The older American population is rapidly increasing — and so will the number of people with Alzheimer’s.

- In 2050 there will be an estimated 88 million seniors and the oldest-old (those aged 85 and older) will comprise an estimated 19% of that population. Compared with today, this represents an additional 4.8 million oldest-old Americans.

- In 2020, an estimated 5.8 million Americans aged 65 and older are living with Alzheimer’s. That number is projected to reach 13.8 million in 2050.

Despite the growing older population, few physicians specialize in geriatrics or are taught much about Alzheimer’s.

- Because of the extra years of training required and relatively low reimbursement rates, only a small percentage of health care professionals specialize in geriatrics. In fact, an additional year of geriatric training can actually reduce earnings power.

- In 2020, there were 403 geriatric fellowship positions offered, but 200 of them went unfilled.

- Among primary care physicians, 69% of them say they learned very little or nothing about the diagnosis and care for Alzheimer’s and other dementias in medical school.

- An overall lack of exposure to geriatrics during medical training means that most physicians will enter the workforce with little exposure to the needs of older adults, including those with dementia.

The consequence is a physician workforce that is insufficient to meet the needs of today’s older population. And that shortage will only get worse.

- More than half of primary care physicians report that there are not enough dementia specialists in their geographic area to meet patient demand.

- The United States has approximately half the number of certified geriatricians it currently needs. And in order to meet the needs of those with Alzheimer’s in 2050, a nearly 200% increase in the number of geriatricians will be needed.

- In 2017, 20 states were deemed “neurology deserts” due to a shortage of neurologists. The United States needs an estimated 19% more neurologists by 2025 just to meet demand.
Non-physician health care providers also rarely have specialized expertise in treating older Americans.

- Fewer than 1% of registered nurses, physician assistants (PAs), and pharmacists specialize in geriatrics.
- Thirteen percent of nurse practitioners have special expertise in gerontological care; only 8% have expertise in geriatric care with a primary care focus.
- Even though nearly three-quarters of social workers serve adults aged 55 and older, only 4% of them have formal geriatrics certifications.

The workforce shortage also includes direct care workers — those who support individuals with daily activities and who are critical in maintaining the quality of life for people with dementia.

- High turnover, low pay, poor working conditions, and few opportunities for advancement make filling direct care positions difficult.
- By 2030, 3.4 million more direct care workers will be needed — a 48% increase from 2015.

### What Can States Do?

- Incorporate dementia and geriatrics into workforce policies and commissions.
- Support financial incentives — such as loan forgiveness and grant programs — to encourage students and recent graduates to enter neurological and geriatric specialties.
- Develop career growth opportunities and educational assistance for direct care workers that would enhance the education pipeline, improve recruitment and retention, and maximize the existing workforce.

### Percentage of Professionals Specializing in Geriatrics by Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nurses, Physician Assistants and Pharmacists</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse Practitioners</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These shortages will have a profound impact on individuals with Alzheimer’s and other dementias.

- A recent study showed that if a disease-modifying treatment were to become available in 2020, individuals with dementia would need to wait an average of 19 months in order to receive treatment.
- This study also concluded that between 2020 and 2040, approximately 2.1 million individuals with mild cognitive impairment will develop Alzheimer’s while on waiting lists for treatment.
- The main cause of this tremendous backlog would be the limited number of specialists in the health care workforce.
- In addition, shortages in direct care workers will place an even bigger burden on family and friends who provide unpaid care — already an effort equivalent to nearly $244 billion per year.