example, Alzheimer's disease progressively destroys brain cells as it moves throughout the brain, affecting more functions as the disease progresses. Alzheimer's is the most common cause of dementia.

Many factors can impact health, including genes, family history, environment, and lifestyle. While we have limited control over factors such as our genes, family history, and the environment we live in, we can modify our lifestyle habits. Making improvements in some areas can positively affect overall health, even for individuals with a family history of conditions like dementia or heart disease.

Blood pressure, blood sugar, weight and cholesterol levels are all key parts of the story of your overall health. Growing research suggests that many factors that increase the risk of heart disease and stroke may also increase the risk of cognitive decline and dementia.*



*Excerpted from "Healthy Living for Your Brain and Body, an education program presented by the Alzheimer's Association®, Presenter's Guide," 2022.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A HEALTHY BRAIN?

For example:

- There is strong evidence of a connection between mid-life high blood pressure, or hypertension, and later-life dementia. This evidence also shows that controlling blood pressure can significantly reduce your risk for cognitive decline and possibly dementia.
- Keeping diabetes controlled is important. Studies have shown an increase in the risk of cognitive decline and dementia among individuals living with diabetes.
- Maintaining a healthy weight is important too. Researchers have found that midlife obesity can be associated with an increased risk of dementia.
- We know that healthy cholesterol levels benefit both the heart and brain. The brain is nourished by blood vessels, receiving up to 25% of the blood pumped with each heartbeat.

Incorporating healthy behaviors reduces your risk of health concerns that can lead to dementia and supports brain functioning. These behaviors include:

- Getting quality sleep
- Being tobacco-free
- Taking care of your mental health
- Engaging in physical activity
- Eating healthy foods
- Challenging your mind
- Staying socially engaged

According to the Alzheimer's Association, "Research is still evolving, but evidence is strong that people can reduce their risk of cognitive decline by making key lifestyle changes, including participating in regular physical activity, staying socially engaged, and maintaining good heart health."* Building these habits is vital at every stage of life to ensure both quality of life and maintaining independence.

*https://www.alz.org/help-support/brain_health, accessed 12/10/24

WHAT'S NEXT?

As San Luis Obispo County residents age, they are eager to learn more about how to reduce their risk of dementia. Increasing community education and outreach around modifiable risk factors will help to meet this demand, reducing healthcare costs and improving the quality of life for residents.

Funding from the California Department of Public Health - Healthy Brain Initiative grant ends in June 2025, and staff are working on a sustainability plan for continued community education and outreach on dementia and brain health.

Goals for 2025 include:

- Supporting community members across the lifespan to support their brain health
- Maintaining new levels of outreach to Latino community members, including classes in Spanish
- Further outreach to rural community members
- Continuing the Healthy Aging Newsletter and adding a Spanish edition
- Attending the Risk Reduction Learning Collaborative, which focuses on modifiable risk factors
- Continuing to closely coordinate with the SLO Master Plan on Aging being finalized by the County Department of Social Services and with the Adult Policy Council

"This class opened my eyes to the importance of preventive health measures. I'm more active now and feel safer when moving around my home or outdoors."

-Healthy Aging Class Participant

