MAXITIA PROJECT INC.

October 15, 2026

The Malnutrition and Dementia Crisis

Biochemical Pathways, Diagnostic Blindspots, and Community Intervention Strategies

Global dementia cases are projected to more than double over the next 25 years, rising from an estimated 11.4 million new cases annually in 2023 to **24.7 million new cases a year by 2050**, driven by an aging population and persistent health inequities. Malnutrition, both micronutrient deficiency and overall food insecurity—plays a major biological and environmental role in predisposing individuals to cognitive decline and dementia.

1. How Malnutrition Predisposes to Dementia

- **Micronutrient Deficiencies and Neurotransmission:** Essential vitamins and minerals function as vital cofactors for enzyme systems, neurotransmitter synthesis, and cellular repair. Deficiencies in B vitamins (B12, B6, and folate) disrupt one-carbon metabolism, leading to a dangerous buildup of homocysteine in the blood. High homocysteine levels promote cerebrovascular damage, oxidative stress, blood-brain barrier dysfunction, and the accumulation of neurofibrillary tangles and amyloid plaques. Antioxidants (Vitamins C and E) and Omega-3 Fatty Acids (DHA/EPA) deficiencies further compromise defensive mechanisms, gray matter volume, and neural network connectivity.
- **Chronic Inflammation and the Gut-Brain Axis:** Poor nutritional quality—such as diets heavy in ultra-processed foods or lacking whole foods—triggers metabolic dysfunction, insulin resistance, and systemic inflammation. Malnutrition and systemic pro-inflammatory cytokines (such as TNF-alpha and IL-6) cross or signal through the blood-brain barrier, activating microglial cells in the brain, accelerating synaptic loss and neuron death.
- **Food Insecurity and Stress Pathways:** Food insecurity introduces chronic psychological and physiological stress. High systemic cortisol levels over long periods impair the hippocampus—the memory center of the brain—increasing vulnerability to cognitive impairment. Research from the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research shows that experiencing food insecurity later in life substantially multiplies the risk of probable dementia.
- **The Bi-Directional Trap:** Malnutrition is both a cause and a consequence of cognitive decline. As early-stage dementia, stroke, or Parkinson's disease impairs executive function, memory, and physical swallowing mechanics, patients frequently stop shopping, cooking, or eating adequately. This secondary undernutrition accelerates brain atrophy, creating a destructive feedback loop.

2. The Clinical Blindspot: Missed Nutritional Assessments

The omission of standardized nutritional assessments during healthcare encounters creates a critical blind spot, leading to a severe underdiagnosis of malnutrition across

clinical settings. Key factors driving this clinical gap include:

- **Overreliance on Weight and BMI:** Clinicians frequently use body mass index (BMI) or weight as a sole proxy for nutritional status. This completely fails to detect sarcopenic obesity—where a patient loses muscle mass but maintains or gains fat tissue due to poor nutrient intake—leaving malnourished individuals undiagnosed.
- **Symptom Masking and Diagnostic Overshadowing:** Physical signs of malnutrition (such as fatigue, muscle weakness, confusion, or apathy) are routinely misattributed to normal aging, frailty, or existing conditions like depression and early-stage dementia.
- **Lack of Standardized Screening Protocols:** Unlike vital signs, nutritional screening is rarely a mandated or automated part of standard triage. When validated tools like the Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA) or Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST) are omitted, clinicians rely on subjective judgment, catching fewer than half of actual cases.
- **Insufficient Clinical Training & Systemic Constraints:** Medical and nursing curricula historically allocate very few hours to clinical nutrition, leaving providers ill-equipped to spot subtle physical markers of muscle wasting. Furthermore, brief encounter windows and rigid electronic health record (EHR) configurations rarely prompt or prioritize nutritional evaluations.

3. Community Intervention: Maxitia Project Inc.

Maxitia Project Inc. addresses these diagnostic and educational gaps in public health through targeted community health education programs. By bringing nutritional knowledge and assessment strategies directly to grassroots communities, the non-profit targets the root behavioral and environmental factors that fuel chronic conditions like dementia, diabetes, and hypertension through:

- **Accessible Forums and Bilingual Workshops:** Hosting health forums and workshops four times per week featuring a collaborative network of medical professionals, nutritionists, and health experts. Many educators utilize bilingual capabilities to deliver culturally relevant, easy-to-understand guidance directly to diverse populations.
- **Culturally Competent Screening and Health Shepherding:** Under the leadership of clinical experts like Dr. Hector Javier Castro and CEO Isabel Leticia Castro, frontline workers teach community members how to recognize baseline indicators of malnutrition. Their Health Shepherding Program actively helps at-risk individuals navigate healthcare infrastructure and request objective clinical nutrition assessments.
- **Proactive Management of Malnutrition:** Workshops focus on utilizing budget-friendly whole foods, understanding macro- and micronutrient requirements, and managing nutritional status alongside existing metabolic comorbidities.

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Preventive Impact Matrix

Preventive Mechanism	Biological & Clinical Impact	Risk Reduction
Mitigating Vascular Risks	Correcting nutritional deficiencies directly counters the progression of type 2 diabetes and hypertension. Controlled blood sugar and blood pressure prevent microvascular damage in the brain.	Lowers Vascular Dementia Risk: Preserves white matter integrity and prevents silent micro-strokes.
Slowing Systemic Inflammation	Transitioning communities away from inflammatory, nutrient-poor diets reduces systemic pro-inflammatory cytokines.	Suppresses Neurodegeneration: Controls microglial overactivation, shielding neurons from toxic protein accumulation (amyloid/tau).
Arresting the 'Bi-Directional' Trap	Educating caregivers to recognize malnutrition early means intervention happens before cognitive decline ruins a patient's eating mechanics.	Preserves Function: Prevents the rapid brain atrophy and accelerated cognitive decline associated with late-stage undernutrition.

President & CEO & Co-Founder
Isabel Leticia Castro

Vice-President & Co-Founder
Leticia Villegas, M.D.

Board Of Trustee Member & Co-Founder
Dr. Dale Alexander, D.O.

Director Of Community Health & Wellness Education and Program Development
Hector Javier Castro, M.D.

Community Health Educator & New Jersey Program Coordinator
Lorena Ramos, C.M.A.

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