

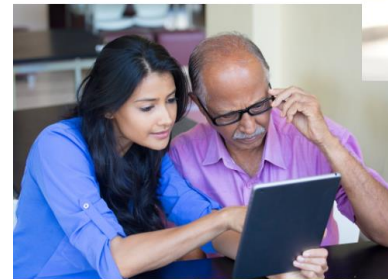
San Luis Obispo County
Healthy Brain Initiative
2023-2025 Action Plan

County of San Luis Obispo Health Agency
Public Health Department



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **San Luis Obispo County Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI) 2023-2025 Action Plan** is a strategic framework designed to address the growing need for brain health and dementia awareness within the county. With an aging population and rising dementia rates, this plan outlines specific actions to improve public knowledge, enhance support systems, and train healthcare professionals.

Purpose

The primary goal of the HBI Action Plan is to outline steps the County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department can take to educate priority populations about brain health, cognitive decline, and dementia. The plan also includes additional priorities to consider that would create a dementia-friendly community.

Key Community Needs

A 2023 needs assessment identified critical areas of concern:

- **Increased education** on brain health, dementia risk factors, signs of dementia, and local resources
- **Increased resources** including patient services and caregiver services
- **Greater awareness and knowledge among healthcare providers** including skills for working with patients with dementia and caregiver resources.

Priority Populations

These are priority populations for this plan due to the relevance of HBI activities and potential disproportionate impacts:

- **Older adults:** Need brain health education and access to dementia care
- **Middle-aged adults:** Benefit from early brain health education and are often caregivers
- **Low-income older and middle-aged adults:** Increased risk due to limited access to healthcare and resources
- **Hispanic/Latinx older and middle-aged adults:** Cultural and language barriers to dementia care and information.

HBI Priorities

1. **Increase community partnerships** to increase access to services and strengthen education
2. **Increase public knowledge** about brain health, dementia risk factors, and early detection and diagnosis
3. **Enhance caregiver support and education** for family caregivers
4. **Increase knowledge and skills** of current and future public health workforce
5. **Train healthcare professionals** about the needs of patients with dementia and their caregivers.

Looking Forward

The HBI Action Plan will guide Public Health-related activities to educate multiple populations about dementia and increase community partnerships. Additional work will be needed by other partners and policy makers to bring the community to a point where it can adequately support residents living with cognitive decline and dementia.

PURPOSE

This Healthy Brain Initiative 2023-2025 Action Plan is the first plan to focus on the brain health and dementia-related needs of San Luis Obispo County residents. The action portion of the plan focuses on the steps that the Public Health Department and community partners can take over the three years of the plan to educate priority populations and the professionals who work with them. The final section of the plan discusses additional areas for consideration to move the county toward becoming a dementia-friendly community.

The plan has been developed in collaboration with three key groups:

- 1) The SLO County Adult Services Policy Council, which includes representatives from over twenty senior-serving organizations who meet monthly to coordinate on topics related to seniors.
- 2) The Alzheimer's Association of the Central Coast, which will be implementing portions of the plan
- 3) Department of Social Services staff responsible for current development of the Master Plan on Aging. This broader plan will address infrastructure, services coordination, and community livability for people experiencing cognitive decline and their caregivers. Relevant data gathered during the Master Plan on Aging planning process will be incorporated into an updated version of this HBI Action Plan.

HOW THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

From September 2023 to January 2024, Public Health Department staff and an external evaluator conducted a Healthy Brain Initiative Needs Assessment to learn more about the needs of community members with higher dementia risk factors and caregivers and loved ones living with dementia. The needs assessment process included:

- Nearly 100 surveys collected, with a focus on low-income, primarily Hispanic/Latinx, community members in north, central and south county at Mexican Consulate event and Food Bank distributions to assess interest in education and current needs
- Survey of Public Health's Healthy Aging Newsletter readers, 24 responses
- Two focus groups, one with the Adult Services Policy Council (representatives from 23 senior-serving organizations present) and one with Promotores Collaborative members, to identify existing resources, needs, and barriers
- Document review of related local data, surveys, and needs assessments.

Learning and insights from this data informed the development of this HBI Action Plan.

COMMUNITY SERVED

San Luis Obispo County is located along the Pacific Coast, approximately 200 miles north of Los Angeles and 235 miles south of San Francisco. It is one of California's 58 counties and is considered part of the Central Coast region of California.

San Luis Obispo County is home to approximately 280,000 people, spread across seven cities and 14 community service districts. The majority of residents live along the coast or along the corridor of Highway 101. The eastern region of the county is sparsely populated with vast areas of agricultural and undeveloped government lands between small, unincorporated towns. Key industries in the county include tourism, education, energy, agriculture and government.

The majority of residents in SLO County identify as White, followed by Hispanic or Latino. The County is also home to an older population, with a greater share of those aged 65 years and older than the state as a whole, and a smaller percentage of those 18 years and younger. The county population includes a greater share of high school graduates than the state overall.

WHY THIS, WHY NOW

Brain Health is Critically Important

As lifespans increase, maintaining brain health is critical. Alzheimer's disease, the sixth leading cause of death in the U.S. and the fourth in San Luis Obispo County, along with other dementias, profoundly impacts individuals, families, caregivers, and the community. Investing in brain health education, early detection, and supportive services benefits individuals while fostering a healthier population, reduced healthcare costs, and a more productive workforce. Supporting caregivers and establishing dementia-friendly communities cultivates an inclusive and compassionate community for all.

SLO County is Aging

- 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
- Latino population is aging and have more risk factors; number of **Latino residents ages 65+ experiencing dementia** is expected to **increase by 258%** from 2019 to 2040
- **Low-income adults at higher risk for dementias** due to increased risk factors caused by social determinants of health.

Community Needs

A needs assessment identified community needs related to brain health, dementia education, and dementia care. The most urgent needs are:

Increased education

- More education on several topics, including healthy brain strategies, dementia risk factors, signs of dementia, and accessing local resources

Increased resources

- Patient services, including providers, care facilities, respite care
- Caregiver services, including support groups, education, and respite care

Greater awareness and knowledge among healthcare providers

- Skills for working with patients with dementia
- Caregiver support resources.



PRIORITY POPULATIONS

The following groups are the focus of the Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI) Action Plan due to their higher risk of cognitive decline and potential challenges in accessing dementia care and support services.

Older Adults (ages 65+)

- At higher risk of cognitive decline
- Could benefit from education on brain health and risk factors and dementia
- May need access to trained medical providers and connections to services
- Some are also caregivers who need support for themselves and their loved ones.

Middle-Aged Adults (ages 45-64)

- At future risk of cognitive decline and could benefit from education and activities around brain health
- Some are caregivers who need support and connections to services for their loved ones.

Low-Income Older and Middle-Aged Adults

- Higher risk due to less access to healthcare, housing, and healthy food and reduced economic stability
- Some are caregivers who need support and connections to services for their loved ones.

Middle-Class Older Adults

- The high cost of dementia care creates barriers to accessing necessary services
- Family caregivers may struggle to afford care but are less familiar with how to access resources and may be more reluctant to seek help.

Hispanic/Latinx Older and Middle-Aged Adults

- May experience language barriers to accessing information and services
- May have cultural norms that limit family communication about dementia
- May experience financial challenges, increasing their risk factors for cognitive decline.

HEALTHY BRAIN INITIATIVE PRIORITIES

1. Increase community partnerships

The number of community members with dementia is expected to rapidly increase. Building from the coordination already in place through the Adult Services Policy Council, increased community partnerships can identify ways to increase access to services for those with dementia and their family caregivers while strengthening the county's network of care and education.

2. Increase public knowledge about brain health, risk factors for dementia, and benefits of early detection and diagnosis

When people do not know about brain health, they cannot change behavior. Community education can result in reduced rates of dementia, increased early diagnosis, and more residents being adequately treated for dementia.

3. Enhance caregiver support and education

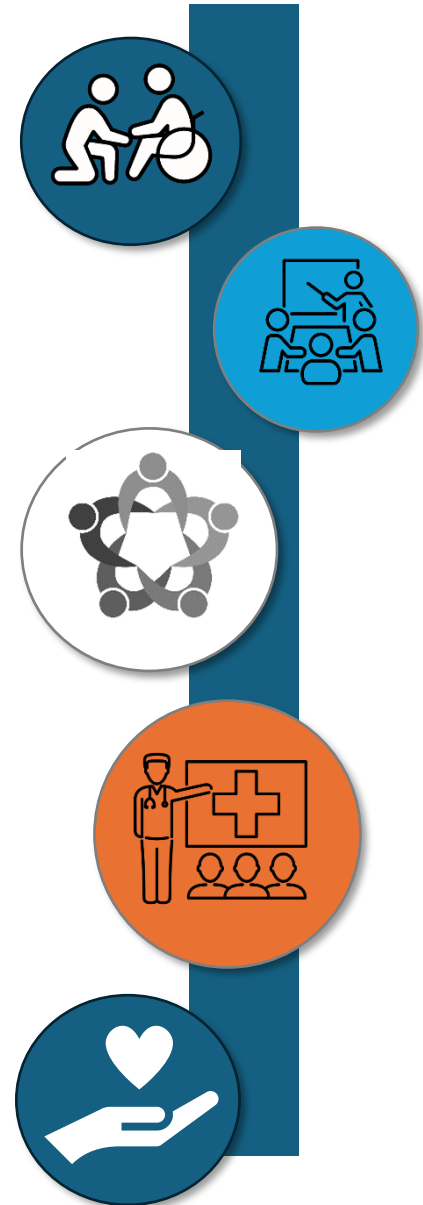
Family caregivers are overwhelmed with their responsibilities and lack support and information. When we increase caregiver support, we directly improve their mental and physical wellbeing and the wellbeing of their loved one with dementia.

4. Increase knowledge and skills of current and future public health workforce

While there are many gaps in services, there are also many services that do exist but residents often lack this knowledge. Better informed professionals are needed to connect residents to resources, particularly for Hispanic/Latinx and low-income residents who may not have the time or skills to research available services.

5. Train healthcare professionals

In this rural county, primary care providers provide most medical care for dementia patients. When these providers have specific information about the needs of patients with dementia, patients in need of additional brain health support, and caregivers, they can provide better care and increase connections to resources.



HBI PRIORITIES DETAIL

Goal 1: Increase community partnerships

Strategies:

- 1.1. Convene and leverage diverse and inclusive multi-sector organizations to strengthen supportive, equitable policies within communities, workplaces, and healthcare settings.
- 1.2. Utilize community partnerships to improve equitable access to community-based chronic disease prevention, dementia support, and healthy aging programs.
- 1.3. Partner across the community to promote equitable access to services, supports, and quality care for people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Potential Partners:

- Adult Services Policy Council
- SLO County Department of Social Services
- Alzheimer's Association of the Central Coast

Activities/Performance Measures:

- Discussions with community partners
 - Number and type of resulting improvements

Goal 2: Increase public knowledge about brain health, risk factors for dementia, and benefits of early detection and diagnosis

Strategies:

- 2.1. Engage diverse audiences including low-income and Hispanic/Latinx adults to develop culturally responsive messaging about brain health, cognitive decline, healthy aging, and caregiving.

- 2.2. Disseminate culturally relevant messaging to encourage conversations about brain health, cognitive decline, healthy aging, and caregiving.
- 2.3. Embed cognitive decline risk factors into evidence-informed health promotion and chronic disease prevention awareness and education campaigns.
- 2.4. Implement media campaigns aimed at changing community norms regarding brain health and dementia, fostering a broader understanding and awareness.
- 2.5. Emphasize mental health resources and initiatives to address loneliness among older adults as integral components of supporting brain health and preventing ADRDs.

Potential Partners:

- Meals that Connect
- Promotores Collaborative of SLO County
- Adult Services Policy Council
- Alzheimer's Association of the Central Coast

Activities/Performance Measures:

- Conduct community education workshops on brain health and signs of dementia, in English and Spanish
 - Number of workshops, number of attendees, pre/post knowledge tests
- Implement media campaigns to promote brain health and reduce stigma, in English and Spanish
 - Number of residents reached
- Disseminate educational materials to seniors on brain health and signs of dementia

- Number of materials provided, number of website views, number of e-newsletters opened
- Update Public Health's Fall Prevention class to include healthy brain and signs of dementia content
 - Curriculum, number of classes provided

Goal 3: Enhance caregiver support and education

Strategies:

- 3.1. Collaborate with the Alzheimer's Association to develop caregiver support programs and educational resources.
- 3.2. Focus on providing tailored assistance and guidance to caregivers within these communities, recognizing their unique needs and challenges.

Potential Partners:

- Alzheimer's Association of the Central Coast

Activities/Performance Measures:

- Disseminate education materials to caregivers through community partners
 - Number of education materials provided for dissemination
- Create Dementia Resource Guide for caregiver navigation
 - Online Guide available

Goal 4: Increase knowledge and skills of current and future workforce

Strategies:

- 4.1. Conduct training sessions for Promotores, Health Agency staff, and partners through the ASPC collaborative to enhance their capabilities in providing preventative

services and disseminating resources related to brain health, caregiver support, and ADRD awareness.

- 4.2. Ensure increased accessibility to resources for both Promotores and Health Agency staff to effectively address the identified needs within the community.

Potential Partners:

- Promotores Collaborative of SLO County
- Alzheimer's Association of the Central Coast

Activities/Performance Measures:

- Train public health professionals, including community health workers, about brain health and dementia
 - Number and type of staff trained, training surveys

Goal 5: Train healthcare professionals

Strategies:

- 5.1. Contract with the Alzheimer's Association to implement specialized training for healthcare professionals.
- 5.2. Enhance professionals' capacity in addressing early diagnosis of ADRDs, supporting caregivers, and promoting brain health habits, with a specific emphasis on the needs of older adults.

Potential Partners:

- Alzheimer's Association of the Central Coast
- Central Coast Medical Association
- Local healthcare professionals

Activities/Performance Measures:

- Number of trainings, number of healthcare professionals trained, training surveys.

LOOKING FORWARD...

The many Public Health-related activities described in this Action Plan will serve to educate multiple populations about dementia, reducing stigma while increasing residents' understanding of brain health and the quality of dementia care and caregiver support. However, more broad activities are also needed to bring the community to a point where it can adequately support residents living with cognitive decline and dementia.

Additional topics to address:

- Dementia-Friendly Community
- Healthcare Navigation
- Emergency Preparedness Plans.

Additional community needs include:

- More adult day centers, particularly in South County
- More skilled nursing facility beds
- Affordable assisted living options
- More supports for seniors: resource lists, transportation, social activities, help with errands, legal and financial services
- Activities for seniors in languages other than English
- Anticipatory grief support groups in languages other than English
- More healthcare professionals with specialized dementia knowledge
- Policy changes to increase access to affordable adult day care, in-home care, respite care, memory care, and care management
- More work on coordination and no-wrong-door approaches.

Additional Public Health Department goals:

- Expanding the HBI/fall prevention program within the Hispanic/Latinx community
- Updating this action plan once the SLO Master Plan on Aging is finalized.



ALIGNMENT

The impetus for the Action Plan was funding from a *Healthy Brain Initiative State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia* grant from the California Department of Public Health. While Action Plan activities are inherently aligned with state goals due to this grant funding, they are also aligned with local and national public health goals related to brain health and dementia. (Note that the state HBI goals are also aligned with the national HBI goals.)

HBI Activities Aligned with the SLO County Community Health Improvement Plan

On a local level, the 2024-2029 SLO County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is a community-generated road map for how the Public Health Department and community partners will work together to improve community well-being and reduce preventable health hazards. Like the Action Plan, the CHIP designates priority populations; those who are also represented in the Action Plan include:

- Older Adults
- Hispanic and Latino populations
- People who speak languages other than English
- Low-Income Individuals.

The CHIP focuses on three overarching priorities, which are also addressed in the Action Plan:

- Healthy Neighborhoods
- Access to Care
- Mental Health & Substance Use.

Healthy Neighborhoods: The CHIP includes strategies to improve walkability of communities, enhance food access, and build multigenerational, multicultural, and multilingual centers. These strategies would improve brain health for Action Plan priority populations and create a more dementia-friendly community.

Access to Care: The CHIP includes strategies to increase the healthcare provider workforce and expand services to hard-to-reach populations. These strategies would benefit older adults with cognitive decline and dementia, as well as their caregivers, and align with Action Plan activities to train healthcare professionals to work with patients experiencing dementia.



Mental Health & Substance Use: The CHIP includes strategies to reduce older adult suicide deaths, including screening and programming to reduce isolation, and to conduct additional data analysis on sub-populations, including by age. Isolation and depression are dementia risk factors as well as common outcomes of experiencing cognitive decline or caregiving burden. Reducing isolation and treating depression would improve brain health and caregiver support.

HBI Activities Aligned with the national Healthy Brain Initiative: State and Local Road Map for Public Health

San Luis Obispo County HBI activities also align with national HBI domains. The following table lists HBI grant-funded activities as they align with the four domains that comprise the HBI framework outlined in the *Healthy Brain Initiative: State and Local Road Map for Public Health, 2023-2027* report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Alzheimer’s Association.

HBI Domain	SLO County Public Health HBI Activity			
Measure, Evaluate and Utilize Data	Conduct a Community Needs Assessment.			
	Develop an action plan for HBI project implementation and evaluation and initiate project implementation activities. Update HBI Action Plan as needed throughout the project.			
	Coordinate with Master Plan on Aging planning process to include HBI in Master Plan and include Master Plan findings in HBI Action Plan.			
Strengthen Partnerships and Policies	Meet with the HBI Advisory Committee, comprised of public and private partners, subject matter experts, and community stakeholders, at least four times yearly in ongoing planning efforts to establish and maintain services and policies that promote supportive communities and workplaces for people with dementia and their caregivers.			
Engage and Educate the Public		Primary: Risk Reduction	Secondary: Early Detection and Diagnosis	Tertiary: Safety and Quality of Care
	Deliver at least 14 community education workshops to increase knowledge of brain health and Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.			

Engage and Educate the Public	Create a widespread multilingual awareness media campaign to promote brain health, reduce stigma associated with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and promote resources in SLO County.			
	Reach a minimum of 1500 older adults with a focus on marginalized communities and provide education on healthy brain habits and the early signs of Alzheimer's and related dementia.			
Build a Diverse and Skilled Workforce		Primary: Risk Reduction	Secondary: Early Detection and Diagnosis	Tertiary: Safety and Quality of Care
	Provide 2-3 training series for Health Agency staff, including public health and behavioral health professionals and Promotores on brain health and cognitive decline risk factors to incorporate into existing health communications.			
	Provide dementia care information, local resource referrals, care consultations and education to 1300 families over two years in San Luis Obispo County.			
	Conduct at least 6 training sessions with relevant medical providers in San Luis Obispo and surrounding areas. Curriculum for training sessions will be adapted from Alzheimer's Association caregiver training programs, including information on communication techniques, behavioral management, and maintaining the dignity of the person with dementia.			