Alzheimer Society BC & YUKON

Summer 2026

Connections

Linking a community of dementia support

Reflecting, learning and supporting community

Wilson family

Throughout June, we are recognizing Indigenous History Month. It's a time to honour the histories, cultures and resilience of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples, and to reflect on how we can continue building respectful and meaningful relationships.

We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of Indigenous Peoples across BC and the Yukon. Through our First Nations, Métis and Inuit resources, we strive to support people and families affected by dementia in ways that honour culture, community and lived experience. These resources are developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners and are grounded in trauma-informed and culturally safe approaches.

We invite you to visit **alzbc.org/IndigenousResources** including:

- Our four intentions: Respect, acknowledgement of the past, culturally informed-resources and relationships.
- Stories from families navigating dementia in remote communities or incorporating language and cultural language and practices into care.
- Our collaboration with local artist Nativeglam.
- How we're building relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and organizations.
- Webinars featuring guest speakers from Indigenous voices.

Through continued learning and partnership, we remain committed to providing support that is respectful, inclusive and grounded in community.

We are on TikTok!

Follow us and you'll hear from lived experience partners, researchers and staff members as they share stories, lessons learned communication tips and more at Tiktok.com/@alzheimerbc.

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Moving forward together

As we move into the summer months, the importance of staying connected, informed and prepared remains especially important for people affected by dementia.

Recently, we shared our 2026–2029 strategic plan, shaped by what we've heard from communities across BC and the Yukon. Again and again, we heard the same hopes: that people want dementia to be better understood, that no one should feel alone after a diagnosis and that we must continue pushing forward research, advocacy and community action that can improve lives today and in the future.

Latest research by Leger Canada reinforces why this work matters. Six in ten British Columbians have a personal connection to dementia, yet many people still experience stigma, fear and uncertainty after a diagnosis. Even though most people recognize the importance of early diagnosis, too many people still feel isolated.

With weather and wildfire season approaching, we encourage people affected by dementia to think about summer preparedness. Extreme heat and wildfire smoke can create additional challenges. Having a plan and staying connected with others can make a difference. If you need support, the First Link® Dementia Helpline is here to help at **1-800-936-6033**.

This season also marks a leadership transition for our organization, and I want to thank former CEO Jennifer Lyle for her dedication and care. I look forward to continuing this important work alongside our staff, volunteers, partners and supporters in the months ahead.

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

Caregiver

Alzheimer's is a spring river that relentlessly surges around the minds and souls of any who are sentenced to cross it.

Without empathy, it changes course and undermines the footing of those who flounder on the banks in a futile attempt to save and support.

It erodes the strength in our spirits and drowns our hearts while we cling helplessly to the slippery shore.

Merciless and powerful, it rages across the landscape of our lives in a series of waterfalls and plateaus.

It is impossible to know the height of each precipice or how many boulders are waiting at the bottom to dash our hopes.

The only certainty we have is that the geography of our lives will be forever changed.

- Angela S., caregiver

Questions or concerns about dementia or memory loss?

First Link® Dementia Helpline

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

To learn more: alzbc.org/FLDHL

Youth advocate brings dementia awareness to the next generation

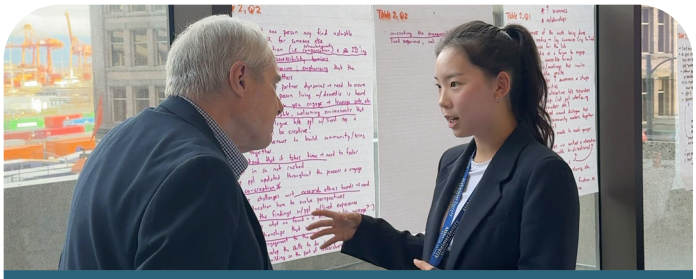
At just 15 years old, Grace Lee is already reshaping how young people understand dementia. A Grade 10 student, she describes herself as a youth advocate, driven by a passion to challenge stigma.

Her journey began with her grandfather, who lived with Alzheimer's disease and cancer. Through that experience, Grace realized many of her peers did not fully understand Alzheimer's disease or its impact on families, often viewing it simply as something that happens to older adults. That gap in understanding motivated Grace to act.

She launched *Mind with Grace*, a youth-focused social media initiative aimed at making dementia education accessible and relatable. "I wanted to start by raising awareness," Grace says. "My vision was to engage youth audiences and ultimately create a bridge between younger and older generations."

Grace believes awareness is a critical first step. "People need to know what dementia is and understand the stigma and misconceptions people are faced living with the disease." Through her posts, she explores topics including the higher prevalence of Alzheimer's disease in women and the societal factors surrounding the disease.

Her curiosity has also led her into research. After reaching out to a neuroscientist at the University of British Columbia, Grace began volunteering in a lab studying Alzheimer's disease, supporting hands-on initiatives, including a digital companion project that brings technological tools into the homes of older adults living with dementia. Through this work, she visits senior care homes and gains firsthand insight into their lived experiences.



Grace Lee (right) attending our research luncheon

Shortly after, Grace was invited to our research luncheon where she saw it as an opportunity to speak on the significance of making research more accessible. "There's so much information that is often misunderstood," Grace says. "I hope in the future research labs explore social media to share clear, reliable information directly with the public."

These experiences have also reshaped how she thinks about dementia. "I used to hear people described as 'patients,' but they're just like the rest of us," says Grace. "They may need more time or guidance, but they're not patients. When we listen more carefully, we understand them better."

Grace hopes to inspire younger people to get involved. "If you're passionate, don't worry about being judged," Grace says. "Once you begin, it's not scary anymore. No one can copy your passion."

Looking ahead, Grace hopes to continue her work in public health and advocacy. Above all, Grace wants people to leave her story with optimism. "Youth are paying attention. We want to help spread awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding dementia," Grace says. "I want people to know that there is hope."

View Grace's Instagram, *Mind with Grace*, at **instagram.com/mindwithgrace.**

Creative expression for processing dementia

David J. Taylor and Terry Marshall are musicians and caregivers who have found comfort in creative expression.

Russ (left) and David Taylor (right)

David, a record producer and songwriter, has faced difficult times throughout his caregiving journey. During his husband Russ's prolonged hospital stay, the realization Russ was never coming home hit hard. Being in limbo between hospital and long-term care was a dark place for the couple. David found himself repeating the words, "It's not forever, just for now."

These words would become the lyrics to an original song that he'd been wanting to re-write for decades. It reflects the feelings of a person caring for another transitioning through a difficult time. They are words David was repeating earlier this year.

Like others finding creative expression assists with life challenges, David experienced a needed emotional release in writing and recording this song as his husband of 29 years was transitioning from hospital into 24-hour care. "[The song] wrote itself in seven minutes, but it took 23 years for it to be the song it needed to be," David says.

David reflects on the deep loss they experienced and acknowledges he couldn't tell Russ that it was going to be okay, because it wasn't okay. Everything was changing.

"We [were] we," he says, "And now suddenly I'm an individual trying to find a way forward." The song captures a caregiver's dilemma of wanting to offer reassurance in the face of so many unknowns. David hopes his song provides comfort to others. "If anyone else who is going through this journey can benefit, that's awesome," David says," That's ultimately what music and art should do — it should affect you."

Writing has allowed him to enter what feels like "a spiritual place" disconnected temporarily from painful realities. Playing the song for others, including his peers in his caregiver support group, is something David says is "so therapeutic." Through the difficult moments, music has supported him as a care partner in taking care of his own well-being.

For Terry and his wife Janet, music has always been at the heart of their 45-year marriage. They played in a band together, and their love for folk music and performing took them around the world.

"We were life partners and musical partners," says Terry. "Music was a passport for us to experience, really, the best of life".

Following a devastating fall six years ago that brought on both physical and cognitive decline, Janet could no longer play the instruments she loved, but she

Janet Marshall (left) and husband Terry (right)

continued to connect and find joy in singing. Despite the challenges, music remained a constant.

When Janet moved to a long-term care home, the couple continued performing together, holding a weekly concert for the other residents and staff and posting their performances on their popular YouTube channel. The music connected them to each other and kept Terry resilient.

On April 2, Janet passed away in what Terry described as a "very peaceful transition." Their love for music remained a cherished bond right till the very end as he sang Shenandoah by her bedside. When asked what he hopes others will take away from their musical journey, Terry shares, "I want others to know that no matter what life throws your way you have the ability to carry on."

If you are a care partner who hasn't yet found the value of creative expression, here are a few reasons to try.

1. **To give a voice to hard-to-name emotions.** Identifying feelings helps with accepting and responding to them. The experience of dementia is complex, particularly for care partners seeing ongoing changes.
2. **To distance yourself from difficult emotions.** A work of art such as a poem or song can hold grief and allow the sadness to be expressed without needing to retell difficult specifics or feel overwhelmed.
3. **To make meaning of the changes that have happened.** Rather than trying to restore losses, care partners can reflect on experiences and appreciate what remains, holding both grief and connection.
4. **To support processing and long-term integration of grief.** Because a person can be living with dementia for an extended period of time, many care partners face ambiguous loss and anticipatory grief. Creative expression offers a way to mourn at times when grief seems unexpected or misunderstood.

We are not all musicians, visual artists or writers, but we all have the capacity to express our feelings in creative ways that help us to process emotions.

Check out David and Terry's music

To listen to David J. Taylor's song, It's not forever, just for now, visit **alzbc.org/davidJTaylor**

For Terry & Janet Marshall's YouTube channel visit **youtube.com/@terrymarshall123**

Would you like to share your experience to the music? Tell us here! Email us at **dementiaeducation@alzheimerbc.org**.

Alzheimer Society
BC & YUKON

Thank you for walking with us!

The Alzheimer Society of BC and Yukon would like to thank our volunteers, participants, donors and sponsors. A special thank you to our honourees for sharing their story.

WalkForAlzheimers.ca

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Rainbow caregiver support group

This summer, as communities across BC and the Yukon celebrate Pride, we are proud to offer a space where 2SLGBTQIA+ caregivers can feel seen, supported and connected.

Our Rainbow caregiver support group brings together people caring for someone living with dementia in an inclusive and welcoming environment. The group offers opportunities to learn and share practical tips for coping while decreasing feelings of isolation.

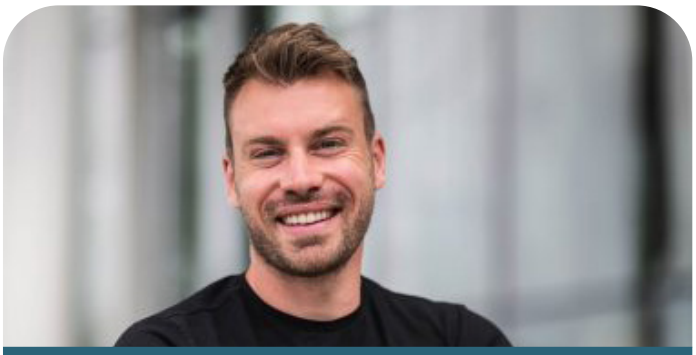
Participants can build meaningful connections and access support grounded in respect and inclusion. "Consistently, our support group members make an all-the-more-pronounced effort to be welcoming and to support others, at all stages of being 'out' or closeted," says Ian Stewart, a support group member. "We value the chance to speak openly amongst

2SLGBTQIA+ peers. It is a judgement free space where despite our distinct identities, many common concerns are shared."

Whether you're newly navigating a diagnosis or have been caregiving for years, you are not alone. Connection, understanding and support are just a conversation away.

The group meets online or by phone. To learn more or to register, contact the First Link® Dementia Helpline at **1-800-936-6033** or visit **alzbc.org/dhl**.

What memory "looks like" in the brain



Dr. Mark Cembrowski

Dr. Mark Cembrowski is an Associate Professor in the Department of Cellular and Physiological Sciences at the University of British Columbia and an Investigator with the Djavad Mowafaghian Centre for Brain Health. His research interests are in applying technological, computational and mathematical approaches to understand brain function. As Principal Investigator of the Cembrowski Lab, he leads a multidisciplinary, highly collaborative team identifying and mapping molecules, cell types and circuits involved in memory and cognition in brains with and without brain disorder.

In 2024, Dr. Cembrowski was awarded an Alzheimer Society Research Program New Investigator grant to study the cellular causes of Alzheimer's disease.

When did your interest in dementia-related research begin?

My long-standing research interest has been in understanding the neurobiology of learning and memory, primarily from the perspective of healthy cognition. Within this research program, we discovered that a specific type of neuron could explain several distinct features of memory dysregulation in Alzheimer's disease. This jump-started my laboratory's research into Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

What excites you most about your work?

Working with people. I am so fortunate to work with great lab members in an extremely supportive department and institution, and through this research, to be able to interact with people with lived experience and clinical care providers. These connections make me excited and energized to go to work every day.

Why is your area of research important?

My lab's research seeks to identify the molecular and cellular elements of the brain that cause memory, and to study how these elements change in Alzheimer's disease. A better understanding of what memory "looks like" in the brain holds immense promise for ultimately treating memory-related brain disorders like Alzheimer's disease.

What do you hope to achieve with this research?

It is my hope that my lab's research will be able to identify more precise cellular targets to help guide new treatments for Alzheimer's disease.

To explore the innovative work happening at the Cembrowski Lab, visit **cembrowskilab.com**.

Free virtual conference: AAIC for all

Learn about the latest breakthroughs in dementia research presented at this year's Alzheimer's Association International Conference® (AAIC). This no-cost virtual event is open to anyone wanting to learn more about dementia research, whether you're living with dementia, a care partner or supporting people affected by dementia.

To view the program and register online, visit, **alz.org/aaic-for-all**.

Giving back: Lyn Smirl's volunteer story

Lyn Smirl

It wasn't a lack of things to do that led Lyn Smirl to volunteering. It was the feeling that something was missing.

Retired and living in Nanaimo, Lyn's days are busy between hiking, walking her dog, tending to a large garden and caring for a koi pond. She's also a Block Watch captain and involved in emergency preparedness in her community. Still, she knows there is still more that she can do. "It's not that much time," she says. "But it makes me feel like I'm contributing."

Her connection with us began more than 25 years ago, when her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. At the time, Lyn received guidance and resources that helped her better understand what her family was facing. "They helped me through that," she says. "I always remembered."

Years later, she was ready to volunteer again. Over the past six years, Lyn has supported caregiver groups, early-stage programs and educational sessions. Her primary focus is caregiver support, where she created a space for people to share experiences that are often difficult to talk about elsewhere. "You come ready to listen," she says. "And your understanding grows from there."

Through this work, Lyn has seen how important connection is, especially for caregivers, who can become increasingly isolated. "Having a place where they feel heard makes a huge difference," she says.

Of all the volunteer roles she's held, this one stands out. "This has been the most gratifying," she says. "It's so well organized, the people are incredible and I've learned so much."

That combination of purpose, structure and connection has made volunteering a meaningful part of her life. For Lyn, it all comes back to something simple, making the time to show up for others and finding meaning in the moments that follow.

Find your way to get involved and make a meaningful impact at **alzbc.org/rosterfy**.

About Connections

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- **Email** newsletter@alzheimerbc.org
- **Call** 604-681-6530; 1-800-667-3742 (toll-free)
- **Mail** to the Alzheimer Society of BC and Yukon
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