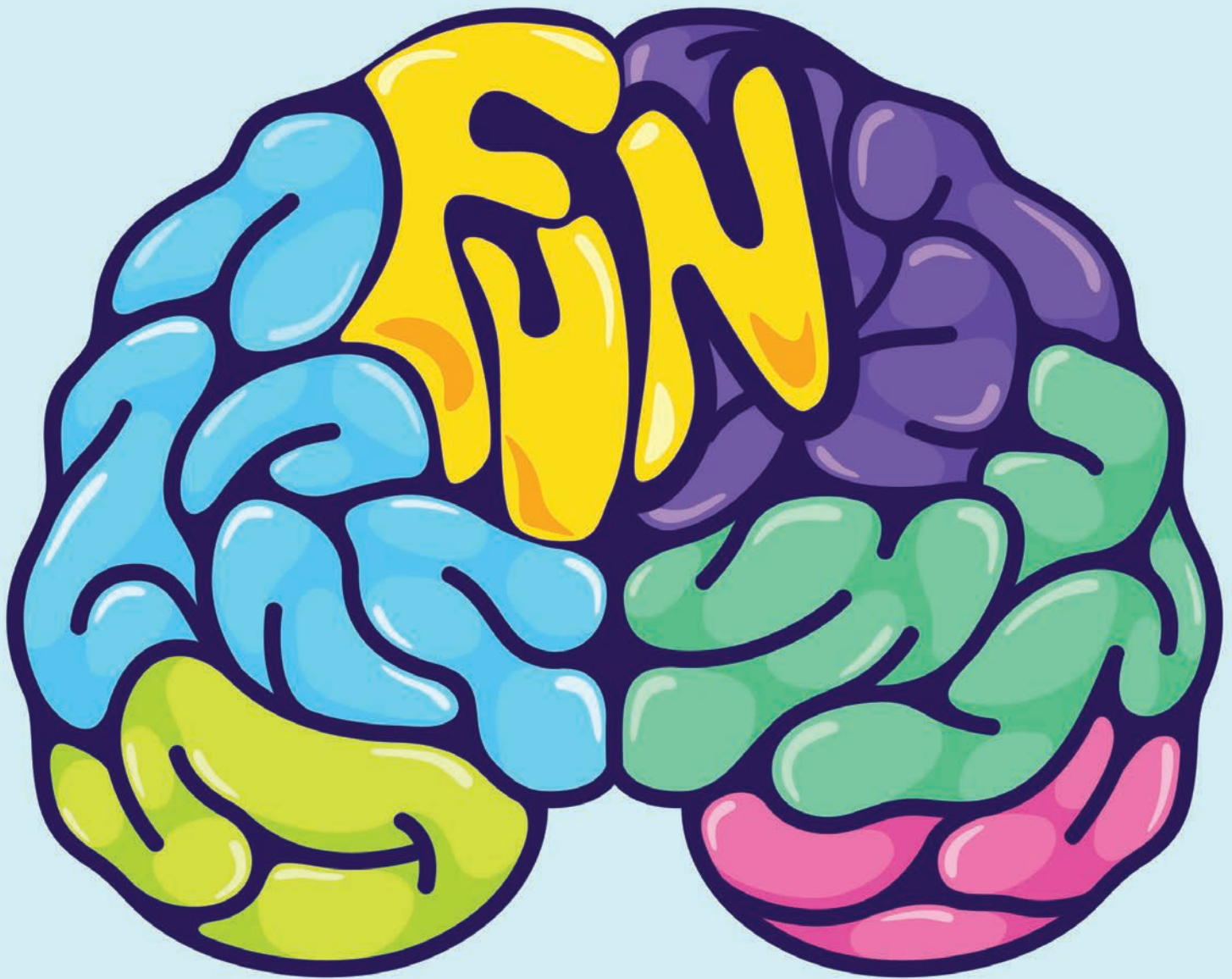


the Power of



**BRAIN INJURY ALLIANCE OF ARIZONA
A QUALIFIED CHARITABLE TAX ORGANIZATION!**



Your brain wants you to read this!

Your brain knows a great deal when it sees one, especially one that helps brains everywhere.

When you contribute up to \$938 to the Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona, the state of Arizona will thank you with up to \$938 on your 2024 taxes.

What's the catch?

No catch, just a win/win: We're a Qualifying Charitable Organization (QCO) and you're a wonderful, thoughtful, caring person who wants to help survivors of brain injury, their families, and caregivers. We also provide free programs and resources promoting brain health for everyone.

Here's how it works —

	INDIVIDUAL	JOINT
AZ STATE TAXES OWED	\$470	\$938
YOUR GIFT TO BIAAZ	\$470	\$938
TOTAL DUE TO AZ	\$0	\$0

QCO CODE:22360 • EIN 94-2937165 • BIAAZ.ORG/TAX-CREDIT

Can any Arizona taxpayer do this?

Yes, and it comes right off the top of your Arizona state taxes, with no itemization required. See how this works? **You take care of your brain; your brain takes care of you.**



**Brain Injury
Alliance**
ARIZONA

Making the invisible visible since 1983

BIAAZ.org | info@biaaz.org
HELPLINE — 888.500.9165

SCAN QR CODE TO
MAKE YOUR TAX
CREDIT DONATION
TODAY!



Contents

FEATURE

The Power of Fun

Page 6

BRAIN HEALTH

Four Questions on Fun

Page 10

GOOD NEWS

Out And About In The Community

Page 12

BRAIN HEALTH INSIDER

Rules of Fun

Page 14





fun /fən/ Noun: enjoyment, amusement, or lighthearted pleasure.

Friends and Colleagues:

Welcome to a very special edition of The Noggin! We've been looking forward to this issue hitting your mailbox and email inbox. I don't think we talk enough about the topic of fun and enjoyment, yet it's probably the secret ingredient in our well-being, quality of life, and resilience.

Whether you are a survivor of brain injury redefining what fun is to your post-injury life or a busy professional trying your best to schedule some time in your calendar for fun, I hope this issue will make you pause and think. Perhaps you'll ponder a bit about how to sprinkle some more fun into your life or ask yourself what fun is to you. Maybe next time you're trying a new hobby, you'll let go of the fear of doing it wrong and just have fun.

Our brains are wired to seek out and maximize our experiences of pleasure. While kids are the all-time masters of making everyday things fun, even adults can learn how to have fun by being more present and leaning into playfulness, connection with others, and going with the flow of life.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this issue and made it happen, from Dr. Eve Valeria in her research lab at Harvard University to Doug Dolan at Recovery in the Pines working hard to help those dealing with addiction recover, both professionals and survivors shared openly their thoughts on the science and application behind this important topic for this issue.

Wherever you are on your journey right now and however you are feeling, I hope this issue of the Noggin has something to inspire you and brighten your day. And remember, when all else fails, a pillow fort just might be the answer.



Wishing you strength, resilience, and a future filled with hope...

Carrie Collins | CEO • Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona
carrie@biaaz.org — 602-508-8024 ext. 101

OUR MISSION—To improve the quality of life for everyone impacted by brain injury by providing advocacy, education, information, support, and resources, while promoting brain injury prevention

OUR VISION—A world where all individuals impacted by brain injury thrive in their community

OUR VALUES—*Integrity*: Being dependable and following through on commitments | *Excellence*: Modeling a positive example as we pursue high expectations | *Collaboration*: Actively listening and working together for a common purpose by brain injury thrive in their community



**Brain Injury
Alliance**
ARIZONA

Drunk & Distracted Driving

Survivor Virtual Support Group

Fourth Friday of the Month
1:00-2:00PM (PST)

- This group is for those injured in a drunk driver or distracted driver-related accident
- Facilitated by professionals, meets virtually, and focuses on living well with post-brain injury related challenges
- For survivors only

Come to learn, share, and grow,
wherever you may be in your healing journey.

REGISTER TO JOIN

Scan QR code or visit
biaaz.org/ddd-group



Call 888-500-9165 | info@biaaz.org | biaaz.org

Facilitated By
Janice Podzimek,
Certified Brain Injury
Specialist

The Power of Fun

Recovery from brain injury demands focus, dedication and incredible resilience. But a life well lived needs laughter, joy, the company of others and, sometimes, being just plain silly or playing with a pet.



Doug Dolan

Everyone needs fun in their life to maintain good emotional and mental health, and that includes brain injury survivors.

Often, fun plays an integral role in rebuilding one's mind and capabilities post-injury. It helps strengthen bonds between friends and family members navigating a new normal, easing the jarring shift into radically changed relationship dynamics.

Perhaps most importantly, though, fun reminds everyone that life is worth living, even amongst challenges that bring very dark days.



The Benefits of Fun

Doug Dolan, COO of Recovery in the Pines, a substance abuse and

mental health recovery program in Prescott, Arizona, believes using fun as part of the recovery process is essential.

There's a lot of overlap between the brain injury and substance misuse recovery demographics. Substance misuse often leads to brain injury, either from accidents that happen while inebriated, changes to the physical brain from long-term use or apoxia from overdose.

Much like brain injury survivors, people recovering from substance misuse often find themselves tangled in a web of physical, emotional and systemic hurdles to overcome, all at the same time. Their bodies may be permanently disabled, or their cognitive and emotional states may be radically changed.

All of which makes just the idea of fun

seem impossible.

“It’s going to be tough to feel like really fun,” Doug said. “You have somebody going through a crisis, and it’s not typically just the substance abuse or related issues. You almost always have other factors like strained relationships, strained jobs or lost employment. Usually, there’s some impact on finances, there could be legal things.”

But this, Dolan says, is when fun is most important.

“You have to find ways to understand that there are things of joy in life,” Dolan said. “And I might not feel it at first because I’m in a moment of crisis, but the moment I do these things it helps the brain calm down.”

The type of fun, however, matters. Dolan’s program focuses on healthy and normal dopamine production, which is precisely the opposite impact of modern technology, which generally overstimulates the brain and can engender addictive patterning.

“What we try to stay away from is those things that will overstimulate individuals,” Dolan said.

That’s why many recovery programs focus on various physical activities, especially those involving groups. Dolan named a slew of activities he uses to help people on their recovery journey. They include going to the gym, hiking in the forest, swimming, fishing or engaging in team sports like flag football.

“It’s healthy for an individual to get up and move,” Doug said. “Men in particular appreciate feeling like, ‘Hey, my body is coming back into shape,’ which also then helps other aspects of the brain heal.”

Physical activities tend to be even more

beneficial when they’re done in groups. They help combat the specific kind of internal, psychic isolation so many brain injury survivors can fall into long after their initial physical recovery is complete.

“You may be showing up at jobs; you may be showing up with your family,” Dolan said. “But you’ll just get the sense you’re not as open, you’re not communicating as much anymore.”

More than creating social ties, group activities help physically heal the brain and regulate the body.

“These activities we’re talking about are social bonding activities,” Dolan said. “It’s about plugging back in with people; it’s about connecting with people in healthy ways. So that just really helps us with serotonin levels, oxytocin levels, healthy dopamine production, things of that nature.”

Though many survivors may have permanent injuries or disabilities that don’t enable participation in group sports, that doesn’t mean they can’t still benefit from being outdoors or spending time with people.

After all, group activities don’t have to be physically intensive to help healing and be fun. Dolan’s clients, just like BIAAZ’s social groups, will do things like go bowling or go to a movie.

And most of these activities are either low-cost or free. Resource facilitation groups like BIAAZ often sponsor, host or facilitate social groups, so no one has to miss out on a good time.

continued next page



Gamifying Recovery to Add Fun

Few people have embraced the spirit of fun while leveraging its benefits than stroke survivor Kevin Moriarty.

In January of 2021, Moriarty's stroke left him partially paralyzed and with serious cognitive recovery to do. He'd always loved games, especially chess, but quickly realized it would take some work to get back to playing them.

"When I first got out of the hospital, I couldn't really play chess even though I could before," Moriarty said. "I felt like I was kind of drifting around."

Still, that didn't stop him from trying. Over the next several weeks and months, he began to play again, bit by bit.

He even found a way to gamify his physical rehabilitation. While working to regain mobility on his left side, Moriarty would throw a juggling ball into the air with his right hand and try to catch it with his left hand, which he couldn't open very well 100 times.

"Initially, out of a 100 times I threw it, I would have zero catches," he said. "After two weeks, I was able to throw it and catch it 100 times out of a hundred."



Folding games into Moriarty's therapy seemed like a natural choice to Mattie Cummins, his counselor and the founder of Cerebrations.

"Kevin voiced his love of games and puzzles during my first meeting with him," Cummins said. "Not only are games a crucial part of his rehabilitation process but also are critical in building his confidence to get back to work and life after brain injury."

For the next two years, continuing to today, Moriarty volunteered to teach both adults and kids how to play chess and run several game nights.

"Not only does Kevin love games, but he also loves working with kids," Cummins said.

"Finding a creative volunteer position where he gets to do the two things he loves was really important, and it's so much fun for our team to watch him on this journey of working after brain injury."

The fun of playing a game keeps people motivated to play it, increasing the overall benefits.

"The more fun it is, the more likely it is that you'll continue to do it," Moriarty says. "And I literally think you can physically benefit just more than enjoying it."

Moriarty also played specific board games to target areas of his mental recovery. When doctors told him his executive function was adversely impacted by his stroke, he learned that meant his ability to engage in deductive reasoning.

"So there are some games that are really

good at that, so I did those too," he said.

He played *X Minus 1*, *Code 777*, and *sudoku*, among others.

"It helps develop those areas," Moriarty said.

And, Moriarty acknowledges, it's also a great way to connect with others.

"I like to come up with the strategy; I like the interaction with other people," Moriarty says. "I usually tell a bunch of bad jokes. It's really a matter of connecting with other people."

He also sees games as a fun and beneficial mental challenge that fosters healing. He calls this his "tiger poop theory."

"When you're playing chess, your brain doesn't know that it's just a game and it's not important if you win or lose," Moriarty explained. "I think your brain thinks that you're being chased by a tiger and so it thinks, 'Uh-oh, we have a problem, so we better figure out how to solve this or we'll become tiger poop.'"

So, the brain rises to the challenge, eventually healing and improving.

It's not a bad theory, and Moriarty only needs to look in the mirror to see proof of it.

"Used to be I lost a lot of games, now I win pretty much every game," he said.

Playing games also gives Moriarty what he calls an "objective measurement of his improvement."

"Pretty much every game I play is a challenge initially," he said. "And now I'm pretty good at grasping how to play pretty quickly, versus when I started, I didn't really get it."

That certainly isn't the case today. Moriarty's son comes over every Sunday to play games. Though he tends towards strategy games, Moriarty is just as likely to play other kinds of games, too, like *Poetry for Neanderthals* or *Instructures*. He's even developing his own game prototype.

Rediscovering Fun

Not every brain injury survivor will necessarily remember what they thought of as fun before their injury, however.

Still, Dolan says rediscovering what's fun is a natural part of the recovery process. One way is to think of a hobby or interest a person engaged in when they were younger, even if only casually.

Cummins agrees that prior interests can be the key to unlocking future fun in a survivor's life.

"After a brain injury, people find their footing faster in this 'new normal' by incorporating the parts of their life that the person already knows, loves and enjoys," she said.

There's also always trying new things to see what works.

"It is about going out and putting themselves out there and trying new things," he said. "That always helps to give somebody that kind of sense of purpose, and that sense of fun."

No one questions that the road to recovery after serious brain injury is long and grueling in a myriad of ways. But that doesn't mean there can't be at least some fun along the way. It can also be a vital part of any survivor's new normal.



Four Questions on FUN



Can Bollywood dancing keep the blues away? Carrie Collins, CEO of BIAAZ, recently had the chance to talk with Dr. Eve Valera of Harvard University about the role of fun and laughter in our everyday lives.

Question 1 | Collins: What do you do for fun?

Valera: Dance! It could be hip hop, rap, salsa, merengue, reggaeton, house, club, Bollywood – no seriously Bollywood! Bollywood dancing is sooo much fun!! But ultimately the form of dance doesn't matter. I was probably dancing salsa in my mother's womb! Simply put – it gives me incredible joy.

I also love to laugh! So, I try to put myself in situations and surround myself with people who make me laugh as much as possible. I still live by a phrase I wrote under my picture in a yearbook: The most wasted day of all is

that on which we have not laughed. It was written by a French playwright, Sebastian Roch Nicolas Chamfort, in the mid 1700s.

I also must mention my love of traveling! To experience new cultures, scream with high adrenaline adventures (e.g., sky diving), snuggle sleepily with my puppy and bunny, swim, skip rocks and capture crabs with my kiddo at the beach, and splurge on weekly date nights with the hubby.

Question 2 | Collins: What is one of your earliest memories of having fun?

Valera: Ahhhh – thank you for asking this! It brings back such heartwarming memories!

My "Aunt Angie" would vacuum her black cat. We – my identical twin and I – were raised in a pretty strict household and did

not get many "extras" (though we had everything we needed!). Aunt Angie would spoil us and make us laugh.

We loved walking a few houses down the street (in those days it was safe to do that

even at a very young age!) where we would be entertained by her antics and truly vivacious personality. She would treat us like little angels, give us yummy goodies as we sat at her table and laughed at her funny com-

ments, and send us shrieking through the house as she giddily vacuumed her beautiful black cat. She was a ray of sunshine for which I will be forever grateful.

Question 3 | *Collins: My Girl Scout troop leader recently passed away from dementia. One of my many vivid memories of her is nearly 40 years ago on a trip to Toronto she took us cruising in her truck at night on Yonge Street. We were a bunch of girls giggling, hooting, and hollering. It was pure joy. Even though we were kids, she respected us as individuals, and she respected our ideas, and she was a fun person.*

So, I had a childhood and young adulthood where I have some positive and fun formative experiences to draw from. Others are not so lucky. How can we as individuals support or understand so that we can serve survivors of trauma who have not had the same experiences in trust, joy and fun that we might have had?

Valera: I think it boils down to the basics, treating others with respect, compassion, dignity, and how we would like to be treated ourselves.

Not everyone has “trauma-informed”

training, and not everyone can understand how trauma may change how people view later experiences or lose faith they may have held previously.

However, everyone can listen, be non-judgmental, and offer basic sources of support (a ride, a meal, lunchtime walks). When we act in this way, we create an opportunity for trust, which will ultimately bring with it the opportunity to experience joy, to hopefully create moments like the ones they did not get to experience as a child.

Question 4 | *Collins: For someone who has left an abusive situation or survived an assault, it can be a jarring feeling to catch yourself having fun or enjoying life. Anger can be a protection, a control, or a way of honoring that something bad happened. What do you say to someone who needs to reestablish joy or fun in their life?*

Valera: This is a great and important question! I guess I would say, “You deserve to enjoy life!”

Unfortunately, in abusive relationships, the person experiencing the abuse has often been told repeatedly by the abuser that they are not worth anything, that they are bad people, that no one else likes them and they don’t deserve anything better or anything good. It can be difficult not to internalize that

after constantly being told these things by the person you love.

I would tell that person the opposite of all those things and help them learn how to say the opposite to themselves every day until they believe it. Ideally, they could set a schedule to gradually allow some fun things into their lives as they try to retrain their brain that it is ok and even healing to have fun.



Out & About in the Community



CycloMesa Brings Opportunity for Education

Three cheers for the City of Mesa for another great CycloMesa event. BIAAZ attended Mesa's annual active transportation festival to educate people on preventing brain injuries through proper helmet usage.



Leadership on Cancer Detection Recognized

BIAAZ advocates met with Rep. Debbie Lesko, R-AZ, to thank her for supporting legislation that could advance cancer screening.



Jen Wins

Jen was the big winner on our trip to Rogue Rhino Gardens in Queen Creek during our class on creating essential oils. Jen won a week's worth of produce from the farm.



Pizza Social at Spinato's a Success

Survivors of brain injury joined Alliance staff for pizza and conversation. Lynn celebrated the social event by creating a unique pizza pie with grilled chicken, artichoke hearts, red peppers, garlic, kalamata olives, ricotta, spinach, and mushrooms. It was delicious.



Tucson Botanical Gardens Hosts BIAAZ

Twenty brain injury survivors were recently able to enjoy an extraordinary ocean exhibit in the desert thanks to funds raised from BIAAZ's Run, Walk, & Roll event in March. Our community members received a guided tour of Washed Ashore: Art to Save the Sea, and strolled the beautiful garden grounds. An exotic flair is added with a visit to Butterfly Magic, a natural oasis with hundreds of butterflies and tropical plants not seen in the Southwest.



Lip Lab Trip Yields Fabulous Results

Cynthia, Michelle, and Jen headed to Lip Lab in Scottsdale to test out whether creating custom lipstick is a suitable outing for a large group of brain injury survivors. The women assessed the noise level, clarity of instructions, ease of parking, access to the venue space, and overall quality of the activity. Each made a custom lipstick, named it, and took it home. Fabulous news – the activity passed the test! We're already finalizing plans for a large group outing in July.



Mimi's Tips for Fun After Brain Injury



Mimi Hayes is a Denver-based stand-up comedian and author of "I'll Be OK, It's Just a Hole in My Head." At 22, she was starting her career as a high school history teacher when she had a brain hemorrhage on a blind date. Since then, Mimi has been using her story to help others heal and find the humor in recovery. She currently travels the world with her comedy and coaches survivors, helping them unlock creative ways to tell their life story.

Tip # 1 | Don't Compare!

Your journey is your own and it will look different than everyone else's. Embrace your uniqueness!

Tip # 2 | It's OK to be vulnerable

On dates, I always bring up my brain injury! It's a litmus test to see if the person can engage with my story and make me feel safe and heard. And if they dismiss it? On to the next!

Tip # 3 | Try new things constantly

I am always looking for new hobbies and creative activities. I've planted tomatoes, crocheted a few bad scarves, made collages, and gotten on stages to tell jokes. Have fun exploring new things that maybe you've never done before. Don't worry about being "good" at it. It's actually more fun when you don't know what you're doing!

Tip # 4 | Your friendships will change over time, and that's OK

I am always looking for new hobbies and creative activities. I've planted tomatoes, crocheted a few bad scarves, made collages, and gotten on stages to tell jokes. Have fun exploring new things that maybe you've never done before. Don't worry about being "good" at it. It's actually more fun when you don't know what you're doing!

Tip # 5 | Set healthy boundaries with friends & family

Communicate your needs often to your people. Let them know what you need. Do you prefer the TV off now during dinner to reduce sound and stay sane? Say that. Need a quiet space to escape to during family functions when things get hectic? Let them know. Your inner circle can only take care of you if you tell them what you need.



**Brain Injury
Alliance**
ARIZONA

presents

SALUTE OUR VETS



RUN FOR BRAIN HEALTH
10K & 5K RACE / 1-MILE FUN RUN

Saturday, October 12, 2024 • 7:00 - 9:30am
Brandi Fenton Memorial Park in Tucson

Join the movement to help veterans get back on track!

With more than 600,000 veterans in Arizona, there is a growing need to help those in various stages of recovery from PTSD, brain injury, trauma, or suicidal ideation. Proceeds from this event allow us to continue offering free resources and programs for these heroes, their families, and caregivers.

Be part of this community by giving back to those who have given so much. Your participation will go a long way in helping fight this invisible disability.

INFORMATION

SCAN QR CODE OR VISIT
[BIAAZ.ORG/SOV](https://biaaz.org/sov)



For more information, email
info@biaaz.org or call 888-500-9165

BRAIN HEALTH Leadership Breakfast

Save the Date

RETURN to
WORK after
BRAIN INJURY

Friday, October 30, 2024

8:00am-9:00am

Arizona Biltmore Golf Club



Brain Injury
Alliance
ARIZONA

SCAN QR CODE or visit biaaz.org/bhl



Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona
5025 E. Washington St., Ste 106
Phoenix, AZ 85034