

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Building A Brain Healthy Community

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **In this BOOST, we share how the BHI is building the first brain healthy community on Florida’s Suncoast.***

Creating brain healthy communities is at the core of the Brain Health Initiative’s (BHI) mission. Community engagement is one of three ways the BHI helps Suncoast residents promote and protect their brain health, optimize their brain performance, and prevent brain illness. The other two components include actively involving the community in the full research and innovation process.

The BHI is built on the foundation of science, community, and innovation that supports preventing brain illness, identifying symptoms of brain illness early, developing, identifying, and implementing innovative brain health interventions, and optimizing brain performance for all ages. Research suggests that brain illnesses such as adolescent mental health challenges and yes, even dementia, can often be mitigated, delayed, or possibly even prevented by choosing a brain healthy lifestyle and reducing risk factors of brain illness. In other words, for the most part, we are in control of our own brain health and performance.

The **Be Brain Healthy** movement, the community engagement component of the initiative, was created by the BHI to mobilize every sector of Florida’s Suncoast— for example, government and public policy, health and wellness, early childhood development, PK-12 and higher education, business, arts and cultural, and religious sectors, as well as the general population — that brain diseases can be prevented by taking action to become informed and educated.

To create a fundamental change in the way we care for our brains, BHI is launching the **Be Brain Healthy: Be Brain Powerful** campaign to leverage the power of the community’s understanding, emotion, and opinions into actions to begin to change the narrative on brain health and brain illness. With research as its foundation, the Be Brain Healthy: Be Brain Powerful movement and campaign aim to:

- Promote and protect lifelong brain health and optimal performance at the individual and community level.
- Elevate the subject of brain health to encourage action-oriented and meaningful conversations, while destigmatizing brain illness.
- Encourage behavior change that science shows us can help improve brain health and optimize brain performance across the lifespan.

“Can you imagine the benefits here on the Suncoast if we knew specifically what steps we could take and when to take them in order to have the most impact on building our brain health, optimizing our brain’s performance, and preventing brain illness?” asked BHI Founder and Executive Director, Dr. Stephanie Peabody. “We are focused on engaging the community in brain healthy behaviors — and supporting each other in achieving brain healthy outcomes.”

Earlier this year the BHI launched the LWR Brain Health pilot study with randomly selected participants to collect data specifically about how residents function mentally, socially, cognitively, and biologically. The study is now open to all adults who live, work, learn, or play in LWR. Community participation is a critical component of the study as the results will help to inform the science that is essential to building a brain healthy community — one that promotes and protects brain health and prevents and fights brain illness.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

In the eighteen months that it has been in existence, the BHI has developed and launched, or is preparing to launch, a number of programs and activities that bring brain healthy programs to individuals, families, and the community for personal and professional development. Please visit our [website](#) to learn you can get how you can get involved in these programs.

- **30-Day BE BRAIN HEALTHY: BE BRAIN POWERFUL® Challenge.** Utilizing an evidence-based approach, the challenge is aimed at educating individuals and families about promoting and protecting their brain health. Science shows that encouraging conversations and behavior can help improve brain health and optimize brain performance across the lifespan. This ongoing effort encourages brain healthy lifestyle changes that support brain health and optimal performance — eating well, staying active, sleeping well, controlling risk, exercising the brain, and connecting with friends and family.
- **Brain Health Scholar Program.** Youth leaders over the age of 16 have the opportunity to work with BHI clinicians and scientists in their effort to promote and protect brain health, fight brain illness, and improve performance for all ages throughout the Suncoast region. Primarily working remotely, the scholars spend roughly 20 hours per semester helping carry out the BHI community engagement and research agenda in Sarasota and Bradenton. Their work focuses on helping to raise brain health literacy and to better understand the brain health and well-being concerns, values, priorities, and attitudes of both youth and adults from the region. The Brain Health Scholar program is an inclusive program free to young leaders nominated by BHI partnering

organizations with interest in the fields of science, medicine and/or health and well-being.

- **Brain Health Matters! Lecture Series.** The *Brain Health Matters!* monthly lecture series features world-thought leaders who share evidence-based information and guidance on how to support brain health, brain development, brain aging, and performance across the lifespan.
- **Brain Health Boosts!** The Brain Health Boosts! began as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and have transitioned to twice weekly posts related to relevant and current events in brain health, as well as resources specific to supporting BHI's brain health pillars and protective factors.
- **PRIDE Training for Mental Health and Well-Being.** The BHI has evaluated and selected the established Massachusetts General Hospital, and Harvard Medical School PRIDE Training Institute as a partner to help address the mental health challenges facing youth in Sarasota and Manatee counties. The services of the PRIDE Training Institute will initially be offered through the Brain Health Scholar program and aim to increase access to mental health care by training and coaching community paraprofessionals to deliver cognitive behavioral skills to youth.
- **BHI Brain Health Community Educator.** This level of engagement is designed for individuals of all ages who want to become trained as a Brain Health Community Educator. These individuals will commit to developing the competencies and confidence to become a BHI educator of brain health.
- **Brain Health Training for Professionals.** These programs include BHI education and training designed for licensed medical and health professionals and separate programming for wellness, and fitness professionals. It provides them with brain health education information, skills, and tools they can incorporate into their existing practice with patients and clients. The BHI's hope is to revolutionize the approach to brain health by promoting brain healthy education and lifestyles and offering explicit training regimens for health professionals that increase prevention outcomes and support a community-based brain health continuum of care.
- And don't forget to **BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a lifestyle** that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:
 - Stress resilience
 - Nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Social connection
 - Emotional wellbeing
 - Meaning and Purpose
 - Cognitive stimulation and creativity
 - Engaging with nature
 - General health
 - Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention, and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).