

Alzheimer’s Association’s Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI) Road Map Strategists: Systems Change Agents Building Capacity to Address Brain Health in Local Health Departments (LHDs)

The Healthy Brain Resource Center Stories From the Field are a series of stories that highlights the achievements of award recipients from the National Healthy Brain Initiative and the BOLD Infrastructure for Alzheimer’s Act. Healthy Brain Road Map domains that are relevant to this story are denoted by the icons in the top right of this document.

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVE

With the number of Americans living with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias (ADRD) projected to nearly double by 2050, LHDs on the frontlines can play a major role in accelerating progress against ADRD and in addressing brain health. There are 3,000 LHDs across the U.S., and few have implemented the HBI Road Map. One of the barriers to implementing the HBI Road Map mentioned by LHDs includes capacity limitation.¹ In 2021, the Alzheimer’s Association launched the HBI Road Map Strategist Program to increase the capacity of LHDs to address brain health and dementia in their communities. Road Map Strategists are public health officials serving as systems change agents in their communities to advance population health approaches to dementia. Strategists work part-time with support from and in coordination with a variety of public health partners, including health systems.



APPROACH

PROCESS

1 Identified partners to design, implement, and evaluate the program.

2 Developed and implemented a yearly application process and selected LHDs based on criteria including a focus on addressing disparities in the local community.

3 Provided financial and programmatic support to selected Strategists to conduct a needs assessment, build knowledge and awareness, and lead implementation and evaluation of public health action on dementia.

4 Facilitated monthly, virtual meetings with current Strategists as well as alumni from the previous cohort to share expert presentations on relevant topics and promote peer exchange.

5 Evaluated the program to measure the change in knowledge, behavior, and attitudes of Strategists and gathered information about implementation efforts, key takeaways, and outcomes achieved.

6 Used findings from monitoring and evaluation to make continuous improvements to the program, such as requiring Strategists to identify a specific focus area during the next cohort’s application process to promote meaningful impact.

7 Conducted ongoing promotion and dissemination of program success through press releases, conference presentations, and webinars.



PARTNERS

Emory Centers for Public Health Training and Technical Assistance

National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)

PROGRESS

2

One-year cohorts completed

16

Strategists (one from each LHD) selected and trained

100%

LHDs developed new or enhanced partnerships for brain health

100%

LHDs integrated brain health into organization priorities

>50%

LHDs in the first cohort maintained brain health staff after their cohort

3

LHDs secured state or federal funding for their work during and after their cohort

¹Alzheimer’s Association and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Healthy Brain Initiative: State and Local Road Map for Public Health, 2023–2027. Chicago, IL: Alzheimer’s Association. https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/Healthy_Brain_Initiative_Road_Map_2023_2027.pdf

LESSONS LEARNED



Strong partnerships contributed to this initiative's success. At the national level, NACCHO brought expertise and knowledge of city and county health departments. At the local level, HBI Road Map Strategists found success in partnering with other programs within their health department, externally with community-based organizations and other government agencies, as well as with officials working at the state level.

"After conducting a needs assessment and seeing all of the systems gaps for people with dementia and caregivers, it's a common sentiment to want to tackle them all. As with any public health project, building strategic partnerships and prioritizing key actions are necessary in order to make meaningful and lasting change in any community. Our work with the HBI Road Map Strategists has reinforced this lesson."

– Associate Director for the HBI Road Map Strategist Program, Alzheimer's Association

"We thought NACCHO was the perfect partner because their membership base is city and county health officials. They really know this population well and we were excited to be able to utilize their expertise to engage these local leaders."

– Associate Director for the HBI Road Map Strategist Program, Alzheimer's Association



Providing support and collaborating with HBI Road Map Strategists to prioritize community needs through the program was essential. LHDs face a

vast number of community and health systems gaps when it comes to brain health and dementia, and systems change takes time. Guiding Strategists to focus on a specific area and supporting them as experts in their own community's needs, was key in ensuring that meaningful change could be made during the one-year initiative.

"Sometimes the most impactful interventions are those that tap into existing strengths of health departments. It's about getting LHDs to think differently about what they already do for other chronic conditions, health behaviors, and social determinants of health, and figuring out how to integrate brain health rather than creating something new. This can be a powerful approach with lasting results."

– Associate Director for the HBI Road Map Strategist Program, Alzheimer's Association



Encouraging the use of existing resources, strengths, and programs, rather than solely creating new ones, has allowed Strategists to do more with their funding. Sometimes building a new program has been effective for HBI Road Map Strategists. In other cases, existing efforts could be tailored or modified to yield a more impactful result. For example, several Strategists were able to participate and leverage existing aging coalitions, combine efforts with existing chronic disease programming, collaborate with their epidemiology teams to increase the availability and use of dementia-related data, and integrate brain health information into their regular communications with local provider networks.

Opportunities exist for LHDs to take action—the HBI Road Map Strategist Program is an important catalyst, but any health department can begin making strides now. Reach out to your local Alzheimer's Association chapter if you have questions about getting started.

RESOURCES



[Alzheimer's Association - Resources for Public Health Professionals](#)

[NACCHO and the Alzheimer's Association Collaborating to Address Dementia in Communities](#)

[Healthy Brain Initiative \(HBI\) Road Map](#)

[HBI Road Map Implementation Guide](#)

[Alzheimer's Association Announces HBI Road Map Strategist Cohort](#)

[Learning and Networking Opportunity: Local Health Departments and Brain Health Action](#)

[Integrating Brain Health into Health Improvement Planning: The Healthy Brain Initiative and MAPP 2.0](#)

[A Public Health Approach to Dementia](#)

[Alzheimer's Association Public Health E-News](#)



For more information, email publichealth@alz.org

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