Alzheimer Society
BC & YUKON
Fall 2026
Connections
Linking a community of dementia support

Connecting dementia caregivers to information, education and support

Dennis Griffiths and wife Linda

Across BC and the Yukon, more than 50,000 caregivers provide an estimated 67.9 million hours of unpaid support. Many reduce their working hours, take leaves of absence, retire early or leave the workforce entirely to care for someone living with Alzheimer's disease or another dementia.

Nearly half of all dementia caregivers in Canada report feeling distressed – almost twice the rate of people caring for older adults without the disease. Someone caring for a person living with the disease is also more likely to experience depression, emotional stress and financial strain.

At the same time, many people are unsure where to turn for help. A March 2026 poll conducted by Leger Canada on behalf of the Alzheimer Society of BC and Yukon found that six out of 10 people in BC would not know where to go for resources and support if they were concerned about dementia.

The poll also found that most people in BC believe the health-care system is not set up to make the dementia experience straightforward, easy or adequate when it comes to cost, support, diagnosis, treatment and long-term care. Only 19 per cent of British Columbians think that the system is set up to make the journey with dementia straightforward, easy or adequate.

Finding support

If you are affected by dementia, the Alzheimer Society of BC and Yukon can help. Call the First Link® Dementia Helpline at 1-800-936-6033 to learn more about available programs and services.

Learn more! Learn how support and connection can make a difference for caregivers. Dennis Griffiths and his wife share how they found support through our First Link® programs and services. Learn more at alzbc.org/dennis-story.

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Celebrating a year with impact

As we move into the final months of the year, it's an opportunity to reflect on the progress we've made together – and the work that continues.

This year, we've continued to expand support and education across British Columbia and the Yukon, helping more people access the guidance they need. We've also seen thousands of people come together through the *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's,* presented by Go Auto, welcomed new volunteers and strengthened vital partnerships as we continue to raise awareness of the disease.

One thing I have been reminded of repeatedly this year is that dementia doesn't wait for a convenient time. Whether it's the middle of summer, the holiday season or an ordinary Tuesday, families deserve to know that someone is there to help. That's why services like our First Link® Dementia Helpline remain such an important part of our work, providing information, guidance and reassurance when people need it most.

Thank you for being a part of this community. Whether you support our work as a donor, volunteer, partner or advocate, you are helping ensure that people living with dementia and care partners have somewhere to turn throughout their journey. Together, we are building a future where no one faces dementia alone.

Wishing you a safe and peaceful holiday season ahead.

Cathryn France
Interim Chief Executive Officer
Alzheimer Society of BC and Yukon

Latest research funding results

In 2026, the Alzheimer Society Research Program is investing $4.1 million in 31 researchers. The Alzheimer Society Research Program funds dementia research in Canada, through four award categories: Proof of Concept Grant, Doctoral Award, Postdoctoral Award and New Investigator Grant.

Among the successful candidates is Dr. Jonathan Gallego Rudolf at Simon Fraser University in BC. Dr. Gallego Rudolf is the recipient of a Postdoctoral Award for his project, "Neurophysiological activity trajectories across the healthy and pathological lifespan."

Using a safe and non-invasive brain imaging technique that measures the brain's magnetic signals called magnetoencephalography (MEG), Dr. Gallego Rudolf and his team will build one of the world's largest datasets, including both healthy individuals from childhood to older age as well as people living with Alzheimer's disease. By comparing their scans, he hopes to better understand how brain activity changes over our lives and how those changes differ in people at risk of or living with Alzheimer's disease.

Ultimately, these findings could guide the development of treatments aimed at slowing or preventing the disease from progressing, improving the quality of life of people affected by dementia and their families.

Read about the 2026 awardees from across the country at **alzbc.org/asrp2026**.

How caregiving can transform resentment into empathy

Arlene Hildred and her mom, Hazel Van Laak

When lifelong Kelowna resident Arlene Hildred's mother Hazel was diagnosed with vascular dementia in 2021, doctors told the family she likely had five years to live. Those final years became an unexpected opportunity for Arlene to finally heal their relationship, replacing resentment with empathy and peace.

The oldest of four siblings, Arlene found herself taking on the role of her mother's primary caregiver as her mom's needs grew. "I was managing my own health challenges and suddenly I was responsible for my mom," says Arlene.

During the first year after Hazel's diagnosis, life felt manageable – until a family trip revealed how quickly the disease was progressing. Hazel began forgetting to take her medications, spent nights pacing and became dangerously indifferent to risk.

As her mother's needs increased, Arlene found herself coordinating home supports, managing finances and making decisions on her mother's behalf. One of the hardest decisions came when it was no longer safe for her mother to live alone.

With just 48 hours to arrange a move into long-term care, Arlene had to lie to her mother. "The only way to get her there was to tell her she was going for more testing," says Arlene. "She was so angry when she realized she wasn't coming home and I carried that guilt with me."

Moving her mother to a care home closer to Arlene became a turning point. "I'd go and sit with her at lunch every day," she says. "One day I looked at her and thought, 'She's just a little old lady who needs help.' Suddenly, I could see her differently."

For years, Arlene had carried resentment from her childhood. Raised by a single mother of four, she had taken on responsibilities well beyond her years, often acting more like a co-parent than a daughter.

Looking back, Arlene now describes those five years with her mother as a gift. They shared quiet lunches, reminisced about family memories and spent more time together than they had in decades. "I remembered at some point in her life she was once a little girl, a teenager and a mother with hopes and dreams," says Arlene. "When I was able to focus on her with the care that I had to give her, I was able to release the resentment."

Hazel passed away in May 2026 after spending 11 days in hospice with Arlene by her bedside. Although her caregiving journey has ended, the friendships Arlene made through our caregiver support group remain. She also continues to find healing through creativity, painting rocks and giving each one away as small acts of kindness for her community.

Arlene's final advice to caregivers: "Give yourself grace and give the person living with dementia grace," she says. "I gave my mom grace because she did what she could with what she knew and the circumstances that were in her life."

Read Arlene's essay, *She has landed softly into peace*. Visit **alzbc.org/arlene-hildred**.

The 2026 Telethon for Alzheimer's

Cynthia Wong was diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and a First Link® program participant. She shares how supporting the Telethon for Alzheimer's *can help ensure people living with dementia and their families have access to culturally relevant support and services.*

After I retired, I began volunteering and making new friends. However, I also began to notice some memory changes. I would leave my keys in the door or my mind would go blank while taking the bus and I'd forget where I was going. When my friends learned about my concerns, they encouraged me to take a test.

The results came in and I was diagnosed with MCI. I knew that this condition might worsen over time, so I followed my doctor's advice and joined fitness programs at the community centre. This allows me to exercise regularly, stay socially connected with others and build a positive lifestyle.

I also connected with the Alzheimer Society of BC and Yukon. Through their regular support calls, they keep track of my condition, learn about my various needs and offer support whenever possible.

I feel there are still misconceptions about MCI and dementia in the Chinese community. Some people are hesitant to share their condition and avoid letting others know, thus missing the opportunity to seek help. I believe sharing my own experience and learning can encourage more people to face this condition with confidence.

If you are in a similar situation, don't be afraid – seek a diagnosis as early as possible and take care of yourself. For me, understanding your condition and learning to accept it is the first step. You will then have the courage to prepare for the future.

I sincerely invite you to tune in to Fairchild TV1 on Saturday, October 24, at 8:30 p.m. or livestream on Fairchild TV's YouTube channel (@fairchildtv) to watch the *Telethon for Alzheimer's*. The program features interviews with doctors, researchers and Alzheimer Society of BC and Yukon staff, as well as personal stories from other people living with dementia and their caregivers.

Donations made during the *Telethon* will help people in need to benefit from culturally relevant supports and services like the First Link® Dementia Helpline in Chinese, educational workshops and social programs. Thanks to your support, people in need will not have to face this challenging diagnosis alone.

With warmest regards,
Cynthia Wong

Watch the Telethon for Alzheimer's

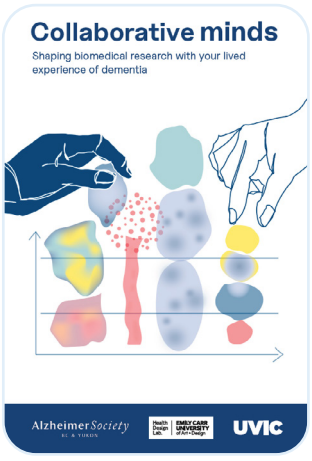
Tune in to Fairchild TV1 on Saturday, October 24, at 8:30 p.m. or livestream on Fairchild TV's YouTube channel (@fairchildtv).

Collaborative minds: Building more inclusive biomedical dementia research

What is biomedical research? Biomedical research investigates the causes of dementia, as well as ways to reduce risk, slow disease progression and develop potential treatments. Researchers may work with people, animals or cells.

Research plays an important role in improving the lives of people affected by dementia. However, there is increasing recognition that this goes both ways – people living with the disease and care partners can meaningfully contribute to research beyond simply participating in studies. While lived experience collaboration is less common in biomedical research, there is a growing interest in creating more inclusive and meaningful opportunities to be involved.

To help bridge this gap, we partnered with the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University of Art + Design and the University of Victoria to bring together biomedical dementia researchers and people affected by the disease to discuss inclusive research practices. These discussions informed the creation of two complementary guides:



Collaborative minds: Shaping biomedical research with your lived experience of dementia

The guide is designed for people affected by dementia who are curious about contributing to biomedical research beyond being a study participant. It explores what collaboration in biomedical research can look like and highlights different ways people can engage.

Collaborative minds: A guide to meaningfully engaging people with lived experience of dementia in biomedical research

This guide supports biomedical researchers in understanding why and how to involve people with lived experience in their studies. It offers practical suggestions and consideration for embedding dementia-inclusive practices across the research process.

Alongside the guides, we've also developed supporting webpages with additional information and resources related to collaborative dementia research. These resources aim to support more inclusive and collaborative approaches to research by:

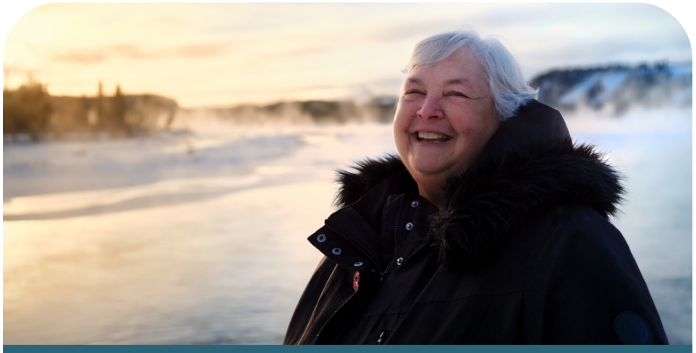
- Highlighting the value of the lived experience perspective.
- Offering practical strategies for engagement
- Encouraging connections between researchers and the dementia community

We hope these resources spark curiosity about what collaboration in dementia research can look like.

Explore the guide and supporting resources at **alzbc.org/collabminds**.

Moving on after caregiving

Shifting identity may be a normal part of moving forward after a caregiving experience, as these three caregivers have experienced. Rediscovering identity is key. Each of these stories is a reminder that it may take time and patience, but moving forward and re-finding your identity is possible.



Pat Hanrath, lived experience partner

Pat's story

In September 2025, Pat Hanrath lost the last of four family members that she and her husband had been caring for during the past decade. One was her mother, who had been living with dementia for several years. "I didn't have time to think about what I might do next week or next summer," says Pat. "Everything depended on how the people we were watching over were doing."

After years of being ready to jump in whenever necessary, Pat realized that she had stopped planning for the future. "So now I stand looking forward and not really sure where I'm going," she said, "I'm not sure I even have the energy to try and figure that out."

When her mom passed away, Pat was surprised to be sad but not overwhelmed. She now sees she was grieving the gradual loss of her mom over many years. Photos and memories shared with friends and family are frequent reminders of the kind woman with the bright smile.

Pat had never anticipated the impact of her caregiving ending. "I'd been so busy, that now I'm not sure what I should put my energy into."

Pat is channeling that energy into volunteering at her local food bank. An interest in traveling has also appeared. Still, Pat realized her energy was lower than before. She decided to look inward and take care of what her body and mind needed by joining a wellness group. She does gentle exercise, has spoken with a counsellor and continues to connect with others in her support group.

Marg's story

Marg is another caregiver who has moved on after supporting a partner living with dementia who passed away a few years ago. Since then, Marg has found herself balancing her grandmother tasks with an informal role walking and talking with other caregivers, offering supportive listening.

This activity has been unintended and unplanned. Yet, the people who need and appreciate her companionship seem to find her. "I haven't got my shingle out. I'm not searching for someone, but they have come my way."

She describes the walking and listening as a gift she both receives and gives. "It's a very small place to fill, but I think it's an important place," says Marg.

Beatrice's story

Beatrice found support from her brother-in-law and a local support group while caring for her husband. When her husband moved into long-term care, she connected with many of the care staff, "it became like another little family."

After his passing, she had to reconcile with not only her husband's death but the fact that her "other family" and the community she had found in her support group were gone too. "My life was boring after he passed."

Seeking social connection, Beatrice moved from her home in the Southern Interior to an independent living residence on the Lower Mainland to be closer to her grandchildren and access more activities. Getting used to a new lifestyle wasn't easy, but "I came through it," she says. "I have my faith behind me."

Today, Beatrice has built a second chapter for herself. She stays busy with chair exercises, bus trips and weekly entertainment. She plays Scrabble with a group of new friends, goes for regular walks and has found a new church. She also cherishes helping her granddaughter prepare for upcoming Christmas craft fairs and finds comfort in being able to visit her husband's resting place, which she made sure was close to her new residence.

Caregivers who have found a sense of community and belonging through our programs and services may wish to continue their connection through our Lived Experience Partner Program. By sharing your firsthand experiences, you can help us advocate for change and help others affected by dementia feel less alone.

To learn more about the program, please email **livedexperience@alzheimerbc.org** or visit **alzbc.org/LivedExperience**.

Dementia-Friendly Communities: Building more inclusive communities

For many people, staying connected to community life is an important part of living well with dementia. Everyday activities – like meeting a friend for coffee, attending a recreation program, taking public transit, shopping or banking – help people maintain independence, confidence, social connections, identity and a sense of belonging.

However, community participation is not always easy. Confusing environments, exclusionary policies and services, not to mention a lack of understanding about dementia among the general public, can discourage people living with dementia from staying engaged in community life.

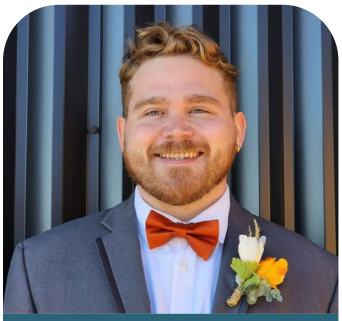
Our Dementia-Friendly Communities initiative works to address these challenges. Since 2015, we've partnered with municipalities, businesses and organizations across BC to create more welcoming

and supportive communities for people living with dementia, and in 2026 we began expanding our reach into the Yukon through workplace partnerships.

We provide education, training and consultation to help all types of businesses and organizations make practical changes to their spaces, services and policies. This work is guided by current research and by the experiences of people living with dementia and their care partners.

To learn more, visit **alzbc.org/dementiafriendly**.

A space to connect: James's story



James Donovan

For caregivers, feeling understood and less alone can make all the difference. That's the kind of space James Donovan hopes to create every time he volunteers as a virtual support group facilitator.

James supports adult children who are caring for a parent living with dementia. He creates an environment where caregivers can speak openly, ask questions and connect with others who truly understand what they're experiencing. "They feel less alone and more capable to handle their day-to-day things that they experience as a caregiver," James says.

James brings both professional and personal experience to the role. When he moved to BC three years ago, he brought with him a background in psychology, experience supporting people with mental health challenges and a personal connection to dementia.

For James, facilitating a support group is about valuing each person and listening to what they have to share before rushing to offer advice. One session in particular has stayed with him: A participant was navigating an incredibly difficult time and as James and his co-facilitator offered support, other group members began sharing their own experiences. One person's story became a moment of understanding and encouragement. "It seemed like a real genuine connected moment," James says. "Everybody was able to support one another and it was really a group, not just individuals meeting."

He commits two hours a month to the support group – time that he sees is meaningful and constructive. For anyone considering volunteering, James encourages them to recognize the skills they already have and think about how those strengths could help others. "Whatever you feel your skill set allows, utilize that and see what comes up for you."

To help people on the dementia journey, like James, and for volunteer opportunities, visit **alzbc.org/rosterfy**.

About Connections

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