

Help break down stigma and social isolation

“My mom was afraid that if she took a memory test and there was any sign of trouble with her brain she would be locked up in what she referred to as an ‘insane asylum.’ I had no idea she had this fear. I had no idea that anyone thought this would be a potential outcome of a memory test. She now knows that this isn’t the case, but had this fear not existed, I believe that she would have agreed to go for a memory test a year sooner.” – A caregiver

Stigma can affect quality of life throughout the dementia journey. Negative attitudes held by friends, family and health-care providers can often discourage people from getting a diagnosis, seeking treatment and support or disclosing their illness.

The link between stigma and delayed diagnosis is well established. Research has shown how stigma contributes to feelings of shame, lowers self-worth and can result in social isolation. According to a Leger Canada-led online survey conducted for the Alzheimer Society of Canada, one in five people stated that if they lived with dementia, they would avoid seeking help for as long as possible to avoid associated stigma. Similarly, 46 per cent of respondents said they would feel ashamed or embarrassed

if they lived with dementia¹.

Research commissioned by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. also found that more than seven in 10 respondents agreed that people living with dementia experienced some form of stigma².

Recommendation 1: Allocate \$10 million to a three-year, provincewide, public awareness campaign focused on reducing misconceptions about dementia.

According to the Canadian Dementia Priority Setting Partnership, addressing stigma is the top concern for Canadians affected by the disease³. The 2019 World Alzheimer Report⁴ cites that the most promising approaches to reducing stigma include specialized education and targeted public health awareness campaigns.

The Province of B.C. needs to increase investments in public awareness campaigns aimed at dispelling misconceptions about dementia. We see a clear opportunity to build on Priority 1 of the *Provincial Guide to Dementia Care, 2016*⁵. The guide outlines the goal of “increasing healthy behaviours by

1 Leger. (2017, December 13). 2017 Alzheimer’s Awareness Survey. https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2017_Awareness-survey-full-report_Alzheimer-Society.pdf

2 Alzheimer Society of B.C. (2022) Dementia Awareness Research. <https://alzheimer.ca/bc/sites/bc/files/documents/Leger-report-2022.pdf>

3 Canadian Dementia Priority Setting Partnership. (2017). Canadian Dementia Research Priorities. 10 priorities for dementia research in Canada. <https://alzheimer.ca/en/research/10-priorities-dementia-research-canada><https://alzheimer.ca/en/research/10-priorities-dementia-research-canada>

4 Alzheimer Disease International. (2019, September). World Alzheimer Report 2019: Attitudes to dementia. World Alzheimer Report 2019. <https://www.alzint.org/u/WorldAlzheimerReport2019.pdf>

5 Dementia Care IN BRITISH COLUMBIA Achievements and Next Steps. (2016). <https://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2016/bc-dementia-care-guide.pdf>

promoting brain health and improving access to early diagnosis, intervention and community support programs.” These priorities are echoed at the national level in *A Dementia Strategy for Canada: Together We Aspire*⁶.

We call on all parties to commit to investing \$10 million to help raise awareness of dementia across the province, and to complement the goals of the national dementia strategy, if elected.

**Recommendation 2:
Support the development
of dementia-friendly
communities through
an additional \$500,000
investment in targeted
Age-Friendly Communities
grants – bringing the total
investment to \$1 million.**

All members of society have a role to play in supporting people affected by dementia to remain engaged and supported in their daily lives. We need to equip whole communities – including health-care providers, all sectors of B.C.’s workforce and the general public – with basic dementia education. British Columbians need to know how to reach out and communicate with someone who may be living with dementia; how to ensure that programs, services and policies are inclusive and welcoming; and how to ensure that physical spaces are not only accessible and

safe but allow people living with dementia to maximize their independence and engagement in the community.

The Province’s Age-Friendly Communities program provides grant funding for local municipalities to implement projects that support older people to live active, socially engaged, independent lives. This has included projects specific to supporting people affected by dementia. We hope to see an increase in total allocated funding for targeted age-friendly community grants, along with a focus on ensuring the programs developed are inclusive and meet the needs of people from all cultural backgrounds.

We are calling for parties to commit to dementia specific, age-friendly community investments, positioned to support municipalities to engage in dementia-friendly projects. We propose introducing a provincial Dementia Community Investment. This strategic investment can be introduced in tandem with the Age-Friendly Communities grant and could be modeled after a similar commitment in the national dementia strategy, where funding is available for community-based projects that encourage the development of dementia-friendly spaces and programs across all workplace sectors, community organizations and members of the public. To support this, we are recommending an investment of an additional \$500,000 to supplement existing Age-Friendly Communities funding.

⁶ Dementia A STRATEGY FOR CANADA Together We Aspire. (n.d.). https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/images/services/publications/diseases-conditions/dementia-strategy/National%20Dementia%20Strategy_ENG.pdf