

National Indian Health Board



TALKING POINTS for Brain Health Champions

For Sharing with Elders

Why is it important to share with Elders about Brain Health?

- ➤ Elders are respected members of the community, who hold valuable stories, traditional knowledge, and cultural values.
- ➤ Elders often express deep concern about the health and wellbeing of the Tribe. Sharing about brain health is one way to support elders, families, and your community.
- ➤ The Healthy Brain Initiative Road Map for Indian Country is a resource for the Tribe or community to respond to brain health challenges. It can also help you learn more about how to engage others to take action for the community's brain health.
- ➤ Invite elders to speak and participate in community meetings or talking circles on brain health.

TALKING POINT 3

Starting conversations about brain health can feel awkward. Try explaining your motivation for wanting to share strategies for brain health. To start, consider why brain health is important to you. What has been your experience with your own or a loved one's brain health?

TALKING POINT 4

Some people with health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, commercial tobacco use, or mid-life obesity may be at risk for cognitive decline.

However, these health conditions can be treated or prevented.

 See page 3 for healthy behaviors that may protect against cognitive decline.

TALKING POINT 1

Brain health is important to understand as we grow older. Caring for our mental and brain health will help us continue to serve as guides and teachers for the next generations.

TALKING POINT 2

Changes in brain health can happen slowly over

time. What experiences have you had or changes have you noticed in your own brain health? Brain health refers to your thinking, understanding, and memory abilities. It also can refer to the things you to do keep your brain healthy and active, like staying physically active and following a healthy diet.

- Explain early warning signs, what is typical aging and what may be cause for concern, like increased difficulty in remembering or thinking (signs of cognitive decline).
 - Do not attempt to diagnose but encourage elders to talk with their healthcare provider about any symptoms.
 - Feel free to use the warning signs listed on page 3.

TALKING POINT 5

Ask the best way to talk about brain health with other elders and how brain health is viewed. Are there any words or phrases to use or avoid when talking about memory?

TALKING POINT 6

People can continue to live a healthy and balanced life with cognitive decline. There are many tools, like the Road Map for Indian Country, that can help elders and communities find the best ways to support brain health. What are the ways that your Tribe and community can address brain health? How can people with cognitive impairment best be supported in their communities?

TALKING POINTS for Brain Health Champions

For Sharing with Families and Caregivers

Why is it important to talk to Families and Caregivers about Brain Health?

- ➤ Taking care of elders is an important responsibility. By supporting and caring for their health and wellbeing, you respect their wisdom and insights.
- ➤ Your elders are important members of your family and community. Changes in brain health, including cognitive decline, can happen slowly over time. Knowing the signs of cognitive decline and dementia can help you notice if there may be concerns for your elder's brain health.
- ➤ Acknowledge that you and some elders may not feel comfortable discussing the subject. Follow your own customs in asking for help if needed. Having these conversations shows that you value elder health and the health of your community.
- ➤ You can support brain health by encouraging family members and caregivers to share their challenges with healthcare providers and decision-makers such as Tribal leaders and administrators. These groups may not be aware of the needs and gaps in services for those affected by declining brain health.

TALKING POINT 1

Brain health is extremely important as we age, not only for our minds but our bodies and spirits. Changes in brain health can happen slowly over time.

What changes have you noticed in your elder's brain health?

TALKING POINT 2

Developing Alzheimer's, dementia, or memory loss is not a "normal" part of aging. Know the 10 warning signs of Alzheimer's and related dementias. See the warning signs on page 3. Signs of memory loss may mean you and your elder should talk to a healthcare professional.

TALKING POINT 3

Some people with health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, commercial tobacco use, or mid-life obesity may be at risk for cognitive decline. However, these health conditions can be treated or prevented. See back of this page for healthy behaviors that may protect against difficulties remembering, thinking, or processing.

TALKING POINT 4

Challenges to brain health are expected to increase significantly in the next few decades. This will increase the number of caregivers and the need for healthcare and services for elders.



Warning Signs of Alzheimer's and Related Dementias

HEALTHY BEHAVIORS THAT MAY PROTECT AGAINST COGNITIVE DECLINE

- > Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise the body, mind and spirit
- Stay socially engaged
- Take care of your heart and manage blood sugar levels
- Limit tobacco to ceremonial use
- Try to get enough sleep and maintain good sleep hygiene

- 1 Memory loss that disrupts daily life: Forgetting events, repeating yourself or relying on more aids to help you remember (like sticky notes or reminders).
- 2 Challenges in planning or solving problems: Having trouble paying bills or cooking recipes you have used for years.
- 3 Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work, or at leisure: Having problems with cooking, driving places, using a cell phone, or shopping.
 - 4 Confusion with time or place: Having trouble understanding an event that is happening later, or losing track of dates.
 - Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relations:
 Having more difficulty with balance or judging distance, tripping over things at home, or spilling or dropping things more often.

- 6 New problems with words in speaking or writing: Having trouble following or joining a conversation or struggling to find a word you are looking for (saying "that thing on your wrist that tells time" instead of "watch").
- 7 Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps: Placing car keys in the washer or dryer or not being able to retrace steps to find something.
- 8 Decreased or poor judgment: Being a victim of a scam, not managing money well, paying less attention to hygiene, or having trouble taking care of a pet.
- 9 Withdrawal from work or social activities: Not wanting to go to church or other activities as you usually do, not being able to follow football games or keep up with what's happening.
- Ochanges in mood and personality: Getting easily upset in common situations or being fearful or suspicious.

Talk to your
healthcare provider if you
or your loved one experiences
one or more of these
warning signs.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

of your:

Healthcare Provider(s):

- ➤ What changes should I expect if my elder has Alzheimer's or another dementia?
- ➤ What tests will be performed before they are diagnosed?
- ➤ What resources are available for caregiving and support?
 - ▶ Where can I learn more about brain health?
 - ➤ What are some things my elder and I can do to support their brain health?

Tribal Leader(s):

- ➤ What programs and policies are you enacting to support brain health?
- ➤ How do these programs complement other health and wellness programs?
 - What are concrete actions the community can take to support brain health?

WHAT IS Brain Health?

Definitions



Brain health refers to your thinking, understanding, and memory abilities. It also can refer to the things you to do keep your brain healthy and active, like staying physically active and following a healthy diet.

What is Cognitive Decline?

Cognitive Decline refers to a person's increased confusion or memory loss. It is not a diagnosis but a description of what someone is experiencing.

What is Dementia? Alzheimer's Disease?

Dementia is a general term for the impaired ability to remember, think, or make decisions that interferes with doing everyday activities.

Alzheimer's disease is a form of dementia. It can progress from mild memory loss to being unable to carry a conversation, live independently, or be aware of your environment.

What is Mild Cognitive Impairment?

Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is a diagnosis and refers to cognitive changes that are serious enough to be noticed by the person affected, family members, and friends, but do not affect the individual's ability to carry out everyday activities.

MCI may or may not lead

MCI may or may not lead to dementia.



NON-TYPICAL AGING

Cognitive impairment can take many forms.

You may frequently not be able to recall a family member's name, find something you've put down, or remember details of your life. These changes are caused by damage to your brain cells. You may also experience issues with making decisions, planning, or motor function.

Cognitive impairment, including Alzheimer's and related dementia, may not affect everyone as they age.

VS.

TYPICAL AGING

As you or a loved one age you may notice some changes in your memory, thoughts, or reasoning. You may forget things once in a while, or take some time to remember a detail.

A key difference between typical aging and dementia is memory or thinking problems that disrupt your daily life and ability to complete daily activities, such as preparing meals or paying bills.



National Indian Health Board

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Mission

Established by the Tribes to advocate as the united voice of federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes, NIHB seeks to reinforce Tribal sovereignty, strengthen Tribal health systems, secure resources, and build capacity to achieve the highest level of health and well-being for our People.

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