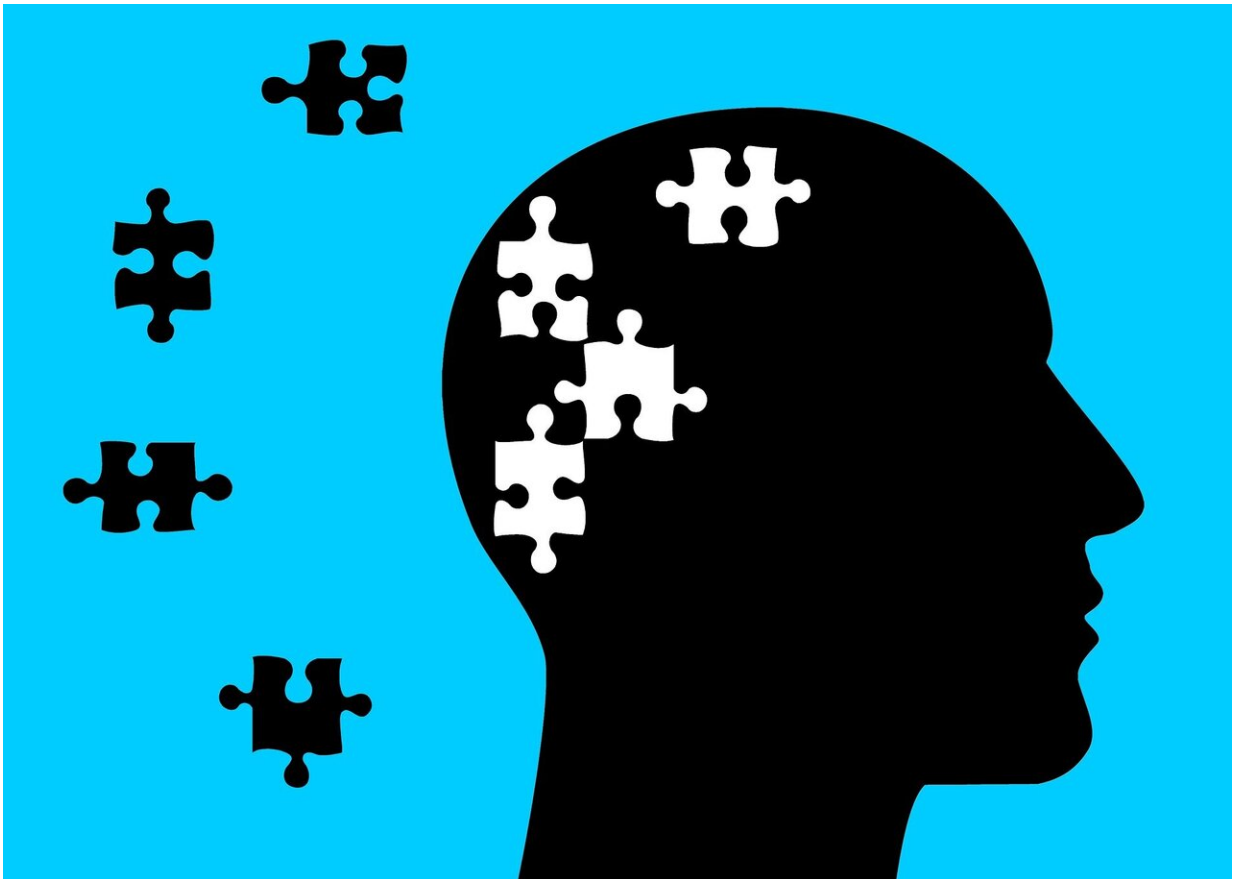


New report estimates 10,000 people 65 and older living with dementia in nation's capital

January 13 2021



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A report released today estimates that about 10,000 Washington, D.C. residents 65 and older are living with dementia, a general term for a

range of memory loss disorders, including Alzheimer's disease. The report also discusses risk factors for dementia and unmet needs of Washington, D.C. residents living with dementia and their care partners.

"We found that an estimated 13% of the city's 65 and older population are living with [dementia](#), and the prevalence was higher for women, minorities and older D.C. residents," Melinda C. Power, ScD, director of the George Washington University Institute for Brain Health and Dementia, said. "Our report also made some recommendations that might help prevent this devastating disorder and help caregivers as well as those already living with memory loss."

The report was produced by Power and other researchers at the GW Institute for Brain Health and Dementia, with funding from the D.C. Department of Health. The GW Institute for Brain Health and Dementia is an interdisciplinary research center that brings together faculty from across the university to promote and support research on cognitive health.

Researchers at the institute and their partners at DC Health teamed up to conduct this assessment because no one knew how many Washington, D.C. residents were living with dementia or what kinds of unmet needs they or their caregivers may have.

The research team also wanted to find out if there were certain modifiable [risk factors](#) in the district that could be targeted to help keep the brain healthy. They found that several lifestyle and risk factors linked to dementia were very common in the district.

For example, 39% of Washington, D.C. residents in midlife have a diagnosis of high blood pressure. More than 60% were overweight or obese in midlife. Another 14% of Washington, D.C. residents smoke.

These same factors not only set the stage for dementia, but also are known to increase the risk of heart disease and other serious health problems.

"This report and other evidence suggests D.C. residents can reduce their risk of heart disease and keep the brain healthy at the same time," Power, who is also an associate professor of epidemiology at the GW Milken Institute School of Public Health, said. "Starting early in life, everyone should keep their weight in check, get out and move and take other steps that can lead to good health."

The team also conducted surveys and focus groups to identify gaps in services or care for people who already have dementia. They found that caregivers reported needing help with navigating the current system and applying for, or even identifying, resources. Many people caring for a family member or friend with dementia reported needing help from home health aides, a service that can help the person with dementia as well as caregivers.

The assessment found that people with dementia and their caregivers would also benefit from increased community awareness of memory loss disorders and a better public understanding of how to interact with someone who has dementia.

The researchers made nine recommendations to help prevent dementia or help those already living with the condition, including the establishment of an independent agency that can help isolated older adults with dementia.

In addition, the team produced a guide to services and resources for memory loss and dementia care. The guide provides detailed information on the kinds of care or programs available to Washington, D.C. residents who have Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia or another type of

memory loss disorder.

"The resource guide serves as a starting point for people living with memory loss or their caregivers to begin exploring services available in the district," said Christina Prather, MD, an assistant professor of medicine at the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences and clinical director of the GW Institute for Brain Health and Dementia.

The researchers began their needs assessment in March 2020 just as the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in shutdowns in the district. As a result, the available Washington, D.C. services and resources are in flux, Prather cautioned. For example, at the time of the survey, many caregivers reported struggling with providing care to loved ones because adult day centers had closed. As a result, many families are struggling to care for loved ones with memory loss.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionally impacted D.C. seniors' health and disrupted the many routine services they receive. As we look to the future beyond the pandemic, this report will guide the district in ensuring [brain health](#) preventative measures and dementia services are stronger than ever before," Dr. Ankoor Shah, interim principal senior deputy director for community [health](#) administration at DC Health, said.

More information: District of Columbia: 2020 Brain Health Needs Assessment: dchealth.dc.gov/sites/default/files/HNeedsAssessment.pdf

Provided by George Washington University

Citation: New report estimates 10,000 people 65 and older living with dementia in nation's capital (2021, January 13) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-people-older-dementia-nation-capital.html>

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