In the United States, the growth in the number of older adults is unprecedented. In 2016, 49 million US adults (15% of the population) were 65 or older. By 2060, that number is expected to climb to about 98 million, or nearly 25% of US residents.

Age brings a higher risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, arthritis, and cancer, which are the nation’s leading drivers of illness, disability, deaths, and health care costs. Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias are most common in adults 60 and older, and the risk increases with age. Health care and long-term care costs associated with Alzheimer’s and other dementias are an estimated $277 billion, making them some of the costliest conditions to society.

CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion funds partners to improve the health of older adults by:

- Helping those with dementia remain active, independent, and involved in their community as long as possible.
- Providing resources to help caregivers stay healthy and deliver quality care.
- Increasing the use of clinical preventive services like blood pressure checks, cancer screenings, and blood sugar testing.
- Providing CDC-recognized lifestyle change programs to Medicare beneficiaries through the National Diabetes Prevention Program (National DPP) to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.
- Promoting physical activity programs to reduce arthritis pain and prevent falls.

Helping Older Adults With Dementia

Alzheimer’s disease, a type of dementia, is an irreversible, progressive brain disease that affects an estimated 5.8 million Americans. It is the sixth leading cause of death among all adults and the fifth leading cause...
for those aged 65 or older. Alzheimer's disease slowly destroys brain function, leading to cognitive decline (such as memory loss, language difficulty, or poor executive function), behavioral and psychiatric disorders (such as depression, delusions, or agitation), and functional decline (such as less ability to engage in activities of daily living and self-care).

Twice as many Americans fear the loss of mental capabilities as the loss of physical ability. People with cognitive impairment find it difficult to maintain their health or manage other chronic conditions. Early detection of cognitive decline, including Alzheimer’s and other dementias, can help people develop plans for care.

**Surveillance and Resources**

CDC's [Alzheimer's Disease and Healthy Aging Program](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dementias/index.html) provides resources and data to health professionals so they can help older adults have the best quality of life possible. It also supports applied public health research and helps national organizations share information and tools with older adults.

CDC works with partners and states to gather information on self-reported cognitive decline among adults through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS). States use this information to develop state plans, increase awareness about the needs of the aging population, and guide elder justice and emergency preparedness efforts for older adults.

**Healthy Brain Initiative and Public Health Road Map**

The [Healthy Brain Initiative](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dementias/healthybrain.html) improves understanding of cognitive health as a central part of public health practice. The initiative creates and supports partnerships, collects and reports data, increases awareness of cognitive health, and promotes the use of [State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia, The 2018–2023 Road Map](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dementias/resources/road_map.html).

The Road Map lists 25 actions to promote cognitive health and address cognitive impairment and the needs of caregivers, including:

- Ensuring a workforce of care providers that know about brain health, dementia, and the importance of caregivers.
- Supporting national data collection on dementia and caregiving.
- Increasing public awareness of dementias in ways that make sense to different cultures.
- Developing policies and partnerships to promote best practices.
- Meeting the needs of caregivers for people with dementia.

CDC is working with funded partners to accomplish the Road Map’s recommended actions. For example, the Alzheimer’s Association helps develop and track Road Map action items and helps state public health agencies develop Alzheimer’s plans. The Balm in Gilead trains African American health professionals to recognize the signs and symptoms of Alzheimer’s and raises awareness through faith-based communities.
Increasing the Use of Clinical Preventive Services

Clinical preventive services can prevent disease or find disease early, when treatment is more effective. These services include screenings for chronic conditions such as cancer, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes; immunizations for diseases such as flu and pneumonia; and counseling about personal health behaviors. The US Preventive Services Task Force provides a complete list of all recommended services.

Increasing the use of preventive services by adults aged 50 or older is a key public health strategy, given the rapid aging of the US population. Unfortunately, only 25% of adults aged 50 to 64 and less than 50% of those 65 or older are up to date on these potentially life-saving services.

CDC funds states, territories, and tribes to improve clinical preventive services by:

- Increasing chronic disease screening rates through the Colorectal Cancer Control Program, the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, and the WISEWOMAN program (which screens low-income women with little or no health insurance aged 45 to 64 for heart disease and stroke risk factors).

Providing Resources to Help Caregivers

In the United States, people are living longer, and Alzheimer’s and other disabling chronic conditions are becoming more common. The need for caregivers, both informal (family and friends) and formal (paid professionals), will likely increase significantly as the population ages. Although caregiving may be rewarding, caregivers are at risk of increased stress, depression, unhealthy behaviors, and poor attention to their own health. Caregivers of people with dementia are at even higher risk, and they may delay dealing with their own health needs.

Informal or unpaid caregivers provide most of the long-term care in people’s homes. According to 2015–2017 BRFSS data, about 20% of US adults aged 18 or older reported providing care or assistance to a person with a long-term illness or disability in the past 30 days. Four in five of these caregivers manage household tasks (such as finances or cleaning), and more than half help with personal care (such as bathing). In 2017, the value of this unpaid caregiving was an estimated $230.1 billion.

CDC worked with partners to develop an action guide for using REACH OUT, which is an evidence-based intervention designed to promote health and well-being among people who care for others with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia. CDC also created a guide for program developers, planners, and evaluators called Assuring Healthy Caregivers. A Public Health Approach to Translating Research into Practice: The RE-AIM Framework.
• Working with health care organizations to identify people with prediabetes and refer them to CDC-recognized organizations that offer the National DPP lifestyle change program. CDC’s Improving the Health of Americans Through Prevention and Management of Diabetes and Heart Disease and Stroke program funds this and other work to prevent type 2 diabetes and improve health outcomes for people with diabetes through diabetes self-management education and support services.

• Working with health systems to increase team-based care for patients with high blood pressure and high cholesterol, including testing innovative ways to engage nonphysician team members through CDC's Innovative State and Local Public Health Strategies to Prevent and Manage Diabetes and Heart Disease and Stroke program.

Promoting Programs to Reduce Arthritis Pain and Prevent Falls

In the United States, 23% of all adults, or more than 54 million people, have arthritis. It is a leading cause of work disability, with annual direct medical costs of at least $140 billion. CDC recommends several proven ways to help people reduce arthritis pain:

• Join a self-management education program, such as the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, that teaches the skills and confidence to live well with arthritis every day.

• Be active. Physical activity, such as walking, bicycling, and swimming, decreases arthritis pain and improves function, mood, and quality of life. Better physical function reduces the risk of falls and fall-related injuries and helps older adults stay independent. Adults with arthritis should move more and sit less throughout the day. Getting at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week is recommended. However, any physical activity is better than none. CDC-recommended physical activity programs can help improve the health of participants with arthritis.

• Maintain a healthy weight and protect your joints. People can reduce their risk of knee osteoarthritis by controlling their weight. They can help prevent osteoarthritis by avoiding activities that are more likely to cause joint injuries.

• Talk with a doctor. Recommendations from health care providers can motivate people to be physically active and join a self-management education program. People with inflammatory arthritis (like rheumatoid arthritis) have a better quality of life if they are diagnosed early, receive treatment, and learn how to manage their condition.