



Alzheimer's Disease
and Precision Medicine in
Native Communities



Aging in American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

Native people are living longer than ever before. There are about half a million Native elders who are 65 or older in the US. In about 30 years, this number may triple in size. This is great news for our Native communities, but it also means that cognitive impairment, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease, are more common. In fact, about 1 in 3 American Indian and Alaska Native people age 65 or older may be diagnosed with dementia during the next 20 years.

Did you know?

Cognitive impairment means trouble remembering information, learning new things, concentrating, or making decisions that affect everyday life.

Dementia means cognitive impairment severe enough to interfere with a person's daily life and activities.

Alzheimer's disease is one kind of brain disease that leads to dementia.



It is not clear what causes Alzheimer's disease, but we do know:

The biggest risk factor for dementia is age.

People's genetic background only partly accounts for the development of the disease.

Having high blood pressure may increase a person's risk of developing the disease.

Poor nutrition can make symptoms of the disease worse.

What are some common symptoms of Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease appears slowly over time. It is not usually Alzheimer's disease if someone seems to be suddenly confused.

People with Alzheimer's disease usually remember things that happened in the past better than things that happened recently.

An early symptom of the disease is having trouble handling money or paying bills.

It is common for someone with Alzheimer's disease to fall down as the disease gets worse.



Important things people often don't know about Alzheimer's disease:

Some people with this disease can still make informed decisions about their own care.

While rare, people in their 30s can have Alzheimer's disease.

Although people with Alzheimer's disease are prone to depression, symptoms of severe depression can be mistaken for symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

The progression of Alzheimer's disease:

There is still no cure and there are no prescription drugs or interventions to prevent it. People do not recover from the disease – it is a “chronic disease.” Eventually a person with Alzheimer's disease will need 24-hour supervision. After symptoms start to appear, the average life expectancy is 6 to 12 years.

There is good news!

You can slow the progression of symptoms or even delay the onset of disease by:

Eating healthy foods

Keeping your mind and body active

Getting plenty of sleep

Staying connected to friends and family

Avoiding drinking a lot of alcohol



What is precision medicine?

Doctors and researchers do not know why certain medical treatments work for some people, but not for others. **Precision medicine** is an approach to patient care that allows doctors to select the best treatment based on a person's health, family history, genetics, environment, lifestyle, and habits.

Precision medicine and Alzheimer's disease

Precision medicine helps doctors understand which of these factors are most likely contributing to Alzheimer's disease. Then they can create personalized care plans for better brain health.

It may even reduce the cost of health care by matching the right person with the right treatment the first time.

Researchers are learning which genes may increase the risk of dementia and hope to develop drugs for people with different genetic profiles.

Precision medicine mirrors how Native people view health—as a combination of many influences on a person's well-being.

American Indian and Alaska Native Research Initiatives

Doctors and tribal leaders don't know enough about Alzheimer's disease and Native populations. This makes it hard to understand how the disease affects Native populations and hard to create treatments for Native elders. We need more American Indians to take part in research to advance treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's disease for future generations.

Please talk to your coordinator to learn more about Alzheimer's disease, precision medicine, and how you can get involved in research to advance treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's disease in Native communities. For more information about Alzheimer's disease: call 1.800.438.4380 or visit www.alz.org