



New Year's Resolutions are Healthy for your Brain!

Congressional Neuroscience Caucus Briefing February 14, 2024

On Wednesday, February 14, 2024, the Congressional Neuroscience Caucus (CNC), in cooperation with the American Brain Coalition (ABC), American Academy of Neurology (AAN), American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP), Center for BrainHealth, and the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) hosted a Congressional briefing on the intersection of brain health and New Year's resolutions, in which experts talked about the benefits of increased exercise, sleep, nutrition, and emotional well-being on brain health. The briefing was moderated by Max Goldman, Director of Congressional Affairs at AAN. The speakers included Bernadette Boden-Albala, MPH, DrPH, from the University of California at Irvine; Helen Lavretsky, MD, from the University of California at Los Angeles; Sandra Bond Chapman, PhD, from the University of Texas at Dallas; and Colonel Geoffrey Ling, MD, PhD, from the BrainHealth Project and Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. The briefing commenced with greetings from Congressmen Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Morgan Luttrell (R-TX), co-chairs of the CNC, who expressed their support for the BRAIN Initiative, and their excitement for the CNC's continued work in the new year.



Co-Chairs, Congressman Luttrell (R-TX) and Congressman Blumenauer (D-OR) making opening remarks

Dr. Bernadette Boden-Albala began the briefing with an overview of AAN's Brain Health Initiative that focuses on science, patient care, and public policy and engagement. In discussing the burden of brain diseases, Dr. Boden-Albala not only highlighted the prevalence of certain brain diseases—such as Alzheimer's, Epilepsy, and mental illnesses—she also noted the health disparities that exist among those impacted by brain diseases and conditions. For example, the prevalence of any mental illness is highest among American Indian/Alaska Native adults compared to all other racial groups. Additionally, Dr.



From left to right: Colonel Ling, Dr. Boden-Albala, Congressman Blumenauer, Dr. Lavretsky, Dr. Bond Chapman

Boden-Albala discussed a "roadmap" to achieve brain health, which calls for a coupled investment in individual potential and injury prevention. Finally, Dr. Boden-Albala called for a more diverse workforce that can more effectively serve every community impacted by brain diseases and conditions, and cited the need to break down barriers to collective brain health initiatives.

Dr. Helen Lavretsky presented on the intersection of lifestyle habits and brain health. In defining brain health, Dr. Lavretsky highlighted the importance of optimizing mental and physical health to benefit both individual and societal well-being. Additionally, Dr. Lavretsky noted that investments in brain health promote cognitive resilience from stress, prevent medical disorders, reduce economic costs, and promote healthy aging. Regarding lifestyle habits that impact brain health, Dr. Lavretsky spoke about

the importance of sufficient sleep, exercise, social support, creative activities, and a healthy diet. Notably, the Mediterranean, DASH, and MIND diets have been shown to reduce depression by 25-30% and improve cognition when compared to the standard American diet, or the SAD diet. Dr. Lavretsky also highlighted a study in which older adults with depression who engaged in Tai Chi training increased their brain connectivity.

Dr. Sandra Bond Chapman discussed the work of the BrainHealth Project, of which she is the co-leader. The BrainHealth Project is a landmark study that seeks to achieve for brain health what has been achieved for heart health by defining, measuring, and delivering strategies to improve one's brain health and wellness across the lifespan. Notably, the BrainHealth Project looks at four factors to measure one's brain fitness: neural systems, connectedness, clarity, and emotional balance. Based on the study's findings, it is possible to improve one's brain fitness through transformative thinking exercises, promoting calm, resilient habits, and supporting innovative thinking regardless of age, education, or starting point. Dr. Chapman noted that applying the findings of the BrainHealth Project could prove transformative for the learning achievement of students in poverty and the high burnout rates among young adults.



Colonel Geoffrey Ling, MD, PhD, was the final speaker to present, and he spoke about his involvement in the BrainHealth project and promoting brain health as a crucial preventative measure against greater medical conditions and diseases. Colonel Ling referenced the importance of staying “left of boom,” an Army phrase highlighting the importance of promoting cognitive resilience to prevent devastating impacts to one's mental and physical health. The Colonel spoke about the importance of empowering the average citizen to know how to improve their own brain health and fitness, and the need to work collectively and collaboratively with researchers, policymakers, and average Americans to promote brain health movements.

The briefing on New Year's resolutions and brain health and wellbeing concluded with a lively question and answer session between the expert speakers, Congressmen Blumenauer and Luttrell, and the briefing attendees. During the fruitful discussion, Congressman Luttrell spoke about the importance of breaking down the silos that exist in the dissemination of neuroscience research to the public and the importance of destigmatizing brain health. The panel concluded with an emphasis on the need for continued federal funding for biomedical research to support brain health research and initiatives.



From left to right: Colonel Ling, Dr. Bond Chapman, Congressman Luttrell, Dr. Boden-Albala, Dr. Lavretsky

A bold next step could be to engage strong bipartisan brain health support for Members of Congress to build a more vibrant future for our nation.