

Connections

Linking a community of dementia support



Planning ahead: Beat the heat

Summer is here with warmer days and abundant amounts of sun. While we're lingering in the sunshine and taking advantage of the great outdoors, it's important to know the risks associated with excessive heat, which can be even more challenging when dementia is involved. Take precautions to stay safe! We are here to help families affected by dementia prepare for and cope with such extraordinary circumstances:

Emergency preparedness: Extreme heat and emergencies could happen unexpectedly. Learn about heat safety and preparing an emergency plan on [page 5](#).

Planning for the future: Responding to an emergency will be easier with advance planning, ensuring someone living with dementia will have their health care, financial and legal matters taken care of. Learn more at alzbc.org/personal-care-planning.

For additional questions and support, call our First Link® Dementia Helpline (toll-free):

- English: 1-800-936-6033 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.)
- Cantonese and Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)
- Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu: 1-833-674-5003 (Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

Climb with us in September!

Join us at the *Climb for Alzheimer's* on Sunday, September 24 as we walk or hike to help provide dementia support and education. Learn more on [page 4](#).

In this issue

Greetings
Caregiver story

Page 2
Page 3

Research
Meet the researcher
Volunteering

Page 5
Page 7
Page 8

It's finally summer! Stay safe and prepared this season

Welcome to the summer issue of *Connections*, the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s publication for people affected by or concerned about dementia.

Many of us try to make the most of summer by getting outdoors. It's a time to recharge and reconnect with family and friends. In this issue, we're focusing on extreme heat and the importance of planning ahead and staying safe, including tips for staying cool and preparing for a heat emergency. As well, Kathy Shuflita, a staff member from the interior of B.C., recounts her experience during an emergency evacuation, and guides us through the steps to prepare in case of an unlikely event, such as a wildfire or a flood.

Now that the weather is getting warmer and we're spending extra hours outside, we share suggested activities and how to make them more meaningful for the person living with dementia. If you're up for an adventure, we invite you to start training and join us at Grouse Mountain on Sunday, September 24 to celebrate the 12th annual *Climb for Alzheimer's* while fundraising for people affected by dementia.

We also profile Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch, a researcher who is exploring the impact of climate change on older adults. Dr. Baumbusch recently presented a webinar on the subject. In addition, we take a deeper look at how climate change affects the brain for people living with dementia. We also share some information about why there's a crucial need for volunteers and highlight some of the volunteer opportunities currently available.

While we look forward to crossing items off our summer checklist, our publications – including *Connections* – will be undergoing a refresh. Thank you again for providing your feedback to help us improve our newsletters and we look forward to relaunching them in the fall.

We hope you have a fun and safe summer!



Jen Lyle
Chief Executive Officer
Alzheimer Society of B.C.



alzbc.org/FLDHL

Questions or concerns about dementia or memory loss?

First Link® Dementia Helpline

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Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu (9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)	1-833-674-5003

Keeping communities healthy and prepared during extreme heat



Kathy Shuflita and family

In recent years, British Columbia has experienced hotter and drier summer conditions than normal. For many people living in towns with extreme wildfire risks, having an emergency plan is top of mind. Kathy Shuflita, Support and Education Coordinator at our West Kootenay resource in Cranbrook, is among many B.C. residents who are preparing themselves and their families for heat emergencies.

Kathy, who has lived in the interior of B.C. her entire life, can't put her finger on when she last experienced a "normal" spring and summer. To people in her community, it's called "wildfire season." Being aware has become part of her daily routine. "We have to be on guard all the time – we have apps on our phones for staying up-to-date and receiving alerts," she explains. "The first thing I do every morning is check the air quality."

Kathy's parents – who are more vulnerable to extreme heat due to their age – live up the road from her and she feels fortunate to be readily available to support them. Having experienced evacuation alerts in the past, Kathy knows the time constraints people find themselves under. "You don't get much time – fifteen minutes to pack your bags and leave," says Kathy. "You need to be well-prepared ahead of time."

Every year, Kathy goes through a checklist with her parents to ensure they're ready for potential evacuation. She recommends using evacuation plans

and resources from the Society and the Province of B.C. "You can print them off and come up with a safety plan for your home and your family," says Kathy. She emphasizes how crucial it is to plan before wildfire season begins and to discuss plans with your family and support network.

Preparing an emergency kit is just as essential as preparing an evacuation plan. It is vital for alleviating the stress caused by the sudden changes in locations and environment, as well as supporting people living with dementia to respond to situations more quickly. Kathy relies on the Society's emergency kit checklist and highlights key items to include, such as a recent photo of the person living with dementia, identification, medications and copies of legal documents. She also tells people to carry at least a 30-day supply of medication and to make sure there's enough gas in their car tank to get them out of town.

If you need to leave your home in the unlikely event of an evacuation, Kathy advises caregivers to be patient with the person living with dementia and remain calm to help reduce their levels of anxiety and confusion. "The more prepared you are, the better equipped you will be if something does happen," she says. "Try not to stress about it and hope for a great summer."

Plan ahead! Prepare for an emergency

For additional resources and checklists, visit:

Alzheimer Society of B.C. emergency kit checklist: alzbc.org/Emergency-Kit

Alzheimer Society of B.C. tips for heat safety: alzbc.org/summer-emergency

Province of B.C. home emergency plan: alzbc.org/PreparedBC

The courage to climb

The dementia journey takes courage, both for the person living with dementia, and for their family and friends who support them.

From the outside, not everyone will understand dementia. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. brings hundreds of participants together for the *Climb for Alzheimer's* at Grouse Mountain each September to demonstrate the courage it takes to face the disease. For participants, the courage it takes to face the mountain is symbolic of the tremendous courage summoned by people affected by dementia when facing the disease. The event reflects the dementia journey: to surmount it, you must take it step by step.

Climb at your own pace

Participants also have the option to take part in the Summit Stroll, beginning with a lovely gondola ride with an incredible view to the top of Grouse Mountain. There, participants can explore the many sights and sounds at their leisure, including the lumberjack show (great family fun), visiting grizzly bears Grinder and Coola in their special habitat, and of course cheering on the climbers at the finish line! Stay as long as you like on the mountain and take the gondola back down whenever you like, perhaps after enjoying lunch on the mountain.

Share courage with your community

We invite individuals, teams, businesses and community members to bring their networks together for a fabulous day on the mountain for a good cause. Whether you hike or walk, donate or fundraise, or all of the above, you'll be sharing courage with those who need it. Participants are encouraged to challenge their family, friends and community to take part in the *Climb* and show people affected by dementia they are not alone.



Funds raised at the *Climb* will help the Society provide vital programs and services for people affected by dementia. Join us, and together we can help build a province where people living with dementia, their caregivers and their families are acknowledged, supported and included: a truly dementia-friendly B.C.

For more information on this year's event, visit alzbc.org/ClimbForAlz or contact our events team at events@alzheimerbc.org.

Keep active this summer while staying safe!

As the weather warms up and we move outside, explore the benefits of meaningful activities for families affected by dementia. Watch the pre-recorded webinar on activities for warmer weather at alzbc.org/webinar-activities.

Planning ahead: Emergency preparedness for caregivers

As we age, we lose the ability to control our body temperature. People living with dementia are more vulnerable to heat stress, resulting in dehydration, heat stroke or heat rashes – but research also shows that symptoms of dementia may worsen due to higher temperatures. Therefore, the likelihood of emergency visits, hospitalization and even death increases during periods of extreme heat.

Coping with extreme heat

Given the rise of more frequent and longer-lasting heatwaves in the future, check in on your family member, friends or neighbours to make sure they're okay. Here are a few quick tips to stay cool:

- Stay in areas with air conditioning, including community centres and shopping malls.
- Stay out of the heat at the hottest times of the day and seek shade when you're outside.
- Set reminders to have a drink.
- Wear lightweight and light-coloured clothing.
- Take cool showers, baths or sponge baths.
- Take note of signs of heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses.

Preparing for emergency and disasters

Emergency situations like wildfires and flooding can have a significant impact on everyone's safety. Many people living with dementia may become distressed when their routine is disturbed and, in some cases, they may have trouble understanding what is happening or feel confused or upset in an unfamiliar place during an evacuation. Planning ahead can alleviate the stress caused by sudden changes and it may help you to respond to situations more quickly.

- Prepare an emergency kit. Include medication, identification and copies of legal documents. Learn more on [page 3](#).
- Stay updated with current news and alerts from trusted media and authorities, including the B.C. emergency alert messages sent to your wireless devices.
- If you know an emergency is about to happen, immediately get yourself and the person living with dementia to a safe place.
- If the need to evacuate is likely, leave as early as possible to avoid heavy traffic.
- Alert family members, friends and health-care providers that the person living with dementia is relocating temporarily and provide contact information.

Overall, remain calm, stay with the person living with dementia and reassure them that everything will be fine.



Learn more

Learn how to respond during an evacuation and prevent agitation:

alzbc.org/emergency-caregiving-tips

Get more information on disaster preparedness from Public Safety Canada: getprepared.gc.ca

Hot weather and dementia



As climate change raises temperatures around the world, countries like Canada are experiencing more frequent, intense and longer heatwaves, which can cause health risks. In the summer of 2021, during B.C.'s heat dome, temperatures in some regions reached 49°C. Since many homes in B.C. do not have air conditioning, the high outdoor temperatures led to extremely high indoor temperatures. This is associated with increased thirst, fatigue, physiological strain, sleep disturbances and even death.

Older adults and people living with dementia may experience heightened risks during extreme heat events because of: reduced ability to regulate body temperature; chronic dehydration; certain medications (e.g., certain antidepressants, antipsychotics or heart medications) and the potential for social isolation. Lack of access to resources, communication difficulties and spending the majority of time indoors in air conditioned spaces can also place older adults at increased risk.

Last year, a group of British researchers found that for every 1°C rise in temperature over 17°C, the risk of dementia-related hospital admissions in the U.K.

increased by 4.5 per cent. They also predicted that between 2009 and 2030, heat-related emergency hospital admissions could triple. In Australia, researchers found people living with dementia in care homes were more agitated when indoor temperatures increased beyond 26°C. Reactive behaviours decreased when the average indoor temperature dropped to 22.5°C.

There are many low-cost cooling strategies that can reduce the health risks for people living with dementia. Applying crushed ice wrapped in a damp towel to the body or wearing a cotton T-shirt saturated with water are simple ways to provide effective cooling. According to B.C. Hydro, closing curtains or shades in rooms exposed to direct sun can block up to 65 per cent of heat coming in through windows. While fans won't cool the air in a hot room, they can keep air flowing. Placing a portable fan near a window during cooler hours (in the early morning or evening) can also help draw outside air into the home. Be cautious when using fans in extreme temperatures, however. When air temperature exceeds 35°C, research shows that dry heat flows in, rather than out, of the body. As such, the World Health Organization advises against using a fan when temperatures rise above this threshold.

For a full list of studies cited, click [here](#).

Beat the heat to stay safe

Learn about heat-related illness and tips on how to stay cool outside. Download the guide from HealthLink BC, visit:

alzbc.org/HealthLinkBC-summer-guide

Meet the researcher: Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch



Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch

Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch is a passionate advocate for the health and well-being of older adults, particularly caregivers and people living with dementia. A professor and Canadian Institutes of Health Research Chair in Sex and Gender Science at the University of British

Columbia's School of Nursing, she believes strongly in community-based research and the active engagement of individuals, clinicians, service providers and organizations.

Dr. Baumbusch and her team will be leading focus groups to better understand the support needs of people affected by dementia during climate events. Dr. Baumbusch is looking for participants to join the research, as well as people with lived experience to join the project's advisory committee. If you are interested in learning more, please contact gero@nursing.ubc.ca.

Watch our webinar and learn more!

In recent years, B.C. has experienced a rapid increase in climate-related weather emergencies, including a heat dome, atmospheric rivers and wildfires. People living with dementia are uniquely at risk during climate emergencies. Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch recently held a webinar on strategies to help people living with dementia and their care partners during these events. Access this webinar, along with all of our on-demand content, at alzbc.org/ondemand.

Fun in the sun: Safe and engaging summer activities

People living with dementia may find everyday activities increasingly difficult and feel badly for not being able to do what was once effortless. However, finding new activities or adapting familiar ones to keep someone living with dementia engaged with them can reduce agitation, anxiety, depression and anger. Here are some activities for warmer weather to share with people living with dementia:

Activities in the early stages:

- Washing the car
- Movies (e.g. drive-ins, movies in the park)
- Walking in nature (e.g. visiting a park, watching the sunset or sunrise)
- Making summertime treats

Activities in the middle stages:

- Gardening
- Observing/studying (e.g. bird-watching)
- Wandering around a nursery (touching and smelling flowers)

Activities in the later stages:

- Spending time with pets
- Listening to music (e.g. look for online concerts or build a playlist)
- Going on outings (e.g. going for ice cream or a family picnic)

For more warmer weather activities, organized by suitability at each stage of dementia, visit alzbc.org/summer-activities.

Make a difference and help us rebuild our volunteer team!



Perhaps you — or someone you know — has the time, skills and experience to join our volunteer team. Reach out to us today to find out more! We'd love to chat with you.

Forward or share this communication with anyone who is seeking volunteer opportunities. You can also visit alzbc.org/JoinOurVolunteerTeam or email mbrooks@alzheimercbc.org.

Many charities rely on volunteers to fulfill their mission. Despite this, volunteer engagement in Canada has significantly declined over the past three years, while demand for services has gone up – including here at the Society.

The Society has extremely meaningful volunteer roles, yet we're currently experiencing a critical shortage of support group facilitators and event committee members in various locations across the province. To address this challenge, we're asking for your help in rebuilding our volunteer team.

Join the team as a support group facilitator

Are you interested in supporting families affected by dementia? As a support group facilitator, you will play an integral role in helping the Alzheimer Society of B.C. offer a safe space for community members to learn more about dementia and connect with others on the dementia journey. To apply, visit alzbc.org/MyImpact

About Connections

Connections is a quarterly print and digital publication produced by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Articles cannot be reproduced without written permission.

Contact us to contribute content or to subscribe to receive *Connections* regularly.

- **Online** at alzbc.org/connections-newsletter
- **Email** newsletter@alzheimercbc.org
- **Call** 604-681-6530; 1-800-667-3742 (toll-free)
- **Mail** to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.
300-828 West 8th Avenue,
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

Help us reduce costs by subscribing to *Connections* by email.

Are you a person living with dementia?

We also publish *Insight*, a publication for people living with dementia or cognitive impairment. For more information, visit alzbc.org/insight-newsletter.



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