

Connections

Linking a community of dementia support



As the season changes

Whether it's navigating shorter days, changes in mood or increased stress around upcoming holidays, it is vital that caregivers prioritize their well-being in the face of changing routines in the fall.

"I'm tired, but I can't stop" and "some days are more challenging than others" are words we hear often from caregivers. The dementia journey doesn't come with a manual. Every experience is unique and knowing you have a support network can be critical during difficult times.

Understanding dementia and its impact can empower us to better navigate these challenges. Education and social programming are valuable resources that can help caregivers find ways to manage their responsibilities while also caring for their own well-being.

This season, give yourself permission to seek support, ask questions and know that you're not alone. For dementia support, contact our First Link® Dementia Helpline by visiting alzbc.org/FLDHL.

Find support near you

Explore comprehensive support services and dementia education available in your area, available in-person and online. Visit alzbc.org/regional-programs.

In this issue
Greetings
Feature story

Page 2
Page 3

Resources
Engagement
Lived experience

Page 5
Page 6
Page 8

Reflecting on 2025

As we approach the end of the year, we reflect on the stories and conversations that have shaped our work in 2025. This fall, I invite you to do the same – think about the words, people or moments that have helped guide you.

In this edition of *Connections*, we're highlighting the many ways our community continues to inspire and support one another. People with lived experience of dementia share the words that have guided them on their journey. We also celebrate the creativity and commitment of people across the province through our *Anything for Alzheimer's* fundraising program. From tea parties to food festivals and golf tournaments, these community-led events bring people together and show support for families affected by dementia.

As we approach the holiday season, we know it can be both joyful and challenging for families. This issue highlights caregiver strategies for reducing stress during gatherings, maintaining routines and finding meaningful ways to include people living with dementia. A few thoughtful adjustments can make celebrations more accessible, safer and less overwhelming for everyone involved.

We're also excited to share an update on our work to build more inclusive care environments. With insights from 2SLGBTQIA+ community leaders, we're developing a new training module for health-care providers – part of our U-First!® dementia care education program – that will support queer-positive care in long-term care settings, ensuring safety, respect and recognition for chosen families.

Finally, we invite you to meet a dedicated volunteer who is helping South Asian families overcome stigma and access support in culturally meaningful ways. If her story inspires you, we'd love to help you find a way to get involved. There are many volunteer opportunities available – including options tailored to different languages and communities.

Whether you're living with dementia, caring for someone close to you, supporting our work in your community or seeking to better understand the condition, thank you for walking the dementia journey with us. I wish you a warm holiday season.



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

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

Words that stay with us

A single moment can change your life and a single phrase can propel you forward.

In a recent edition of *Connections*, we asked people affected by dementia to share thoughts on hope, self-care and advocacy.

For some readers, a reminder that each person's experience is unique can be a source of understanding: "If you've met *one* person living with dementia, you've met one person living with dementia." These words remind us to avoid stereotyping.

Lester and Cindy Gierach are a couple who are part of our Lived Experience Partner Program, helping frame our commitment to the meaningful engagement of people living with dementia and caregivers. They share, "You can live well with dementia for many years," a reminder that it is possible to maintain your quality of life for quite a while.

Another lived experience partner, Tobias Jesso, shared his guiding words on the importance of self-care for care partners. Reworking the timeless golden rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you," he reminds us to "care for yourself as you would care for your partner."

Other care partners have mentioned a metaphor from plane travel to remind themselves about self-care, "put your own oxygen mask on *before* assisting a travel partner."

For Sidra Qadeer, a Support and Education Coordinator at the Alzheimer Society of B.C., the guiding words that fuel her are, "Change the narrative from *decline* to *dignity*." To other staff members, she often says, "People living with dementia are not losing out on life. They're living life with dementia. That's what the conversation needs to be about."



Changing the conversation may also take place with small asks that make a big difference. This is something that guides Pat Hanrath, a caregiver and lived experience partner in the Yukon.

"It's okay to tell people what you're concerned about and ask for answers," says Pat. The change you ask for – whether in home support, to a health-care professional, or in long-term care – may help not only the person you care for, but many others in the future.

While words like these can help motivate and inspire us, when we bring them together they can create real change. Our CEO, Jennifer Lyle, shared a quote from Margaret Mead that helps keep her motivated: "Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has."

Thank you to everyone who shared their guiding words.

Do you have a guiding message or idea you've learned from us that has stayed with you – something that offered strength, shifted your perspective or became a mantra during difficult moments? Your words may be featured in future articles or campaign. Contact us: dementiaeducation@alzheimerbc.org

0% Cure. 100% Community. *Anything for Alzheimer's*

Each year, individuals, businesses and community groups across British Columbia find powerful, personal ways to support people affected by dementia. Through our *Anything for Alzheimer's* fundraising program they transform their talents, hobbies and celebrations into meaningful community-driven fundraisers.

From trivia nights and dance-a-thons to holiday gatherings and cultural events, these grassroots efforts are as creative as the people behind them. This flexible, accessible model meets people where they are—making it easy to take part and give back in a way that feels authentic.

And the impact goes beyond dollars raised. Every event is a message of support—showing people on the dementia journey that their community is there for them.

Check out these fundraising events hosted in 2025:

Marion Denton's Mini Teas

For over 11 years, Marion Denton has hosted spring teas, luncheons and bake sales with friends, raising more than \$11,000 to date. From apple desserts and bottle drives to heartfelt conversations over tea, each gathering is inspired by Marion's personal connection to the cause.

"Alzheimer's disease has touched the lives of six people I've loved. Giving back is my way of honouring them and standing with every family on this journey," says Marion.

Flora Aasen Memorial Pro-Am Golf Tournament

Held each August at Richmond Golf & Country Club, this cherished tournament has raised over \$860,000 since 2000. Golfers enjoy a barbecue lunch, a round with a pro in each foursome, exciting contests and an



Wexford's Street Food Festival

evening buffet with a silent auction – all in support of people affected by dementia.

"This fundraiser is a special tribute to my mom, Flora, who lived with dementia and spent many happy days playing the game she loved," says organizer John Aasen.

The Wexford's Street Food Festival

In June 2025, The Wexford Seniors Community in Tsawwassen hosted its annual street food festival, raising over \$5,300. A vibrant celebration of food and community, the event has raised more than \$22,000 since 2017. Guests enjoyed \$5 chef-crafted dishes – including chocolate-covered strawberries – live music, raffles and strong local support.

"We all pull together because this disease touches so many of us," says General Manager Matt Baryluk.

These inspiring events reflect what *Anything for Alzheimer's* is all about: community, creativity and commitment. Every event – big or small – is a powerful reminder that while there may be 0% cure today, there is 100% community behind every step forward.

Interested in hosting your own fundraiser or learning more about the *Anything for Alzheimer's* program? Learn more at alzbc.org/A4A.

Caring through the holidays



Gatherings and holidays can be an exciting time of the year, as families and friends come together to celebrate. However, these times can be stressful for everyone, especially for people who are supporting someone living with dementia.

Often, people living with dementia need some structure and routine in their lives so the changes and excitement of the holiday season can raise their level of stress, causing insecurity, disorientation and distress. It is still possible to be a part of significant moments, setting realistic expectations and simplifying plans can go a long way to making an event a little bit less stressful.

Be prepared to let go of expectations of how things “should be”. Consider simplifying traditions based on the person’s comfort. Sudden changes to environment or routine can cause confusion or anxiety. Try to choose which holiday traditions mean the most and will be the least disruptive for the person.

Plan visits wisely. Consider holding smaller gatherings, allowing more time between visits. Keep in mind that many people living with dementia are often better able to cope earlier in the day, so try to plan timing of events accordingly.

Keep changes to a minimum. Stick to the person’s daily routine as much as possible. Keep mealtimes

and bedtimes the same. This will help calm and orient the person.

Take the lead. As the caregiver, you know what is likely to work best. You might have to take the lead on this and explain to your family why some changes need to be made this holiday season.

Reminisce together. Sharing memories from the past can bring families together and make the holidays meaningful and enjoyable for everyone. Surround the person with things that trigger their five senses to help spark their long-term memory, like photographs, music and seasonal foods.

Encourage the person to participate. Focus on the person’s remaining abilities by giving them tasks that allow them to contribute to the festivities, such as setting the table, helping prepare food, or helping to decorate.

Safety first. You may want to avoid small ornaments, hard candies, and plastic fruit decorations as these could be choking hazards. Do not leave the person alone around an open fireplace, burning candles or space heaters.

Ask for help. Try not to take on added holiday and entertaining responsibilities. Family and friends can also help by spending time with the person while you attend to the holiday preparations.

It is particularly important that you take good care of yourself during this time to avoid burnout. Managing stress for yourself and the person you support is key to a relaxing and enjoyable gathering and one key to managing stress is in adjusting expectations.

Relieve the stress of caregiving during the holiday season. Learn ways to reduce the stress of caregiving at alzbc.org/caregiver-holiday.

New course: Care for 2SLGBTQIA+ people living with dementia



Through consultations with community members and community organizations, we're developing a new course to support more appropriate care for 2SLGBTQIA+ people living with dementia. The training will

be available through our U-First!® program, which provides dementia education to long-term care staff.

Whether it's accessing home support or long-term care, many 2SLGBTQIA+ people have concerns.

When interviewed for a video developed by the BC Care Providers Association, Chris Morrissey – a fierce 2SLGBTQIA+ advocate who has since passed away, spoke to the importance of queer-positive care. She described why it is critical that care workers who support 2SLGBTQIA+ clients have a queer positive mindset.

“[I don't want to be] ... trying to figure out if it's safe to talk about my life or not,” Chris said.

Knowing a care provider is queer positive is, “the most important thing for me in terms of someone coming into my home to provide care,” she said.

Queer-positive care – the provision of health and social services that affirm, respect and centre the needs of queer people – is a requirement across the province.

Five key themes emerged in the consultations:

Re-closeting and safety concerns: Many 2SLGBTQIA+ seniors fear long-term care because they may feel pressure to hide their identities due to fear of discrimination or mistreatment. Trauma from

earlier experiences may be deeply felt. For Chris, an out activist for many years, her resolve was firm. “I'm not going back in any closet,” she said, but added, “there's still a level of anxiety even though I've been very public in my life.”

Spiritual and emotional care: Many 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults value spiritual care. However, affirming supports are not always available.

Symbolism versus action: Visual signs of inclusion (like rainbow flags) are welcomed, but concrete actions, such as inclusive hiring, clear policies, and ongoing training, are essential to creating safe environments.

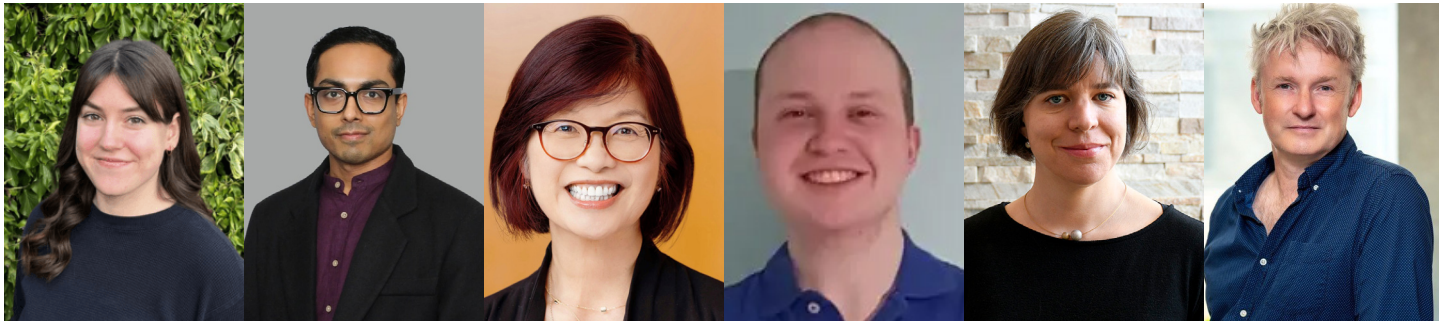
Dementia-specific considerations: Dementia may affect expression of identity, relationships, or intimacy. Care teams need empathy, flexibility and cultural humility.

Chosen family and legal barriers: 2SLGBTQIA+ people often build strong support systems with “chosen families,” which may not be recognized in care settings, advocacy, visitation, or end-of-life decision-making. Envisioning herself as a care home resident, Morrissey said, “The visitors that I have are likely to all be queer. That's my family.”

Many thanks to the community leaders and organizations who shared their wisdom and lived experience. We also appreciate the B.C. Care Providers' video with Chris Morrissey. The entire recording is available at alzbc.org/queer-positive.

We would like to recognize Chris Morrissey, whose incredible legacy you can read more at alzbc.org/memory-of-chris.

2025 Alzheimer Society Research Program recipients announced



The Alzheimer Society Research Program (ASRP) is a collaborative initiative between the provincial Alzheimer Societies, the Alzheimer Society of Canada, other partners and our donors. This year, the ASRP has distributed \$5.1 million to 37 researchers across the country, representing a truly national commitment to advancing dementia research from across the country.

To date, 108 projects in British Columbia have received over \$11 million through the program. Congratulations to the six B.C.-based researchers awarded this funding for 2025. Their dedication and innovation are paving the way for a brighter future in dementia care and research.

- **Zoe Gilson**, University of Victoria
Doctoral Award: Psychoeducation to reduce risk of cognitive decline: Testing an mHealth intervention.
- **Kishore Seetharaman**, Simon Fraser University
Postdoctoral Award: Embedding dementia-inclusivity in built environment accessibility at the municipal level in Metro Vancouver: A universal design approach bridging aging, disability and dementia.
- **Lillian Hung**, University of British Columbia
New Investigator Grant: A pilot randomized trial of a digital app, *WhatMatters*, to enable person-centred care.
- **Ryan Ripsman**, University of British Columbia
Doctoral Award: Finding the weakest link: Identifying cell subtypes with Alzheimer's vulnerability in early-stage disease
- **Veronica Hirsch-Reinshagen**, University of British Columbia
New Investigator Grant: Deep histological and pathological phenotyping of sporadic dementia.
- **Douglas Allan**, University of British Columbia
Proof of Concept Grant: A universal platform for high volume genetic modifier testing in tauopathy.

Interested in learning more?

To view the full project descriptions for all the 2025 recipients, visit: alzbc.org/asrp2025

Helping shift the conversation around dementia



Pravleen Hans, Volunteer

When Pravleen Hans began volunteering with the Alzheimer Society of B.C., she saw it as a way to explore future career paths in health care. However, what she discovered was a deep sense of purpose –

helping South Asian families feel seen, understood and supported as they navigate the dementia journey.

Pravleen connects South Asian community members with services through outreach and information sharing. Her fluency in Punjabi and understanding of cultural values help bridge the gap between families and the resources that can help them.

Programs like our Punjabi-language *Minds in Motion*® and the South Asian Dementia Forum aim to create safe, inclusive spaces where people feel represented.

“I was passing out information at a Gurdwara, and there were people who didn’t know dementia

by name,” Pravleen says. “But once we started the conversation, they recognized the symptoms and were eager to learn more.”

From sharing resources to attending caregiver support groups, Pravleen is helping open the door to meaningful conversations. While cultural norms often emphasize self-reliance, they can also make it harder to seek outside help. “People feel like asking for help means you’ve failed to take care of your family – I don’t want it to feel this way, I want people to know there are resources,” Pravleen says.

Thanks to volunteers like Pravleen, engagement continues to grow. “At the South Asian Dementia Forum, lots of people signed up for First Link®. They were asking questions about legal and financial help and how to get a diagnosis,” Pravleen says. “That was a big moment – seeing the shift from stigma to curiosity.”

If you’d like to make a difference in your community, visit alzbc.org/rosterfy.

About Connections

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- 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

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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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