

Sustainability in Healthy Brain Initiative Implementation: Who? What? Why? Now!

Program sustainability ensures delivery of a program’s intended benefits over time¹, which public health initiatives require to retain community trust and ensure long-term positive outcomes. Building comprehensive plans for sustainability helps populations meet the Healthy Brain Initiative (HBI) vision to lead a life with the healthiest brain possible.²



This resource is intended for health agencies implementing the [HBI State and Local Road Map for Public Health, 2023-2027](#) to build sustainability in their jurisdiction’s HBI work through collaboration with their **agency, partners, and communities**. It expands upon the [Program Sustainability in HBI video series](#) by offering collaborative approaches and resources for integrating sustainability—placing a special emphasis on **operationalizing equity** and empowering communities to be the leaders of their own brain health. Finally, this resource highlights **Sustainability in Action** in three states.



Who? Your Agency

What? Sustainability Planning and Assessment

Why? Sustainability planning and assessment are crucial for ensuring that HBI implementation is sustained over time as local needs, financial climates, and policies change.³ Agency-wide engagement facilitates effective responsibility distribution and the formation of long-term, attainable goals for a program. In addition to agency staff, sustainability planning and assessment involves [partner collaboration](#).

Consider where current plans or actions may already embrace sustainability, then work to institutionalize practices from the infrastructure that exists. Flexibility is important to address the changing needs of your jurisdiction and sustain the benefits of your program activities.

Actions to Take Now:

- Assess your program’s sustainability and your agency’s staffing and infrastructure regularly.⁴
- Incorporate sustainability strategies in your plans or consider developing a complementary [plan for sustainability](#).



Operationalizing Equity:

Ensure focus on populations experiencing high risk for or burdens of dementia, including people from Black, African American, Hispanic, American Indian and Alaska Native communities, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.⁵

What? Workforce Development

Why? Maintaining operations within your agency requires a skilled and motivated workforce. Exposing agency staff to new skills and information helps them improve their ability to work on multiple levels.⁶ It is important to understand staff’s level of baseline knowledge and intentionally offer development opportunities to apply what they have learned.

Actions to Take Now:

- Incorporate dementia and HBI training in new staff onboarding. Use the Alzheimer’s Association’s [Public Health Curriculum](#) to establish knowledge of dementia as a public health priority and ASTHO’s [HBI Road Map Module](#) to build understanding of public health implementation of HBI.
- Offer regular training or educational presentations across your organization to increase workforce knowledge of dementia, dementia caregiving, and public health connections with cognitive health.



Operationalizing Equity:

Educate agency staff about the populations experiencing high risk for or burdens of dementia in your jurisdiction, and ways their work can advance equity in dementia outcomes.



Who? Your Partners

What? Sustainable Partnership

Why? Maintaining strong partnerships is critical to sustaining public health benefits because connections with partners helps to align related work and strengthen the collective effort. Investing in existing partnerships with other agencies, organizations, and individuals is equally as important as creating new opportunities for collaboration.

Public health agencies must be intentional about diversifying partners to best support the population in their jurisdiction. Just as with your ongoing plans or activities, existing partnerships may already encompass shared goals, alignment of strategy, and potential for improved HBI implementation. When working to build sustainability into your efforts, keep these partners near and seek opportunities for mutual success.

Actions to Take Now:

- Evaluate your existing partnerships and gaps using existing [partner matrix tools](#) from the Alzheimer’s Association and ASTHO’s [needs assessment toolkit](#).
- Identify and engage new partners, using consistent communication and understanding their priorities to inform relationship development.
- Help your partners see their work’s connection to brain health and how their expertise and priorities intersect with HBI.



Operationalizing Equity:

Prioritize building trust with agencies, organizations, and individuals who center planning around equity and serve populations disproportionately affected by dementia and dementia caregiving.



Who? Your Communities

What? Determining Your Community's Needs

Why? Building a strong rapport with communities in your jurisdiction to understand their priorities and adapting HBI work in response creates a foundation of trust for sustainable implementation.

Understand what the current data shows in your jurisdiction and use this to involve those who are most affected by dementia and dementia caregiving. Engagement at this level allows for increased support for the population and can inform the efforts of your agency and partners. Direct collaboration with the people your agency serves will influence successful action and contribute to long-term success.

Actions to Take Now:

- Engage community members in conducting a [needs assessment](#) on dementia, cognitive health and dementia caregiving.
- Work with local partners to institutionalize practices for community engagement to build trust and center community input.



Operationalizing Equity:

Make centering community input a regular part of your program's practice to understand what the community's assets, needs, and preferred ways to engage (e.g., focus groups, interviews). Consider community readiness when seeking community-level engagement.⁷

What? Effective Messaging

Why? Messaging plays a key role in keeping community members informed of actions they can take to support jurisdiction HBI plans or prioritize their own brain health. Thoughtful health promotions can help change perceptions and understanding of dementia and promote inclusivity while delivering essential information.

Taking a cross-program approach to promotion creates opportunities to educate and inform broad audiences. Intentionally tailoring the medium and content of communication materials can support a campaign's efficacy and ensure greater reach of its intended message.

Actions to Take Now:

- Use [Culturally Tailored Communications Resources and guidance on inclusive language](#) to inspire thoughtful health promotions.
- Integrate brain health into [messaging](#) across chronic disease, healthy aging, or disability program areas.

Cross-Program Messaging Options:

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| • Traumatic Brain Injury | • Physical Inactivity | • Depression | • Hypertension |
| • Obesity | • Smoking | • Hearing Loss | • Diabetes Prevention |

Find more about these topics in the [Road Map](#) and through the [Public Health Center of Excellence on Dementia Risk Reduction](#).



Operationalizing Equity:

Tailor messaging to address conditions that disproportionately impact specific populations in your area.

Sustainability in Action: Georgia, Vermont, and Washington

The following jurisdictions have taken intentional action to embed sustainability in their implementation of the Healthy Brain Initiative and public health programs, contributing directly to long-term positive health outcomes for the people they serve:



The **Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH)** has prioritized community trust for creating sustainable programs, services, and referrals. The agency has partnered with local nonprofits, academic institutions, and state agencies to equip professionals with skills needed to provide competent, caring service and educate about topics related to brain health.

Georgia DPH also partners with local health departments to improve access to screening for diagnoses and care. This collaboration led to establishing telehealth sites as an alternative to in-person memory assessment clinics that may be inaccessible to people in less densely populated areas. Through active engagement and a focus on community needs, Georgia DPH cultivated a collaborative approach that enhances the effectiveness and reach of services. This community-led initiative fosters more tailored and effective solutions for the state's residents, creating valuable opportunities for participation and involvement.

Georgia DPH has advanced sustainability in their work by identifying leaders who will champion their ongoing HBI efforts. Dedication and buy-in happening from both the top down and the community level up establishes an operative middle-ground where sustainable solutions can be attained for all. Georgia has worked to make purposeful collaboration at every level a part of their normal operations, an effort that will continue to benefit the department and lend to the success of HBI implementation over time.



The **Vermont Department of Health (DOH)** and the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) are drafting a multisector, ten-year plan for aging, Age Strong VT, and teaming up with key partners involved in their state's planning to ensure alignment with other state plans. For example, Vermont's State Plan on Aging has been updated to address topics related to dementia and expand involvement with Area Agencies on Aging and adult care centers around dementia education, care, and risk reduction efforts. The next State Health Improvement Plan will also reflect and support key HBI activities. As a result, Vermont has expanded its collaborative and integrative efforts to benefit early detection, brain health, and falls prevention which can foster improved outcomes over time. These alliances have fostered sustainable success in Vermont's implementation of HBI.

Vermont DOH also connects regularly with the Governor's Commission on Alzheimer's and Related Dementias and participates in agenda setting to share BOLD Program data, request input on strategies, and support strategic data-informed communications from the Commission to the state legislature, which has contributed to sustainable infrastructure and coalition building in the state. Vermont DOH hosts monthly and quarterly coalition meetings to discuss growth of health systems infrastructure and improvements of readiness and capacity at the local and state level.

The state's flagship Memory Program based at the University of Vermont had a waitlist of over 500 Vermonters waiting to be seen and has since been reduced to 100-150 people. The department's efforts to build capacity, establish cross-sector partnership, and train clinical and public health workforce has resulted in increased screening, diagnoses, and expanded focus on brain health state-wide.



The **Washington State Department of Health (DOH)** centers their planning efforts and program activities around sustainability and equity. The department has established strong partnerships with community and faith-based organizations and is working to inform their public health colleagues about the latest data and research around brain health. The department strives to connect chronic disease prevention and mitigation programs, such as those for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes prevention with brain health in their health communications. This cross-program messaging extends awareness of brain health to more people throughout the state.

Washington State DOH promotes the value of timely and accurate diagnosis for all people. Their focus on communities that experience greater health disparities has led to successful partnerships within the Black, African American, Hispanic, and Latinx communities to promote and share campaign information in Washington. Based on the current success of this approach, these efforts will continue to address dementia prevalence and health disparities in the state. The [2023-2028 Washington State Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias](#) includes equity as a guiding principle of the goals, strategies, and recommendations.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Schell, S.F., Luke, D.A., Schooley, M.W. *et al.* "Public health program capacity for sustainability: a new framework." *Implementation Science*. 2013. 8:15. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-8-15>
- ² Alzheimer's Association and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Road map for state and local public health." *Alzheimer's Association*. 2023. <https://alz.org/hbiroadmap>
- ³ HHS Office of Population Affairs. "The OPA Framework for Program Sustainability." 2017. 1. <https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/framework-for-program-sustainability.pdf>
- ⁴ HHS Office of Population Affairs. "The OPA Framework for Program Sustainability." 2017. 5. <https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/framework-for-program-sustainability.pdf>
- ⁵ Alzheimer's Association and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The Healthy Brain Initiative Collaborative." *Alzheimer's Association*. 2023. <https://www.alz.org/hbi-collaborative>
- ⁶ Batan, M., Butterfoss, F.D. *et al.* "A Sustainability Planning Guide for Healthy Communities." https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/pdf/sustainability_guide.pdf
- ⁷ HHS Office of Population Affairs. "The OPA Framework for Program Sustainability." 2017. 5. <https://opa.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/framework-for-program-sustainability.pdf>