

Population segments differ on perceptions of cognitive health

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A new special issue of *The Gerontologist* has identified for the first time how ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and geographically diverse groups think about aging and brain health.

This research was conducted based on recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Healthy Brain Initiative, a project designed to eliminate health disparities. The findings will be used to further the development of effective [public health](#) messages to promote cognitive health in older adults across the nation.

"This special issue includes a wide range of cutting-edge manuscripts on cognitive health in old [age](#)," said William J. McAuley, PhD, editor-in-chief of *The Gerontologist*. "It presents information on perceptions about cognitive health held by various groups, methods of promoting cognitive health, and approaches to preserving physical health among those with cognitive problems."

All demographic groups studied believed that cognitive health is influenced by physical, mental, and social activity; however, they differed in opinions of the benefits of specific activities, nutrition, and genetics. The respondents also indicated that that media messages about cognitive health are limited and confusing. Furthermore, many agreed that health messages that incorporate specific community values and are delivered within pre-existing social groups by community leaders may be particularly effective.

The Healthy Aging Research Network (HAN), located within CDC's larger Prevention Research Centers Program and supported by CDC's Healthy Aging Program, spearheaded the project.

"The Network is unique in that it combines diverse perspectives of nine Network members — in partnership with CDC's Healthy Brain Initiative — to focus on improving our understanding of the public's perceptions about cognitive health by conducting quality research and dissemination of findings," said Wayne H. Giles, MD, MS, the director of the Division of Adult and Community Health within the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

Between 2005 and 2007, the HAN conducted 55 focus groups with over 450 older adult participants from nine states, including rural and urban communities; individuals with cognitive impairment and their family caregivers; speakers of English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Vietnamese; and African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and non-Hispanic whites.

"This special issue of *The Gerontologist* is an example of the important results of that work and includes key findings about cognitive health that can assist in efforts to disseminate appropriate and effective cognitive health messages," Giles said.

More information: www.geron.org/Publications/The%20Gerontologist

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