Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Winter 2026

Connections

Linking a community of dementia support

There's no roadmap to dementia, but we can be your guide

January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month. Throughout the month, we want to ensure people affected by dementia know that they are not alone. We are sharing the experiences of people affected by dementia who have found meaning, connection and joy after a dementia diagnosis, in part by connecting with us.

People living with dementia and caregivers often feel overwhelmed after they receive a diagnosis and as the disease progresses. We want to make sure that people affected by the disease know we're available to listen and guide people to resources, education and support that can help them on their journey.

Get involved:

- Download the Community Partner Toolkit and share knowledge with your community.
- Raise awareness and fight stigma by sharing your personal experience through social media channels
- Tell your friends and family to call the First Link® Dementia Helpline if they have questions about dementia.

Learn more!

To learn more about this year's Alzheimer's Awareness Month campaign, visit **alzbc.org/AlzheimersAwareness**.

In this issue

Year-end reflections and new beginnings

As we close out the year, I want to take a moment to thank you for your ongoing commitment to people affected by dementia.

We know that many people feel overwhelmed after a diagnosis and as dementia progresses. Thanks to your support – whether it's through advocating, volunteering or donating with us – you've helped us meet people where they're at, listen to their needs and help them find the programs, services and information that fit their unique situation.

Because of you, we're able to offer vital support for people affected by dementia and their caregivers this holiday season. Resources and guidance are just one call away through our First Link® Dementia Helpline. If you're living with dementia or supporting someone who is, I encourage you to reach out by calling our Helpline. Learn more at **alzbc.org/FLDHL**.

It's this message we'll carry into the new year as we acknowledge Alzheimer's Awareness Month in January, "*There is no roadmap for living with dementia, but we can be your guide.*" Together, we'll continue to walk alongside families across the province, ensuring that no one makes this journey alone.

As we look ahead to 2026, I challenge each of us to continue sharing what you know, start conversations and inspire others to join us in creating a more dementia-friendly province and territory.

From all of us at the Alzheimer Society of B.C., wishing you meaningful moments this season.

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

Grief

Loss and grief
So much to endure
Time is a thief
I have lost her for sure

Her body's still here
Her mind is gone
Overtaken with fear
Understanding withdrawn

Years as one
Lost in the fog
Now I am alone
No memory to jog

She was my guide
She was my counsellor, my advisor
After talking with her
I would be wiser

Love is forever
Memory fleeting
My heart is broken
But it is still beating

Sadness and despair
Pain that she is gone
She tried so hard
Alzheimer's has won

I shall love her forever
Whether she recognizes my face
Her soul is still there
Still full of grace

I look at my world
Where do I go
My old world is gone
Forced to be "Lyle 2.0"

- Lyle Lsenor, caregiver

January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month: Meet Ashley Sharma

Ashley Sharma grew up in Abbotsford surrounded by family. Her Nanni was the centre of it all – the matriarch, the storyteller, the problem-solver.

When her grandmother began showing signs of confusion and frustration, conversations about what was happening didn't come easily. "In our household, there's a structure," Ashley says. "We didn't talk about dementia."

The family's resistance to talking about dementia was rooted in fear. Ashley's grandfather had experienced racism and mistreatment from hospitals when he first immigrated to Canada and that trauma lingered.

"For him, going to the hospital meant you might not come home," Ashley says. "So, when Nanni started showing symptoms of dementia, the idea of taking her to a doctor felt impossible."

When Ashley's grandmother was hospitalized in 2020 after losing feeling on one side of her body, her family could no longer ignore her symptoms. Doctors confirmed the loss of feeling was likely caused by frontotemporal dementia. Even while lying in a hospital bed, Ashley's Nanni remained the family's anchor.

"She comforted me," Ashley says. "She said, 'Koi na maim theek haanGoygalni, matika' – there's nothing to worry about, I'm okay. Even in that moment, she was still being Nanni."

As the disease progressed, Ashley found herself stepping into the caretaker role her grandmother had always filled. It wasn't an easy transition.

A search for guidance eventually led her to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s South Asian First Link® Dementia Helpline. "It was only a 20-minute conversation, but I had never felt so heard. I had found someone to talk to who understood what it was like to balance caregiving, culture and family expectations," Ashley says.

Ashley described the tensions between her traditional family structure and Western approaches to care and Joti validated her struggles in a way that stayed with her. "She just got it," Ashley says. "She understood without me having to explain."

With support from the Alzheimer Society of B.C., Ashley found ways to blend her family's traditions with the care they received, keeping her Nanni's dignity and culture at the centre of every decision.

Now, a couple years into her caregiving journey, Ashley hopes to see more recognition for young caregivers like herself.

"There aren't a lot of spaces for people my age who are caring for grandparents or parents living with dementia," she says.

Despite the challenges, Ashley wouldn't trade the closeness she's grown with her Nanni. "At the end of the day, I'm just trying to love my grandma and give her what is best."

Throughout January, we are sharing the experiences of people like Ashley, who have found meaning, connection and joy after a dementia diagnosis, in part by connecting with us. Learn more at **alzbc.org/AlzheimersAwareness.**

0% cure 100% courage

While there is no cure for dementia today, together we give people affected by the disease courage to face the journey ahead.

It takes courage to ask for help and support. It takes courage to speak up about dementia. It takes courage to tell your story. This holiday season, we are grateful to the people who courageously stepped forward to share their stories with us.

People like Megan and Bob. When Bob received a life-changing diagnosis of dementia last year, he and Megan felt alone until they connected with the Alzheimer Society of B.C. From day one, programs like Minds in Motion®, caregiver support groups and the First Link® Dementia Helpline were a lifeline that gave them support, connection and hope when they needed it most.

Every donation to the Alzheimer Society of B.C. helps fund vital dementia support programs and services that provide support, education and information for thousands of families on the dementia journey. Donations also fuel innovative research to change the future of the disease.

This is a great time of year to donate, because thanks to an incredible group of supporters, every donation made by December 31 will be matched dollar for dollar – up to a total of $125,000! That means your gift will go even further in supporting families on the dementia journey.

Together, we can give families facing the disease support and courage for what lies ahead. With dementia, we don't have survivor stories, we have stories of survival. We have stories of courage, of care and of hope.

Megan and Bob are among the many people who have courageously shared their journey with dementia this year

Our community is strong because of you. Whether you connected with us for information or support, gave your time as a volunteer, made a donation, took part in our fundraising events or helped us spread the word, you have shown people affected by dementia they do not have to face the disease alone.

If you would like to support us before the end of the year, you can make a donation and give the gift of courage this holiday season. If you donate before December 31, your donation will be matched. Thank you.

Donate today

Double your donation online by December 31 by visiting **alzbc.org/givecourage** or scan the QR code.

First Link® dementia support after a diagnosis

After receiving a diagnosis, it's common not to know where to begin. Whether you want to learn more about the programs and services we offer or find dementia-related information specific to your needs, First Link® dementia support connects you to services, education, and information as early as possible after receiving a diagnosis and throughout the progression of the disease.

Meet Rana and Dev

Dev began noticing changes in his wife Rana – memory loss, confusion about dates, mixing up words, increased agitation and disorientation when they were out together. Rana was diagnosed with early-stage dementia. With their permission, the geriatrician referred them to the Alzheimer Society of B.C. A Support and Education Coordinator reached out to introduce our services and answer any questions.

Since then, they've received regular follow-up calls and have become frequent attendees of our free Webinar Wednesday sessions, held weekly at 2 p.m. PST. Rana has also joined a local Coffee and Chat group, a social program available in-person and online, designed to help people affected by dementia meet new people, engage in social activities and have fun!

Meet Pat and Sandra

Sandra is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. She and her partner Pat began attending Minds in Motion®, a fitness and social program for people living with dementia and their care partners.

From their positive experience, they joined support groups. Sandra joined an early-stage group for people living with dementia and Pat has joined the 2SLGBTQIA+ caregiver support group. Sandra's group discussed coping abilities and strategies for maintaining independence, and Sandra feels she has regained some control in the face of a challenging diagnosis.

Meet Phil

Phil is a long-distance caregiver for his brother, who lives with Lewy body dementia in another city. He knew it was time his brother should stop driving, but his brother refused. Unsure what to do, Phil called the First Link® Dementia Helpline and spoke with our Helpline staff. Together, they explored ways Phil could approach the sensitive conversation.

He was also recommended to attend an online Driving and Dementia workshop. After the session, he found it so valuable that he began exploring other topics. Our workshops offer practical strategies and are available online, in-person and on-demand videos available to watch online.

Phil now feels more confident about having his next conversation with his brother about driving, and knows he can call or email the Helpline when further questions or concerns arise.

Learn about what's coming up

For online education and in-person regional dementia support available in your area, visit **alzbc.org/dementia-programs**.

Telling your family and friends about a dementia diagnosis

Serena invited her four favourite friends for dinner and told them over dessert. “We will be here for you,” they said.

Andrea came home from the doctor’s appointment and phoned her adult children without any hesitation, starting with the oldest. “We will need your help,” she said.

There is ample discussion about receiving a dementia diagnosis from a doctor or nurse practitioner and the challenges in ruling out other possibilities diagnosis but much less on how to share that diagnosis with the people in your life – even though it’s a question facing everyone.

How have you told family and friends about the dementia diagnosis received by the person you care for? Did you:

- Call a family meeting on Zoom?
- Share the news in one-on-one meetings?
- Tell friends and family in a written message?

We’re curious about how people living with dementia and their care partners are handling this. A couple of suggestions have emerged:

- Use person-centred language to preserve the dignity of the person with the diagnosis, available on the Alzheimer Society of Canada’s website at **alzbc.org/asc-language**.
- Prepare to respond to misconceptions about dementia that might arise. Many people believe dementia is strictly genetic. It’s not. Read more at **alzbc.org/genetic-testing**.

Other people think dementia is a normal part of aging. It’s true that age is the biggest risk factor, but many people live well into their 80s, 90s and beyond with no signs of dementia. At the same time, younger people, even in their 30s and 40s, can develop dementia – although this is rare.

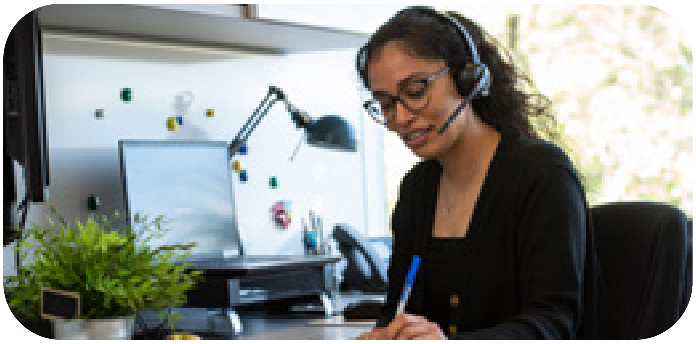
Dementia is caused by diseases that cause abnormal changes to brain cells, like Alzheimer’s disease, vascular disease, Lewy body disease, and frontotemporal disorders. Our website has information that will help you to prepare for questions from friends and families, available at **alzbc.org/myths-realities**.

We’d like to know how people are telling friends and family about a dementia diagnosis. With your permission, we’ll include your ideas in an upcoming article. Send an us an email and we will reach out to you: **dementiaeducation@alzheimerbc.org**

Explore rehabilitation approaches for people living with dementia

The 2025 World Alzheimer Report explores possibilities for improving quality of life and independence for people living with dementia and their care partners. Read the free, downloadable report at **alzbc.org/adi25**.

More than a call: The research behind helplines



No matter where you are in the progression of dementia, it's normal to feel uncertain about what comes next. The First Link® Dementia Helpline is a valuable resource for anyone affected by dementia. Whether you're living with the disease, caring for someone who is, working in health care or simply interested in learning how to offer support, a single call can make a meaningful difference. Helpline staff are here to listen and offer practical support when it's needed most, connecting callers with local programs, services and resources.

A trusted community resource

At the Alzheimer Society of B.C., our First Link® Dementia Helpline is a trusted source of support, not only for people affected by dementia, but also for health-care providers. In 2022, researchers from the University of British Columbia[1] analyzed feedback from more than 1,100 surveys to learn more about the program's impact. Many doctors and nurses refer their clients to the Helpline. The study found that 91 per cent of these providers were satisfied with the support their clients received and 82 per cent agreed it helped lower their clients' stress.

Research conducted by the Alzheimer's Association in the United States[2] noted a similar impact. Researchers analyzed nearly 500 post-call surveys and found that people reported significant benefits after just one call – including improved emotional well-being, better ability to manage emotions, and a greater likelihood of accessing services they hadn't known about before. More than 80 per cent of callers found the practical steps discussed during the call helpful.

Helpline operators act as a bridge, connecting people affected by dementia with information, education and services, as early as possible after diagnosis and throughout the progression of the disease. No one has to face dementia alone.

Our trained staff are ready to listen and provide information. They understand that every person's story is unique and will work with you to identify actionable next steps.

"When you call the First Link® Dementia Helpline, you'll find more than just information – you'll find 'a safe person that gets it,'" says a Helpline caller.

References

1. Hodgson, N. A., Petrovsky, D. V., Finegan, K., Kallmyer, B. A., Pike, J., & Fazio, S. (2021). One call makes a difference: An evaluation of the Alzheimer's Association National Helpline on dementia caregiver outcomes. Patient Education and Counseling, 104(4), 896–902. **https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2020.09.026**

2. Tam, M. T., Dosso, J. A., & Robillard, J. M. (2022). Community and Provider Evaluation of a Canadian Dementia Support Services Program. Canadian Geriatrics Journal, 25(2), 162–170. **https://doi.org/10.5770/cgj.25.548**

Questions about Alzheimer's disease or other dementias?

Call the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s First Link® Dementia Helpline for information and support (toll-free in B.C. only). Visit **alzbc.org/FLDHL**.

Join passionate volunteers to make meaningful change in your community

Are you deeply connected to your community and have what it takes to inspire your fellow community members? We're inviting you to join the organizing committee for your local *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*, presented by Go Auto.

The *Walk* is our largest fundraising event. The event will see participants in communities across British Columbia walk together the last weekend in May 2026, to honour people affected by dementia.

Qualities of successful committee members

The continued success of the *Walk* depends on dedicated and passionate community members who bring energy, organization and heart to their work.

We're looking for people who:

- Thrive with teamwork and collaboration.
- Have strong organizational and communication skills.
- Can adapt and lead through planning challenges.
- Are motivated to make a difference for people affected by dementia.

Supported and guided by the Alzheimer Society of B.C., committee members use these qualities to create well-run, welcoming events that unite their communities and leave a lasting impact long after event day.

Join the team

If you're ready to make a difference in your community, we'd love to have you on board. We're currently seeking Committee Members in communities across B.C., as well as *Walk* Chairs to lead our Abbotsford, Delta, Vancouver and White Rock & Surrey events. *Walk* Chairs and Committee Members work together to plan and deliver a successful *Walk* in their community.

Applying is simple through our new volunteer portal Rosterfy at **alzbc.org/rosterfy**.

About Connections

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- **Online** at **alzbc.org/connections-newsletter**
- **Email** newsletter@alzheimerbc.org
- **Call** 604-681-6530; 1-800-667-3742 (toll-free)
- **Mail** to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.
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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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