

# Research Brief

CDC HEALTHY BRAIN RESEARCH NETWORK

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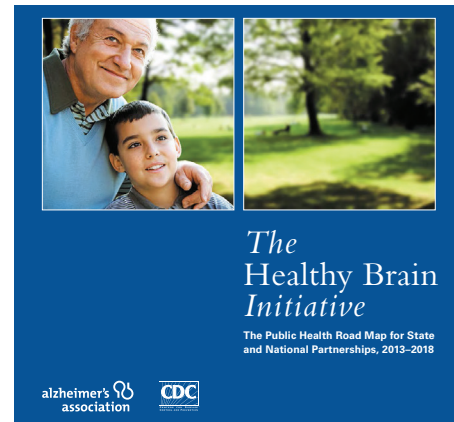
## What Do People Know and Think about Cognitive Health and Impairment?

Our goal in answering this question is to understand people's perceptions about factors that may help maintain cognitive function or reduce risk of impairment.

In 2013, the Alzheimer's Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released *The Healthy Brain Initiative: The Public Health Road Map for State and National Partnerships, 2013-2018*. The Road Map outlines 35 specific actions within four public health domains designed to help state and local agencies and their partners employ effective public health practices relating to cognitive health and impairment. Our project helps inform the actions of the Road Map to better understand perceptions about cognition.

### What We Did

Our project included two steps: The first was to ask small groups of individuals what they thought about cognitive health and impairment. The second was to review the literature. We reviewed more than 1,000 research abstracts and found 34 studies that addressed our question.



### What We Found

- Eight countries had conducted studies
- The number of participants in the studies ranged from as few as 9 (personal interviews) to as many as 4,500 (national surveys)
- Both men and women as well as diverse racial/ethnic groups were included in studies
- Most studies looked at dementia or Alzheimer's Disease (AD)
- The top 2 risk factors people mentioned in these studies were:
  - Genetics/heredity (14 studies)
  - Older age (8)
- The top 3 protective factors people mentioned were:
  - Intellectual stimulation/mental activity (13)
  - Physical activity (12)
  - Healthy diet (10)

### Comments from Study Participants:

*"First in staying sharp is exercising, the second is diet, and the third is being active in society."*

*"If you have people in your family who have Alzheimer's or have a problem, I think, you ought to get concerned yourself."*



## Take Home Message

Review of the literature revealed **the general public, regardless of nationality, race/ethnicity, or gender, identified well-established risk factors for cognitive impairment, such as genetics, and factors that may reduce risk of AD and other dementias, such as physical or social activities and healthy diet.**

*"If you stay indoors and don't get out, then your mind will slow down. When you have time, even if you just chat with your friends, you will be more open, and able to keep your mind sharp."*

-Small Group Participant

## What's Next?

**Based on our review of the literature, we found that investigators did not identify a consistent set of risk or protective factors across studies.** As a result, future studies need to include a more uniform set of factors across studies to better assess and track changes in people's perceptions over time and across locations and cultures.

Given all of our work, understanding the public's perceptions about cognitive health and impairment **will help identify and promote culturally appropriate strategies to increase public awareness and develop effective communications** related to cognitive health, impairment, AD, and other dementias.



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