

The Brain Injury Association of Florida, Inc. (BIAF), is a nonprofit organization founded in 1985 to provide a better quality of life to individuals who have suffered a traumatic brain injury (TBI) and their families. A TBI is often a life-changing experience; BIAF helps these individuals and their families with the difficult problems and long-term consequences of TBI. BIAF promotes awareness, prevention, research, education, support services, and advocacy. The organization is composed of individuals with TBIs, their families and caregivers, as well as professionals who work in the brain injury field. BIAF considers itself to be the group that is "Connecting the TBI Family to a Lifetime of Hope and Opportunity."

It is currently estimated that the number of individuals living with a TBI in Florida exceeds 210,000. This number is expected to increase to 260,000 by the year 2020. Approximately 97,000 TBIs occur in Florida annually resulting in 4,000 deaths, 19,000 hospitalizations and 74,000 visits to the emergency room. Approximately 8,300 of these injuries result in long-term disabilities. Causes of TBIs include falls (39.6%), motor vehicle crashes (20.8%), and assaults (11.1%).

The groups at greatest risk for TBIs include children ages 1-4, young adults ages 15-24, and adults over the age of 65. The occurrence of TBI in adults over the age of 65 is greater in Florida than nationally as evidenced by the following statistics:

	Florida per 100,000	Nationally per 100,000
Deaths	36.9	35.5
Hospitalizations	183.2	173.5
Emergency Room Visits	439.2	244

To put these figures in perspective, according to the Center for Disease Control, an older adult is treated in an emergency room for a fall every 18 seconds; and of this group, someone dies every 35 minutes as a result of their injuries.

BIAF is headquartered in Tallahassee and has offices in Gainesville, Jacksonville, Miami, Orlando, Pensacola, Broward County, Sarasota and Tampa. The local offices are staffed by Family/Community Support Specialists who provide support services by phone and/or in the individual's home and community. Services provided include individualized information, education, support and advocacy to, with and on behalf of individuals with TBI and their families. These services are provided free of charge to those individuals with TBI and their families/caregivers. Individuals may apply for services directly or be referred by a doctor, facility or agency. Individuals must be a legal resident of Florida and a legal citizen of the United States.

BIAF's prevention efforts include a program entitled "Be Head Smart, Seniors." The program, which incorporates interactive presentations with readily available printed material, encourages seniors to take action to prevent head injuries. The program's brochure contains a list of preventative measures for seniors and is available on BIAF's website as indicated below. The program's presentations, entitled "HeadSmartz," are offered free of charge to senior centers and groups of 20 or more seniors and/or caregivers. In addition, special versions of the "HeadSmartz" program are offered by fire and life educators as well as law enforcement officers throughout the state. BIAF also trains trainers in order to meet the growing demand for education.

BIAF is also pioneering a "Walking Buddies" program with support from the Florida Department of Health. Students from eight colleges around the state are partnering with seniors to encourage them to get out and walk. Students are given basic training on head injuries. During the twelve-week program, the students visit senior centers, teaming up one-on-one with seniors, to walk together. According to Sandra G. Dreker, Director of Prevention, Education and Outreach for BIAF, "With falls now the number one cause of injury and death, it's important that people ages 60+ take action to reduce their risk of falling and the devastating traumatic brain injuries that can result. Regular walking improves balance and improved balance means fewer falls."

More information regarding BIAF can be found on the internet at [www.biaf.org](http://www.biaf.org) or by calling BIAF's Family Help Line at 800-992-3442.