

FACTSHEET

JUNE 2019

alzimpact.org

Dementia-Capable Workforce

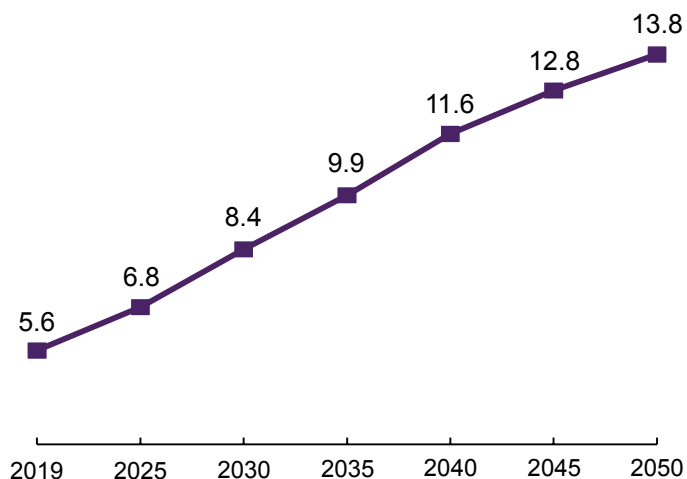
The older American population is rapidly increasing—and so will the number of people with Alzheimer's.

- By 2030, there will be a projected 74 million Americans aged 65 and older. They will make up more than 20 percent of the total U.S. population.
- In 2050, the oldest-old (those aged 85 and older) will comprise an estimated 22 percent of the 65+ population. Compared with 2012, this represents an additional 12 million oldest-old Americans.
- In 2019, an estimated 5.8 million Americans—5.6 million aged 65 and older—are living with Alzheimer's. That number is projected to reach 8.4 million in 2030 and nearly 14 million in 2050.

Despite the growing older population, few physicians specialize in geriatrics.

- 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 2019, 49 percent of geriatric fellowship positions went unfilled.
- 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.

Millions of Americans Age 65 and Older with Alzheimer's



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.

- The United States has approximately half the number of certified geriatricians it currently needs, and between now and 2030, the American Geriatrics Society estimates that nearly 25,000 more geriatricians will be needed.
- In 2017, 20 states were deemed “neurology deserts” due to a shortage of neurologists. Estimates indicate that the United States will need 19 percent more neurologists just by 2025 in order to meet increasing demand.

Non-physician health care providers also rarely have specialized expertise in treating older Americans.

- Fewer than one percent of registered nurses, physician assistants (PAs), and pharmacists specialize in geriatrics.
- Nine percent of nurse practitioners have special expertise in gerontological care, and only four percent of them 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 four percent of them have formal geriatrics certifications.

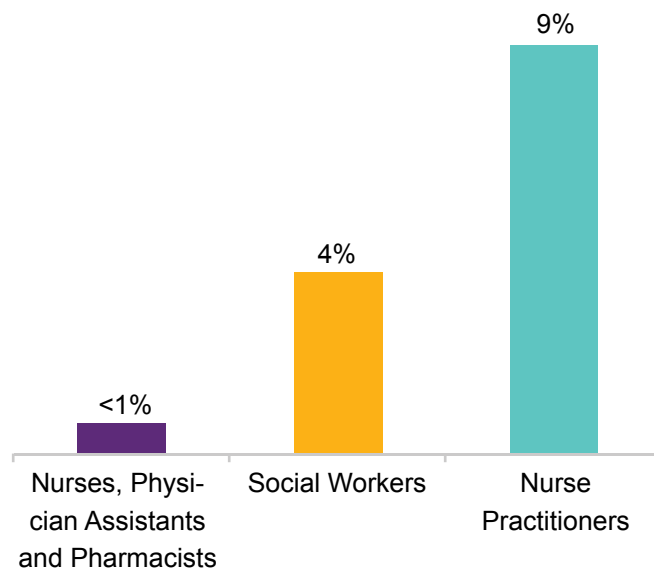
The workforce shortage also includes direct care workers—those who support individuals with daily activities and who are critical in maintaining the quality of life for people with dementia.

- 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 percent 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



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 healthcare 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 \$234 billion per year.