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ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION STATEMENT

DEMENTIA PREVALENCE IN THE U.S. 2000-2012

JAMA Internal Medicine

CHICAGO, November 21, 2016 – In the past few years, several studies in high income countries with good access to healthcare and education have shown a reduction in new cases of dementia in the older population. This new *JAMA Internal Medicine* article reports a reduction in the U.S. dementia prevalence rate – that is, the percentage of older people with dementia – between 2000 and 2012. This change in the prevalence rate over time is also reflected in data compiled and analyzed by the Alzheimer's Association in the annual [*Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures*](#) report.

Taken together, this is good news because it strongly suggests that the risk for dementia can be reduced. The authors of these studies are almost unanimous in proposing that the changes are due to increasing levels of formal education and better control of heart health risk factors (blood pressure, diabetes, smoking) in these countries.

However, there is an important difference between prevalence *rate* (number of people with the disease divided by the total population) and the prevalence *number* (number of people with the disease). The prevalence rate can be going down while the prevalence number is going up. The Alzheimer's Association believes this is the situation with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Although these recent findings indicate that a person's risk of dementia at any given age may be decreasing slightly, it should be noted that the total number of Americans with Alzheimer's and other dementias is expected to continue to increase dramatically. The same is even more true for low and middle income countries, which, compared to the countries where the handful of studies have been conducted, do not have the same access to formal education and high quality healthcare, and heart health risk factors are on the rise.

- According to the Alzheimer's Association [*2016 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures*](#) report, the current best estimates are that 5.2 million Americans over the age of 65 already have Alzheimer's; this is expected to grow to 13.8 million by 2050.

- Alzheimer’s Disease International [reports](#) that dementia affects 47 million people worldwide and this number will triple to more than 131 million by 2050.
- According to data reported at Alzheimer’s Association International Conference (AAIC) 2014, Alzheimer’s and dementia incidence and prevalence in developing countries is often underreported, and may be much higher than previously thought.

We must redouble efforts to understand, diagnose, treat and prevent Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias, which devastate both individual families and national economies. Many questions remain, and the only way we can get the answers is through more research.

Lifestyle factors such as a heart healthy diet, regular physical activity, cognitive stimulation, and social activities are beginning to be tested in people with dementia, and in healthy older adults at risk for dementia, in large-scale clinical trials (FINGER, MAPT, preDIVA), with promising though inconsistent results. More research is needed, such as large-scale trials in the U.S.

With the support of the Alzheimer’s Association and the Alzheimer’s community, the United States created its first [National Plan](#) to Address Alzheimer’s Disease in 2012. The plan includes the critical goal of preventing and effectively treating Alzheimer’s by 2025. It is only through strong implementation and adequate funding of the plan, including an additional \$400 million in fiscal year 2017 for Alzheimer’s research, that we’ll meet that goal. For more information and to get involved, visit www.alz.org.

The Alzheimer’s Association says certain healthy behaviors may reduce the risk of cognitive decline as we age. These include staying mentally active, engaging in regular physical activity, not smoking and eating a heart-healthy diet that benefits your body and your brain. The Alzheimer’s Association offers [10 Ways to Love Your Brain](#), tips that may reduce the risk of cognitive decline. You can find them on the Alzheimer’s Association website at www.alz.org.

“A Comparison of the Prevalence of Dementia in the United States in 2000 and 2012,” by Kenneth M. Langa, MD, PhD, et al., was published online by *JAMA Internal Medicine* on Monday, November 21, 2016.

About the Alzheimer’s Association®

The Alzheimer’s Association is the leading voluntary health organization in Alzheimer’s care, support and research. Our mission is to eliminate Alzheimer’s disease through the advancement of research, to provide and enhance care and support for all affected, and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer’s. For more information, visit the Alzheimer’s Association at alz.org or call the 24/7 helpline at 800-272-3900.

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