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RESEARCH ADVANCES FROM THE 2026 ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

LONDON, July 16, 2026 — The latest scientific advances reported at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference® 2026 (AAIC®) included new insights into Alzheimer's blood tests for improving diagnosis in primary care and for predicting future cognitive decline.

Other new research reported at AAIC 2026 told the story of global adaptation and expansion of a successful lifestyle intervention to improve cognitive abilities, a promising treatment to ease late-stage Alzheimer's agitation, and new data on the brain health risks of playing soccer. Highlights include:

- Knowing the results of an Alzheimer's blood test helped family doctors diagnose the disease with nearly the same accuracy as specialists in a large real-world study in Sweden.
- A blood test measuring an Alzheimer's-related protein called p-tau217 may help predict a person's risk of developing cognitive decline 5 or 10 years before any memory or thinking problems appear, according to one of the largest studies of its kind.
- A healthy lifestyle program with structured coaching and support – based on the U.S. POINTER Study -- improved cognitive abilities in older adults at risk for cognitive decline across 11 countries in Latin America, confirming this approach can be adapted to work effectively across diverse cultures, languages, and health systems.
- In a Phase 2 clinical trial, a cannabis-derived treatment significantly reduced agitation in people with advanced Alzheimer's and other dementias, offering new hope for comfort and dignity in the final stages of the disease.
- The first and largest study of its kind found measurable differences in brain health in retired professional soccer players.

AAIC is the premier annual conference for presentation and discussion of the latest Alzheimer's and dementia research. This year's conference in London and online attracted more than 11,000 registered attendees and included more than 7,800 scientific submissions. AAIC 2027 will be held in Chicago.

Blood Test Helps Family Doctors Diagnose Alzheimer's Almost as Well as Specialists

In one of the first large real-world studies of its kind, AAIC 2026 researchers found that a blood test for Alzheimer's disease significantly improved diagnostic accuracy in both primary and specialty care settings.

In a study of more than 1,300 patients and 165 physicians in Sweden, family doctors who reviewed blood test results diagnosed Alzheimer's correctly 93% of the time — nearly identical to specialists' 94% accuracy among the same patients. Before seeing the blood test results, family doctors were accurate 65% of the time, compared to 76% for specialists. The blood test closed that gap almost completely.

The test also changed diagnoses or care plans for more than half of all patients in both primary and specialist care. It was most useful in primary care for ruling out Alzheimer's, helping doctors confidently look for other causes when the result was negative.

The Alzheimer's Association has developed a decision support tool for primary care doctors on when and how to use blood biomarker tests, now available on [ALZPro®](#), the Association's online hub for healthcare professionals. Visit pro.alz.org.

[Read the press release on blood tests in primary care.](#)

Blood Test May Help Predict Alzheimer's Risk a Decade Before Symptoms Appear

One of the largest and most comprehensive studies of its kind found that elevated levels of an Alzheimer's-related protein in the blood are associated with a person's future risk of developing cognitive impairment — up to 10 years before any symptoms appear.

The study, published simultaneously in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, included nearly 2,700 cognitively healthy older adults followed for up to a decade. Those with very high levels of a blood-based marker called p-tau217 levels had an estimated 78% chance of developing cognitive impairment within 10 years, and about a 33% chance within five years.

Just as high cholesterol can signal future heart attack risk, elevated p-tau217 may signal future risk of cognitive decline. However, researchers caution that these are early results and this approach is not yet ready for routine clinical use. According to [Alzheimer's Association guidelines](#), blood tests should only be ordered by a doctor for patients already experiencing memory or thinking problems.

The Alzheimer's Association strongly supports the bipartisan Alzheimer's Screening and Prevention (ASAP) Act, which would create a Medicare coverage pathway for future blood-based biomarker screening. Visit alzimpact.org/asap.

[Read the press release on p-tau217 for predicting risk of cognitive decline related to Alzheimer's.](#)

Lifestyle Program Improves Brain Health for Older Adults Across Latin America

A healthy lifestyle program built on the Alzheimer's Association's [U.S. POINTER](#) study intervention improved brain health in older adults at risk for dementia across 11 countries in Latin America — solid evidence that this approach can be adapted to effectively work across countries, cultures, languages, and health systems.

The core program included regular physical activity, specific dietary guidance, cognitive training, social engagement and ongoing heart health monitoring. The program was thoughtfully adapted for local cultures by, for example, incorporating salsa and tango dancing as part of the physical activity component, and locally available foods like avocado and quinoa supported healthy nutrition.

Participants in the LatAm FINGERS study who received structured coaching and peer support showed 55% greater improvement in overall memory, thinking and reasoning than those following a self-guided program over two years. The study included more than 1,000 older adults across sites in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay, and was published simultaneously in *The Lancet*.

At AAIC 2026, the Alzheimer's Association announced (a) a new global clinical trial combining the U.S. POINTER lifestyle intervention with a GLP-1 or similar drug, and (b) six pilot research grants to study how to bring the LatAm-FINGERS program into widespread real-world use in Latin America.

[Read the press release on LatAm-FINGERS results.](#)

Cannabis-Based Treatment Shows Promise for Calming Agitation in Late-Stage Dementia

A combination of two compounds found in cannabis, THC and CBD, significantly reduced agitation in people with advanced Alzheimer's and other dementias in the LiBBY Phase 2 clinical trial.

Agitation affects about half of people living with dementia near the end of life and is one of the most distressing symptoms for patients, families, and caregivers. In the study of 120 participants with severe dementia, benefits were seen within just two weeks of starting treatment. Nearly 90% of patients receiving the treatment showed overall improvement after 12 weeks, compared to 25% on placebo.

This experimental treatment was created specifically for this research study and is not available to the public. Caregivers should never give cannabis or cannabis-related products to a loved one living with any disease that causes dementia without first consulting a doctor.

LiBBY, which was conducted by the National Institute on Aging-funded Alzheimer's Clinical Trial Consortium, is among the first randomized, controlled trials in a hospice-eligible population with dementia. The Alzheimer's Association supports all legitimate avenues of dementia research, and encourages patients, caregivers, and clinicians to engage in shared decision-making when considering treatment options. Visit [alz.org](https://www.alz.org) to learn more.

[Read the press release on the LiBBY trial results.](#)

Study Finds Signs of Brain Health Changes in Retired Professional Soccer Players

As the World Cup captivates fans around the globe, the first and largest study of its kind found measurable differences in brain health in retired professional soccer players — detected in mid-life, years before symptoms of brain disease would typically appear.

Researchers studied 142 retired elite professional soccer players ages 30–60 and compared them to 56 healthy adults with no contact sports history. Former players reported significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety: 31% scored in the clinically significant range for depression compared to 9% of the comparison group. Brain scans showed lower volume in regions important for memory, attention, and emotional regulation.

Additional studies reported at AAIC 2026 found that heading a soccer ball, even in amateur play, was linked to short-term spikes in markers of brain cell injury, and that longer soccer careers were associated with higher risk of the brain disease chronic traumatic encephalopathy.

Protecting your head is one of the Alzheimer's Association's [10 Healthy Habits for Your Brain](#). Visit [alz.org](https://www.alz.org) to learn more.

[Read the press release on soccer and brain health.](#)

AAIC For All: Bringing Dementia Science to the Public

On Thursday, July 16, the Alzheimer's Association hosted [AAIC For All: Community](#), a free, single-day event open to people living with Alzheimer's or another dementia, family members, caregivers, and the general public — in person in London and online. The event featured global experts translating the most significant AAIC 2026 research findings into clear, accessible key takeaways for non-scientific audiences.

Also held that day was [AAIC For All: Clinicians](#), showcasing research highlights from AAIC to expand practical clinical knowledge of dementia diagnosis, treatment, risk reduction, and dementia care. Attendees could earn Continuing Medical Education (CME) and Continuing Education (CE) credits.

Registered attendees can view recordings of all sessions at alz.org/aaic-for-all.

About the Alzheimer's Association International Conference® (AAIC®)

The Alzheimer's Association International Conference (AAIC) is the world's largest gathering of researchers from around the world focused on Alzheimer's and other dementias. As a part of the Alzheimer's Association's research program, AAIC serves as a catalyst for generating new knowledge about dementia and fostering a vital, collegial research community. AAIC 2026 home page: alz.org/aaic

About the Alzheimer's Association®

The Alzheimer's Association is a worldwide voluntary health organization dedicated to Alzheimer's care, support and research. Our mission is to lead the way to end Alzheimer's and all other dementia — by accelerating global research, driving risk reduction and early detection, and maximizing quality care and support. Our vision is a world without Alzheimer's and all other dementia®. Visit alz.org or call 800.272.3900.

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