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Dementia Prevention Becomes National Priority Following Successful Risk-Reduction Advocacy Campaign

LAKEWOOD RANCH, Fla. — The fight against Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias (ADRD) became a national priority last week with the addition of a new risk-reduction goal to the National Alzheimer’s Plan.

The addition of this new goal reflects a growing body of evidence that shows that brain health can be protected, performance can be optimized, and risk of brain illness – like dementia – can be reduced and prevented across the lifespan, according to Dr. Stephanie Peabody, founder and executive director of the Brain Health Initiative (BHI).

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra announced the update to the National Alzheimer’s Plan on Dec. 27. The goal – namely, to accelerate action to promote healthy aging and reduce risk factors for ADRD – recognizes that reducing risk factors such as hypertension, physical inactivity, and depression may delay the onset or slow progression of ADRD and its symptoms.

In July 2020, UsAgainstAlzheimer’s, a BHI collaborative partner, and a broad range of organizations and top leaders, including Peabody, issued a call for a national prevention goal for ADRD. That coalition has now increased to nearly 200 groups and leaders.

As part of its leadership in risk reduction for ADRD, **UsAgainstAlzheimer’s will convene the Brain Health Partnership, including the Brain Health Initiative, on January 27 to discuss what the new goal means and next steps. To join this meeting, please [RSVP here](#).**

“This new goal giving greater priority to prevention is a tremendous victory and a huge step forward in reducing the risk of ADRD for people across our nation,” George Vradenburg, chairman and co-founder of UsAgainstAlzheimer’s, said in a press release from the organization. “Our nation is already committed to a goal of effectively treating and preventing

ADRD by 2025, and with this new national goal, the United States commits to focus more on preventing ADRD in the first place.”

Peabody and the BHI advocated for the national priority and applauded the change.

“For too long, people have erroneously believed that cognitive decline is a normal part of aging,” Dr. Peabody said. “This new goal should lead to increased awareness and actions to promote brain health for all ages, bridging the gap between brainspan and lifespan.” This additional goal to [reduce risk of Alzheimer’s](#) calls for the creation of clear strategies to achieve this target; additional research to understand brain health risk and protective factors; strengthening the public health infrastructure; addressing health disparities and the social determinants of health; and turning risk-reduction research findings into practice at the individual, family, community, and clinical levels.

The National Alzheimer’s Project Act (NAPA) Advisory Council has recommended that the new goal seek a 15-percent reduction in prevalence of 10 key risk factors by 2030. These risk factors include: depression, diabetes, hearing loss, midlife hypertension, physical inactivity, poor diet quality and obesity, poor sleep quality and sleep disorders, tobacco use, traumatic brain injury, and unhealthy alcohol use. This aggressive goal could reduce the number of people with ADRD by 1.2 million by 2050.

What does this mean for the Suncoast region? “Led by an evolving and strongly supported collaboration with the Evelyn F. and William L. McKnight Brain Institute of the University of Florida, College of Medicine, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, the University of South Florida, and the BHI, a Florida Brain Health Consortium has been established to support brain health and prevent brain illness,” said Michael S. Jaffee, M.D., F.A.A.N., F.A.N.A., vice chair of neurology at the University of Florida and director of UF’s Brain Injury, Rehab & Neuroresilience Center. “While we remain hopeful that better treatments for Alzheimer’s are on the horizon, we know there are things that people can do right now to lower their risk of developing this disease. We hope that this consortium can help Florida become a state leader in brain health and prevention.”

Said Dr. Peabody, “The consortium is first focusing on the design of a pilot brain health and illness risk-reduction project, centered in Lakewood Ranch and including the greater region.”

“The project is bringing together a community of professionals from different disciplines and from across a variety of institutions who believe in the potential of a systematic approach to brain health,” said Dr. Kathy Black, Professor of Aging Studies at University of South Florida.

Barbara Coffey, M.D., M.S., Professor and Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, said, “This consortium aims to coordinate a number of brain health projects that focus on education, clinical care, research, and innovative interventions involving public/private/academic collaborations.”

Brain illness is a public health crisis: More than 6 million Americans are currently living with Alzheimer’s disease and nearly 14 million people are expected to be diagnosed with Alzheimer’s by 2050. Women and communities of color bear a disproportionate burden of this

devastating brain illness, with women making up nearly two-thirds of Alzheimer's cases. By 2030, nearly 40 percent of all Americans living with Alzheimer's will be black or Latino.

"CenterPlace Health is honored to be part of the Florida Brain Health Consortium," said Melissa Parker, CEO of CenterPlace Health. "As a community health center, we treat some of the most vulnerable members of society, especially those in our aging senior population. To be part of this pilot study on Brain Health Dementia Risk Reduction enables us to be proactive in caring for our patients across their lifespan to improve the quality of lives both today and in the future."

Chuck Henry, R.S., M.P.A., health officer and the Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County, said, "The creation of a Florida Brain Health Consortium and design and execution of a dementia risk-reduction project is an essential next step to reduce incidence of brain illness. This project is dedicated to brain health education, research, and innovation and aims to increase brain health outcomes. A resource like this for our greater community is invaluable to the well-being of our region."

While Alzheimer's takes a toll on patients and their families, it also has a significant economic impact on this country. Without early intervention and treatment, care costs are projected to exceed \$20 trillion over the next 30 years.

"It is imperative that people living with the disease, caregivers, doctors, and policymakers work together to stop this accelerating trend in its tracks, and this new priority on prevention and risk reduction is a great start," Dr. Jennifer Bencie, M.D., M.S.A., health officer at the Florida Department of Health in Manatee County, said.

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About UsAgainstAlzheimer's

UsAgainstAlzheimer's exists to conquer Alzheimer's disease. We take on the toughest problems; bring all of "Us" together to break down barriers; advocate for research that will speed treatments to market; and drive changes that matter most to people living with the disease. We will not rest until brain-span equals lifespan — for everyone.

About the Brain Health Initiative (brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, uses a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is building brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference.***

About UF's McKnight Brain Institute

The MBI serves as a nexus for neuroscience research at the University of Florida, combining multidisciplinary research teams and clinicians to better understand how the brain works and

how various diseases alter brain function. Collectively, our investigators hope their research will make a difference for those who suffer from disorders of the brain including neurodegenerative diseases, brain cancers, addictive and psychiatric diseases, stroke, acute spinal cord injuries and brain injuries as well as memory loss associated with normal aging.

About The University of South Florida

The University of South Florida is a high-impact global research university dedicated to student success, generating an annual economic impact of more than \$6 billion. Over the past 10 years, no other public university in the country has risen faster in U.S. News and World Report's national university rankings than USF. Serving more than 50,000 students on campuses in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Sarasota-Manatee, USF is designated as a Preeminent State Research University by the Florida Board of Governors, placing it in the most elite category among the state's 12 public universities. USF has earned widespread national recognition for its success graduating under-represented minority and limited-income students at rates equal to or higher than white and higher income students. USF is a member of the American Athletic Conference. Learn more at usf.edu.

About University of Miami Miller School of Medicine

The University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine (UMMSM) was founded in 1952 as Florida's first accredited medical school. The past 10 years have seen tremendous growth at UMMSM with a wealth of new leading-edge programs and stunning new facilities. The medical school has continued to gain international acclaim for research, clinical care, medical education, and biomedical innovations, and was ranked in the top third of the nation's best medical schools for research in 2022 by U.S. News & World Report. Having recently implemented a revolutionary new curriculum, UMMSM is teaching and training the next generation of medical experts in the field of brain health and beyond. The Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences boasts a multidisciplinary team of clinicians, researchers, and physician-scientists. In addition to ADRD and memory/cognitive disorders, faculty are experts in the evaluation and treatment of many other mental/behavioral health and neurocognitive disorders. The Department has developed numerous successful programs and fostered national partnerships devoted to optimizing brain health, resulting in two Center of Excellence designations. With dozens of grants and millions in funding, our scientists are on the leading-edge of novel, life-changing therapies for brain disorders. Learn more at umiamihealth.org.

About CenterPlace Health

CenterPlace Health's mission drives the work that they do to provide high-quality, low-cost health care. The mission of CenterPlace Health is to provide efficient and effective delivery of quality, affordable health services to a diverse population in a compassionate and caring manner. As a Federally Qualified Health Center, CenterPlace Health is committed to addressing the whole patient through primary care, dental care, and integrated behavioral health services at six locations throughout Sarasota County. Learn more at CenterPlaceHealth.org.

About the Florida Department of Health

The Department, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board, works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts. Follow us on Twitter at @HealthyFla and on Facebook. For more information about the Florida Department of Health please visit www.FloridaHealth.gov.