



# Making your workplace dementia friendly

Information for stores and retail staff



**Dementia-Friendly  
Communities**

Building a dementia-friendly B.C.

**Alzheimer***Society*  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

The provincial office of the Alzheimer Society of B.C. is located on the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, with regional resource centres located on traditional territories in all regions of B.C.

Our vision for a dementia-friendly province – where people living with dementia and their care partners are welcomed, included and supported – will only be possible through ensuring that everyone living on these territories has access to support that is culturally-safe, barrier-free and free from racism.

# Making your workplace dementia friendly: Information for stores and retail staff

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## Introduction

Thousands of families across B.C. are affected by Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, and this number is growing. The Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s vision is a world without dementia, and that world begins with a more dementia-friendly society, where people affected by dementia are welcomed, acknowledged and included.

Stigma reduction and inclusivity are at the core of this movement. Many people who are living with dementia report feeling alone and isolated in their community after diagnosis. This isolation is heightened when people and professionals in their community do not interact with, include or support them. Education, resources and open conversation about dementia help all community members to feel more confident in reaching out and supporting a person affected by dementia – both people who are living with dementia and care partners. When people living with dementia are met with compassion and acknowledged as rightful members of society, dementia is brought into the open where we can address it together, making dementia not just someone else's problem, but everyone's concern.

This is where you come in. Retail outlets have great potential to reduce social isolation by becoming inclusive and accessible spaces where people living with dementia can stay engaged and active in their communities. This resource will help you:

- Recognize and better understand dementia.
- Learn strategies for communicating with and supporting people living with dementia.
- Consider how you can support care partners in a variety of situations.
- Discover how to make the current products and services offered at your store more dementia friendly.
- Learn the benefits of becoming a dementia-friendly store from a business perspective.

**A word about language:** You will note that we conscientiously use the term 'people living with dementia' as it is language that indicates a person is more than their diagnosis and it avoids assumptions about the person's abilities or experience. People that support a person living with dementia are referred to as care partners. When we use the term 'people affected by dementia,' we are referring to both people who are living with dementia and their care partners.

Throughout this guidebook, we use the term 'store' and 'retail outlet' to refer to any venue where customers purchase merchandise or services. Likewise, staff are referred to as 'retail staff' or 'employees.' Please note that the guidelines and strategies contained herein were written with all retail businesses in mind, including but not limited to shops, grocery stores, shopping centres, department stores, clothing stores, markets, boutiques, outlet stores and convenience stores.

## Stores and retail staff are important

In 2022, an estimated 85,000 people in British Columbia were living with dementia and more than 50,000 people were caring for someone living with dementia. If current trends continue, by the year 2050, that estimation is projected to triple<sup>1</sup>. In addition, over 60 per cent of people living with dementia continue to reside in their home and community. Dementia is becoming more prevalent, and we can all help build a community where people can continue to lead active lives, engage in meaningful activities and enjoy supportive relationships.

Retail outlets are central to our neighbourhoods and are primary places in which people living with dementia and their care partners run errands and manage daily tasks. Shopping is also a social outlet for people affected by dementia. Becoming a dementia-friendly store means empowering people to shop comfortably, remain as independent as possible in their community and continue to engage in activities they enjoy.

As dementia progresses, a person's abilities will change, and they may encounter situations that make it more difficult to access their favourite businesses and activities in their community.



<sup>1</sup> The Landmark Study Report 1: Navigating the path forward for dementia in Canada (2022)

Within your business, you may notice:

- A person that is finding it challenging to find the product they are looking for or making a decision between the options available.
- Someone who is finding it difficult to follow conversations or is becoming overwhelmed in a busy/noisy environment.
- Someone who is finding it difficult to use the self-checkout system or to count out the correct amount of money.
- Someone who is experiencing challenges navigating the store layout.
- A long-time customer who is starting to behave differently or often has trouble finding the right words.

As a retail worker, you may meet a person living with dementia when they are having a good day or on a day when they are feeling more anxious, confused or disoriented, stressed or frustrated. A person living with dementia and their care partner(s) may need your understanding, support and more time than usual to process information or answer questions asked of them.



**You may also notice changes in an employee who is starting to have memory challenges or difficulty performing familiar tasks, such as stocking shelves or using the cash register. For more information on how to have productive, compassionate conversations related to dementia in the workplace and how to build and contribute to a dementia-inclusive work environment, visit <https://alzheimer.ca/ab/help-support/dementia-workplace>.**

## Benefits of becoming a dementia-friendly business

Working towards becoming a dementia-friendly store is not only a socially responsible step towards inclusivity, but will also benefit your business in other ways, such as:

### Enhanced customer service

At the core of a dementia-friendly business is dementia-educated staff. This means all employees understand the signs and symptoms of dementia, are aware that customers may need additional support and are confident that they have effective strategies to help support their customers who may be affected by dementia. Employees are trained with strategies that are specific to their work environment and are supported by management to offer extra time, patience and assistance to any customers experiencing difficulties. Improved customer service will allow you to retain existing customers, attract new customers and will help maintain employees who feel supported in offering dementia-friendly services.

### Increased competitiveness

Research has shown that many people with memory changes switch their shopping habits to places that are more accessible and dementia friendly.<sup>2</sup> As the number of people living with dementia within society increases, more people will seek out businesses that can support their needs and make them feel welcome. It is an effective business decision and competitive advantage to ensure that your store is a reliable dementia-friendly business.

### Inclusivity for all

Dementia-friendly businesses are inclusive and cater to the shopping needs of people living with many different types of cognitive and physical abilities. Your business will be valued as a welcoming place to all customers who value accessibility and inclusivity. For example, through implementing dementia-friendly changes, your business may also become more accessible to people with other vision, cognitive, communication or physical impairments.

### Improved brand reputation

Businesses that are recognized as socially responsible and conscious of the needs of their customers often attract more members of the community, as consumers tend to support businesses that promote the growth, well-being and prosperity of their communities. These businesses earn the reputation of valuing and prioritizing the needs of their customers.

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<sup>2</sup> Dementia-Friendly Retail Guide: A practice guide for shops and retailers to support people effected by dementia. Alzheimer Society of the UK, 2018

## Demonstrate that your business is on board with national and provincial dementia strategies and accessibility standards

The Government of Canada's *A Dementia Strategy for Canada: together we aspire* (2019) and the Province of BC's *Accessibility BC Act* (2021), both outline priorities to ensure that people affected by dementia remain active and valued members of their community.

Making changes to become a more accessible establishment takes time, and every step you take will bring you one step closer to compliance with government standards and law.



**“[A Dementia Strategy for Canada] allows people living with dementia and their caregivers to: optimize their health and wellbeing; live as independently as possible and remain part of their community; be understood and supported; safely navigate and access their local communities, including banks, shops, restaurants, entertainment and transportation; and maintain or expand their social networks.”<sup>3</sup>**



<sup>3</sup> A Dementia Strategy for Canada: together we aspire (2019) and the Province of BC Accessibility BC Act (2021), text box 9.

## Understanding dementia

The word dementia is an umbrella term that encompasses many different diseases, the most well-known being Alzheimer's disease. Different types of dementia are caused by various physical changes in the brain. You can find more information about the different types of dementia at [alzbc.org/aboutdementia](https://alzbc.org/aboutdementia) and their warning signs at [alzbc.org/warningsigns](https://alzbc.org/warningsigns).

Some common myths and misconceptions (listed below) about dementia perpetuate misunderstandings about the disease and create barriers for people living with dementia. With a little knowledge, we can all become more compassionate and inclusive.

**Memory loss doesn't always indicate dementia; it can be a natural part of aging or may point to another health issue.**

| Myth                                                              | Reality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Dementia is a part of regular aging.</b>                       | <b>Dementia is not a natural part of aging.</b><br>Most people do not develop dementia as they age. There is uncertainty around the causes of dementia, but certain risk factors and underlying medical conditions (such as diabetes and stroke) can increase the risk of developing dementia.                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Dementia only affects older adults.</b>                        | <b>Dementia can affect people from their 30s onwards.</b><br>Dementia is a progressive, degenerative disease of the brain. While people over the age of 65 are more likely to develop dementia, it can occur in people under this age. When this happens, it's known as young onset dementia.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>People living with dementia become violent and aggressive.</b> | <b>Aggressive behaviour is not innate to dementia.</b><br>Changes in a person's behaviour can be a sign of damage to the brain caused by dementia. These changes may be seen when someone experiences challenges understanding the world around them and has increased difficulty communicating their needs. By understanding the person's needs and creating an inclusive environment, we can reduce these responsive behaviours. |
| <b>Memory loss means you have dementia.</b>                       | Many people have trouble with their memory as they get older, but that does not mean they have dementia. For instance, many of us have forgotten where we parked the car. However, it may be a red flag if you forgot that you drove to the store and walk home instead. It is best to visit a doctor to determine the cause if you are concerned about memory loss or other symptoms.                                             |

## Signs of dementia and communication strategies

Many people who are living with dementia experience changes to their thinking/ cognitive abilities, and these changes can be expected to progress over time. Many of the more common signs of these cognitive changes are listed below, along with strategies for responding in a supportive way. However, it is most important to note that **it is not always immediately clear that a person is living with dementia**. You may notice a customer who appears to be experiencing memory difficulties, or seems confused or disoriented, and you may wonder whether they are living with dementia. The truth is, you don't need to know their diagnosis as these strategies may be useful in any interaction where you notice a customer needs a little more support.

### Problems with memory.

Many people living with dementia experience changes in their short-term memory.

For example, they may forget that you just told them about your return policy. They may forget if they have paid or how to use the debit machine. You may also notice that they ask the same question or tell the same story several times during your interaction.

### Communication strategies

- Do not argue or try to correct. If someone does not remember a previous interaction, it is likely because they are no longer able to properly store that memory due to changes in their brain. Correcting them will not help them remember and may lead to feelings of frustration, mistrust or embarrassment. If they repeat a question, or a story, try to respond as if this is the first time you have heard it.
- Meet them in their reality. Try and adjust to the reality of the person living with dementia, because they may no longer be able to adjust to yours. For example, if the person living with dementia feels you did not answer a question about a product, it is better to apologize and acknowledge that they feel frustrated (their reality) than to try to convince them that you responded to their question a few minutes ago (your reality). You may say something like "I'm sorry about that – I can see how frustrated you are. Let's get this sorted out as soon as we can."
- A person living with dementia may forget to bring their wallet with them. In this case, you may offer to keep their shopping to one side and let them know they are welcome to come back later. Write down information, such as the store name, hours of operation and store location, as well as the cost of their merchandise. If this person is a regular customer, you may arrange with their care partner to load a gift card that is kept in your cashier safe and can be used to pay for their merchandise if they forget their wallet in the future. You may also consider extending your policy on holding items for a customer so that they can pay later and offer to call the customer after two days to ask if they would like to complete their purchase.

### Difficulty with familiar tasks.

Challenges in sequential thinking may cause a person living with dementia to have trouble with tasks, especially if the task has many steps. Even routine activities, such as handling money or bagging groceries may become challenging as the condition progresses.

### Communication strategies

- In the early stages, a person living with dementia may only need a helping hand or gentle encouragement to continue to do tasks independently.
- If you are providing instructions, deliver them in a simple, step-by-step way. Pause briefly after each step. This gives the person living with dementia more time to process the information and initiate a response.
- If possible, bring the person to a space that is free from distractions and interruptions, where it is easier to concentrate. You might say, "It's quite busy here. Can I help you at the service desk over here, where it is a bit quieter?"
- Try demonstrating as well as providing directions verbally. For example, if you are assisting someone with the self-checkout system, point to where you would like them to click or type.
- A person living with dementia may remember some parts of the task, while forgetting others. For example, they may be able to tap their credit card on the payment terminal, but not remember their PIN. Focus on what the person is still doing well, rather than the challenges they are experiencing.



**It's important that a person living with dementia does not feel rushed when completing a task or paying for their merchandise. You may want to reassure them that they can take their time, ask if you can assist them and notify your manager if you need another employee to help serve your other customers.**

### Inability to follow a conversation or find the right words.

Everyone has trouble finding the right word sometimes, but as the condition progresses a person living with dementia may frequently forget words or substitute the wrong word. Problems with language can make sentences or accounts of events difficult to understand. For example, a person living with dementia may have difficulty explaining an item on their shopping list that they are looking for and instead of asking where the scarves are, they use a related word such as “necklace.”

#### Communication strategies

- Be patient and do not rush – this may mean taking more time with the person.
- Observe the person’s body language as they may be having difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally.
- When possible and appropriate, use close-ended or “yes” or “no” questions. For example, instead of asking “How can I help you?” you might ask “Can I help you find the right size?”
- Try demonstrating as well as providing directions verbally. For example, you may respectfully point to their merchandise when you ask them if they are ready to pay or walk them over to a table of items that are on sale so that you can show them as you answer their questions.
- Avoid using acronyms (e.g., B.O.G.O.) or informal terms such as “We’re having a buy one, get one sale right now.” Speak slowly and clearly describe what you’d like to communicate. For example, “We have a sale on jeans today. When you buy one pair of jeans, you get a second pair for free.”
- If you are offering suggestions on products or services, provide them in a simple, step-by-step way. Pause briefly after each suggestion. This gives the person more time to absorb the information and think of a response.
- Repeat the question a different way or try again later.

### Disorientation of time and place.

A person living with dementia may become lost enroute, or within a grocery store or shopping centre, even if it is a place they visit frequently. It is also possible that the person may become confused about the time of day, the day of the week, what season it is, or what year it is.

### Communication strategies

- Someone who is disoriented may just need a friendly approach and a short conversation to get them back on track, especially if they are in the early stages of dementia.
- If a person is looking for the fitting rooms, offer to show them the way by saying "I'm actually headed in that direction, would you like me to show you where they are?" You may also consider giving directions using visual cues and landmarks, such as "Go past the cashier and through the red door."
- For more information on disorientation, refer to the section on Wayfinding, disorientation and getting lost on [page 15](#).



**To learn how you can optimize your space to be dementia friendly and reduce disorientation, refer to the section on the physical environment on page 18.**



### Poor judgement.

A person living with dementia may experience changes in the ability to use their judgement. For example, a person may forget that a pet passed away and purchase multiple bags of cat litter because it is on sale. As the condition progresses, they may experience less social inhibition. For example, you may hear inappropriate comments, offensive language or sudden changes in emotion.

### Communication strategies

- Avoid drawing attention to the behaviour or criticizing it. Consider inviting the customer to a more private space or redirecting them to a different activity or topic of conversation.
- Make suggestions tactfully. If someone is purchasing the same product repeatedly, you might say “My computer shows that you’ve already bought this shirt. Would you like me to find a pair of pants that would go well with it?”
- Be respectful of people’s choices. A person living with dementia may purchase items that you think are not suitable for them. Rather than question them about their purchase, you may want to ask your manager about relaxing the store’s return policy if an item needs to be returned without a receipt, or after the return period. Doing this ensures that you eliminate any false assumptions so that you can adjust to their reality if needed.
- Protect the privacy and security of your customers. If the person living with dementia requires assistance with paying, and attempts to give you their personal banking information, be sure to inform them that you do not require that information. You may want to offer to take them to a quieter place if you are concerned that they are disclosing personal or financial information within hearing of other customers.



**A person living with dementia may not remember what you said, but they often remember how you made them feel.**



**“I didn’t realize how powerful a smile was.”**

**— Care partner**

### Problems with abstract thinking.

Dementia can change a person's ability to engage in abstract thought, which can make it challenging for them to make sense of symbols, images, metaphors and some form of humour.

### Communication strategies

- Use concrete language and avoid metaphors/idioms. For example, instead of saying "I gave you a baker's dozen," simply say "I gave you one extra."
- Stay positive and friendly. Using humour can be a form of connection for someone with dementia. However, it is important to remember that using sarcasm or jokes requires abstract thinking skills.
- All signs should use simple, straightforward language. If you are using symbols on your signs (e.g., to indicate the location of the restrooms), use commonplace/universally recognized icons and avoid using thematic symbols (e.g., rooster and hen).
- Be patient if the customer asks you questions about their receipt. Do not take it personally. If more time is needed with the customer to explain the charges, or to assist them with making payment, inform your manager so that another staff member can step up to provide service to other customers.



**At times, other customers may ask you questions about the behaviour of a person living with dementia. While maintaining confidentiality and preserving the dignity of the person living with dementia, this is a great opportunity for you to use your learning and speak about the cognitive changes related to dementia and the ways we can all help a person living with dementia feel included and supported. Raising awareness about dementia is an important step towards removing stigma.**

### Other tips for communication

- In all interactions, take your time and focus on connecting with the person instead of correcting their mistakes.
- If the customer appears to be overwhelmed by the number of products available, you can ask simple questions to help them narrow down the options. For example, if you notice a customer looking at shirts, you may ask if they are looking for a particular colour.
- Avoid using “elder-speak” (for example, words like “sweetie,” or “dear”).
- Make eye contact and avoid multi-tasking. Your focus and attention will have a positive impact during the interaction.
- Body language is important, especially if language skills are impaired. Take note of your own body language and tone of voice. Try to maintain a calm, friendly and positive demeanour.
- Never speak around or about a person living with dementia as if they are not there. You may choose to address a care partner or family member but ensure that you include the person living with dementia in the conversation as well. Language skills may be impaired, but the ability to feel left out or ignored is not.
- If you notice that a customer has trouble hearing or understanding you, try lowering the pitch of your voice.



## Key communication strategies



Set up for success .



Allow time for response.



Approach from the front and get the person's attention.



Show and speak.



Make eye contact.



Use close-ended questions.



Offer a quiet place.



Support the person's reality.



Speak clearly and share one message at a time.



Repeat or try again later.

To view a short instructional video on these communication tips, visit [alzheimer.ca/dfc/resources](https://alzheimer.ca/dfc/resources)

## Wayfinding, disorientation and getting lost

### How to help someone who is disoriented.

Disorientation – which is also sometimes referred to as getting lost or wayfinding – is a direct result of physical changes in the brain and:

- Is a common behaviour associated with dementia.
- May occur at any time of the day or night.
- May occur on foot, by car or public transportation.

Disorientation can occur when a person living with dementia is trying to find someone, wanting to get to a destination or accomplish a task. While getting disoriented is not dangerous in itself, it can become dangerous when the person living with dementia becomes lost, or when the physical environment poses risks to their well-being. Risks include dangers like traffic, falls or extreme weather conditions.

Like all people, people living with dementia should have the opportunity to move about as freely as possible, but changes in the brain may mean that they aren't able to exercise the judgment and reasoning to do it safely. For example, a person living with dementia may not be able to remember their way back home from the shopping centre, putting them at risk for getting on the wrong bus, getting lost, injured or hurt. Here are some examples of dementia and unsafe wayfinding:

- You are collecting shopping carts in the parking lot on a cold November evening, and you notice a man walking alone, wearing shorts and a t-shirt. He is pacing back and forth, looking lost, confused and scared.
- As you are opening the store, you see an older woman sitting on the bench outside. Hours later, she is still there. When you ask her if she needs help, she says that she is waiting for her daughter to pick her up.
- A customer gets lost on their way out of a fitting room and leaves the store unbeknownst to their spouse, who is waiting for them.



Although disorientation is more common in the middle or later phases of dementia, it can occur at any stage of the disease. If you notice someone who appears to be disoriented or lost, try the following:

- Enter their field of vision from the front to make sure the person can see you approach.
- Speak to the person slowly, calmly and clearly.
- Introduce yourself and start a conversation.
- Provide reassurance and assure the person that you are wanting to help.
- Offer them a glass of water or a warm blanket if available and appropriate.
- Stay with the person, or find another trustworthy person who can, such as a co-worker or a security guard.
- If an emergency contact is available, contact them immediately. If not, call 9-1-1.

For more information about disorientation please visit [alzbc.org/disorientation](https://alzbc.org/disorientation) or contact the First Link® Dementia Helpline at 1-800-936-6033.



## Making your business dementia friendly

Stores can adapt their social and physical environments with small, meaningful changes so that people living with dementia can feel more supported, comfortable and independent.

### Social environment

Everyone in your business has a role to play in contributing to a dementia-friendly environment. Ensuring that all staff members know how to recognize when someone may be living with dementia and communicate appropriately is an important first step to creating a workplace that is supportive and inclusive of people living with dementia and their care partners.

Along with the communication strategies listed above, here are some additional ways to achieve this goal:

- Ensure staff have the tools and training to recognize the signs of dementia.
- Become familiar with your regular customers. Get to know their likes and dislikes so that you can help them narrow down their options and choose products that are based on their personal needs and tastes.
- Build staffing models that encourage interaction between retail staff and customers. While one employee may require more time to assist a person living with dementia, another employee may need to be available to help other customers. If you offer fitting rooms, for example, it may be helpful for an employee to check in with the person affected by dementia more often as they may need more assistance in finding the correct size.
- Encourage staff to look out for and welcome customers to your store. If a customer appears to be confused or lost, a smile and simple welcome can go a long way. For example, "Hello and welcome to XYZ Mart. Can I help you find something?"
- Assist with reading and making sense of price tags and labels where necessary.
- Communicate to your customers (either verbally or through signage) that your employees can provide extra dementia-friendly support if needed.
- Offer assistance when you notice a person having difficulty with the self-checkout or debit machine.
- Design uniforms, name tags or badges that clearly identify employees so that a person living with dementia knows who to ask for help.
- Designate a person at your workplace to be the "go-to" person about dementia. Ideally, this person would mentor others and help identify customers who need dementia-friendly support.
- If you are unsure if someone is lost, or seems to be confused, reach out and ask if they need assistance. Sometimes a friendly smile and a brief conversation are all that is needed to help the person get back on track.

- If you are providing instructions, offering suggestions or asking questions of your customer, say one thing at a time, and pause after each step, suggestion and question. It may be confusing for a person living with dementia to receive multiple messages at the same time. For example, asking a person living with dementia if they have a store loyalty/points card, if they would like a shopping bag, and if they would like to contribute to a local charity as they are paying for their purchases may be overwhelming all at once. Ask just one question at a time and consider leaving out questions that are not essential to the sale transaction.
- Background music and a lot of visual stimulation may be overwhelming and make it difficult for a person living with dementia to concentrate. It may be helpful to suggest a quiet seating area within your store if people need to take a break or, if possible, temporarily turn off/down any background music.
- Become familiar with any volunteer shopping services available in your community and share these resources with your customers when asked.
- Care partners may be reluctant to ask for assistance for a variety of reasons. If you see someone who seems to be accompanying a person living with dementia, ask if they require any help and offer any support you can give. For more information on supporting a care partner, refer to the section titled How dementia-friendly businesses benefit care partners on [page 24](#).
- If you have suppliers that come into your business to deliver/stock products, or you contract store services to another business (e.g., security) ensure they are familiar with your dementia-friendly policies and encourage them to reach out for more resources and training.
- Invite the Alzheimer Society of B.C. to provide a Dementia-Friendly Communities Workshop ([https://alzbc.org/DFC\\_education](https://alzbc.org/DFC_education)) or enroll in an online Dementia-Friendly Communities course at [alzbc.org/online](https://alzbc.org/online) campus and/or [alzeducate.ca](https://alzeducate.ca).

While you may not be certain whether your customer is living with dementia, you can be assured that a dementia-friendly environment will welcome everyone experiencing a range of cognitive changes and help them feel acknowledged, supported and included.



**January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month. During this month, think about designating an area of your store to promoting awareness for dementia amongst the general public, or bring attention to features in your business that are dementia friendly. This is a good opportunity for you to use your learning to help reduce the stigma surrounding dementia, as well as recognize your business as an inclusive business for people living with dementia and their care partners.**

## Physical environment

The physical environment and design of store displays, waiting areas, customer service areas and signage can all play an important role in improving the shopping experience for a person living with dementia. Here are some dementia-friendly actions you can implement to improve the experience of people living with dementia:

Please note, while all these recommendations may initially seem overwhelming, you can introduce these components at various stages of your business plan. Many businesses, for example, may initially choose to focus on simpler and less costly changes first (e.g., clearing clutter from aisles and between displays) while they start to implement staff training and make future plans for larger changes to the physical environment.

### Provide general accessibility measures:

- Create accessible spaces by providing handrails, ramps, accessible elevators and restrooms.
- Ensure that steps on staircases and other level changes have a high contrast color such as red, orange or yellow strip on the edges.
- Offer accessible parking spaces and consider creating a passenger drop-off and pick-up zone by the entrance. Encourage employees to watch for customers who have been dropped off or are ready to be picked up and offer assistance if necessary.
- Consider supporting accessible community transportation services to make it easier for customers to get to your store.
- Have call buttons in aisles and fitting rooms so that customers can call for immediate assistance if necessary. Add a sign at eye level that lets customers know what the button is for.
- If your store provides shopping carts, ensure they are well-maintained, light, easy to manoeuvre and placed in an accessible area of the store.
- Offer an assisted shopping service for customers that require extra support to do their shopping. Employees can be available to assist customers in collecting, bagging and carrying their purchases to their car or taxi.
- Be mindful that sandwich boards placed on the sidewalk outside your business do not obstruct the walkway.
- Ensure customers are aware of your online ordering and delivery/pick-up service. Consider letting your customers know of any volunteer organizations in your community that help people navigate websites.
- Consider offering wheelchairs with shopping baskets on the front. These will allow care partners to offer the person living with dementia a seat and involve them in the shopping.

### Enhance the visibility and clarity in your store:

- Provide open walking spaces in aisles and between displays that are clear of obstacles and clutter.
- Ensure lighting is adequate and as natural as possible. Poor or overly bright lighting can make the environment confusing by creating shadows or glare off reflective surfaces.
- Simplify décor, furnishings and reduce visual stimulation where possible.
  - Consider placing mirrors only where necessary, such as in washrooms or fitting rooms, rather than as a décor piece. Due to changes in perception, seeing one's reflection may cause a person living with dementia to become confused.
  - Utilize fabric or furnishings with a plain design and little or no pattern.
  - Visually stimulating décor like abstract paintings or many pieces of art may make it difficult to concentrate.
- Increase the colour contrast between the floor, walls and furnishings to make it easier for people living with dementia to locate and differentiate items. For example:
  - Bright and contrasting colours around door frames will allow a person living with dementia to identify entrances and exits easily.
  - Colour contrast between the walls, floors and doors will help with depth perception.
  - Colour contrast between the edges of benches or seats and the floor will avoid confusion and prevent falls.
  - Grab bars, ramps, door handles and toilet seats should be a different colour from the background, making them easier to see.
- Avoid using dark floor mats when possible as they may be mistaken for holes in the floor. Similarly, high glare on the floor may be mistaken for a slippery or wet surface.
- Glass doors can be visually confusing. Clearly mark glass doors to avoid accidents and visual mistakes.
- Display large clocks, both analog and digital, throughout the space to accommodate different customer's needs. Many people living with dementia find it easier to read the numbers on a digital clock.
- Items should be easy to reach and placed at eye level. Price tags and labels should be large and clear.
- Consider having magnifying glasses available in fitting rooms or at the service desk for customers that require a larger font.

### **Eliminate distractions and provide a more tranquil environment:**

- Where possible, offer a quiet place for customers to sit comfortably and take a break from shopping.
- Reduce wait times to help reduce confusion and anxiety. Where possible, ensure that there are enough cashiers available at each checkout.
- Ensure background music is at an appropriate volume level or consider implementing quiet shopping hours for customers who prefer a more peaceful shopping experience.
- Avoid processes that require multiple steps or decisions to be made. For example, choosing between two different shopping baskets may be challenging. Choose one design that is the most effective for your business.
- Consider limiting how often you change your store layout, or the location of products around your business. This will help all customers find their favourite items quickly and help them navigate around the store.
- Create relaxed checkout lanes for customers who may need more time to unload and pay for their purchases.

### **Ensure signage is clear and customers can easily find their way around the store:**

- Make signs very noticeable by placing them at eye-level and against a plain background.
- Use simple straight-forward language that uses two to three key words and simple symbols like directional arrows, e.g., "**Fitting Rooms** ➡."
- If you are using symbols on your signs (e.g., to indicate the location of the restrooms), use commonplace/universally recognized icons and avoid using thematic symbols (e.g., rooster and hen).
- Signs should be placed directly on doors to indicate the location of the restroom, or areas where you do not want customers to enter. For example, you may want to add a sign on the outside of the storeroom door that says, "Do not enter."
- Keep advertisements and information posters concise and prioritize key words and important information.
- See below for more tips on creating effective signage.



**People affected by dementia are more likely to use single-use or smaller multi-portioned packages in comparison to family-sized products. Ensure that items, such as one-litre milk cartons and single-serving soups are displayed at eye level.**

## Restrooms

- Consider creating mixed/unisex or family washrooms and changerooms so care partners and family members can provide assistance if needed.
- Ensure there is colour contrast to washroom fixtures, toilet seat and grab rails.



**Consider displaying complimentary products side-by-side. For example, salad dressing could be found near the vegetables, and belts could be found near the dress pants. You may also create a section at the front of the store for popular products and convenience items (e.g., milk and bread) to make shopping easier.**

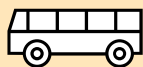
For a checklist to assess your workplace environment and to help you develop an action plan for making physical changes to your space, visit <https://alzbc.org/45h2n6e>. For a full list of tip sheets available through Dementia Friendly Canada, see the Resources for further information section at the end of this guidebook.

Remember, becoming dementia friendly takes time and is an ongoing process. The important thing is to start with the changes you can and plan for others in the future.



### **Easy-to-read signage tips include:**

- **Use a large font size.**
- Use simple and universally recognized graphics or symbols.



- Avoid decorative fonts with *light type* and *thin strokes*.
- Make sure there is contrast between the writing and the background; for example,

**black font on a white background**

- Use non-reflective/anti-glare materials.

## How dementia-friendly businesses benefit care partners

One of the benefits of becoming a more dementia-friendly business is that care partners will also benefit from a calmer environment where staff offer additional patience, support and understanding. Many care partners report feeling exhausted, overwhelmed and lonely. The stress and social isolation that sometimes accompanies caregiving can take a toll on their health, well-being, mood, cognitive function and sense of personal identity. The following are some additional considerations when making your establishment more supportive and inclusive for care partners.

- **Care partners often put a tremendous amount of effort into planning an outing.** They consider all possible situations that may cause confusion, agitation or stress, and prepare strategies for dealing with these scenarios, as well as unexpected challenges that may arise. A dementia-friendly setting requires less energy and makes the care partner feel more at ease. Knowing that a business will help to promote independence and preserve the dignity of the person living with dementia means that the care partner can worry less and spend more energy enjoying themselves. For more information on supporting a care partner, see [page 23](#).



**“Knowing that people are available and willing to help, and that I don’t have to hide the fact that we are having challenges. I’m less worried about what other people think.”**

**— Care partner**

- **Care partners may be reluctant to ask for help.** They may not want to draw extra attention to themselves, feel people will not understand or that they should be able to manage on their own. It’s okay to not know how to support a person living with dementia or their care partner. You can make a big difference by offering a smile, a kind word or by simply asking if there is anything you can do to help make the experience better for them. Some businesses have even found little ways to go the extra mile, such offering to carry their purchases to the car.



**“I may not ask for help, but always appreciate extra patience, a kind word, or a smile.”**

**— Care partner**

- **Every care partner is unique and will employ unique strategies.** Some may define a dementia-friendly experience as one where they are able to find what they want in a store quickly and leave without incident. Others may find that they value a more relaxed, less rushed experience and will take their time. Some may discreetly disclose to you that their companion has dementia and ask you to support them in specific ways (e.g., by being more patient). Allow the care partner to take the lead regarding what is the best way to support, but also continue to include the person living with dementia.



**“I let the barista know, when it’s appropriate, that dad has dementia, and ask that they have more patience with us. For example, he may come back and ask for free refills. I’ve never had a negative experience. People are generally good and want to do a good job.”**

**— Patrick, Care partner**



**“I went to a restaurant with a friend and her husband. Some of the things he said were fairly inappropriate. The staff were so kind. They gave him as much respect as any other customer. She placed his order, but they still included him in the conversation.”**

**— Mardi, Care partner**



## Inclusion and retail services

There is a growing worldwide trend amongst businesses to provide extra services for people affected by dementia. For example, some stores have created daily or weekly relaxed shopping hours, or slow lanes for shoppers that require more time and support. For business owners, these services are a great way to welcome new customers, a good training opportunity for staff and an effective way to advertise to the community that you prioritize your customers' needs by providing dementia-friendly service. For people affected by dementia, these services provide an extra level of comfort and inclusion, as customers can take more time to do their shopping, rely on getting the support they need and may be less concerned about the reactions of other customers.

Here are some things to consider when setting up dementia-friendly relaxed shopping hours or slow lanes

- Choose a time of day that is not a busy time in your business. This will vary between stores, although it is generally more effective to offer this in the earlier hours of the day, as some people living with dementia experience more fatigue and confusion later in the day.
- Have employees ready to welcome customers at the door, or in a drop-off area in front of the business.
- Encourage customers to take their time and chat with the employees in a relaxed manner.
- Ensure all customers are aware of your new service and that slow lanes or special shopping hours are primarily for customers requiring additional support.
- Adjust the lighting and background music levels. Avoid using the overhead speaker system wherever possible.
- Have new staff work alongside staff that are more experienced in providing dementia-friendly services, but keep in mind that the person living with dementia may require your full attention throughout your interaction.
- Place rest spots and seating areas throughout the store.
- Consider providing photos of items at the end of each aisle to help shoppers find what they are looking for.
- Have employees available to assist with finding, unloading, bagging and carrying purchases to a customer's car or taxi.
- Advertise with the local media and contact the Alzheimer Society of B.C. We love to include success stories in our newsletters and nominate community partners for a dementia-friendly community award!

**Thank you for taking the first step in becoming a dementia-friendly business!**

It is vitally important for people living with dementia and their care partners to remain connected and engaged in their community. Being able to enjoy a pleasurable shopping experience is integral in allowing people affected by dementia to connect with friends and family in the community, to independently manage daily errands, and continue to visit their favourite community businesses. Retail services that are respectful and responsive to the needs of people affected by dementia are valued and integral to building a dementia-friendly society.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about dementia and how you can better support people in your community that may be affected by this disease. It is our social responsibility to support all members of the community and with your support, we are bringing B.C. a step closer to becoming a truly dementia-friendly province.



## About the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

In communities throughout the province, an estimated 85,000 British Columbians are living with dementia and this number is growing. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is the only provincial charity dedicated to helping anyone concerned with or facing dementia have the confidence and skills to maintain quality of life.

It will take courage and leadership to break down stigma and take steps to build a society that is friendlier, more accepting and more supportive of people living with dementia. We are available to answer questions and help you find the professional assistance you need.

- Visit our [website](#) to find an Alzheimer Resource Centre in your area.
- Email us at [dementiafriendlybc@alzheimerbcb.org](mailto:dementiafriendlybc@alzheimerbcb.org) for more information about making your organization dementia friendly, including information on requesting Dementia-Friendly Communities training for your organization.
- Stay connected with our community and updated on any upcoming events and webinars by following us on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).



*Questions or concerns about dementia?*

**First Link<sup>®</sup>**  
**DEMENTIA HELPLINE**

English - B.C.: 1-800-936-6033  
(Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. PST)

Cantonese and Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007  
(Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. PST)

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

English - Yukon: 1-888-852-2579  
(Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. MST)

## Resources for further information

### Dementia-Friendly Canada

For sector-specific videos, public service announcements and tips sheets (tips for dementia-friendly interactions, dementia-friendly language guidelines, tips for dementia-friendly spaces, tips for dementia-friendly written materials, and more) visit: [alzheimer.ca/DementiaFriendlyCanada](http://alzheimer.ca/DementiaFriendlyCanada)

### Landmark Study by the Alzheimer Society of Canada

This three-part study uses data modelling to project the future of dementia in Canada. The first report focused on overall prevalence, the second report examined impacts across demographic groups, and the third report explores the economic effects of dementia. To view a summary or for full versions of the reports, visit [Alzheimer Society of Canada, Landmark Study](#)

### Seniors First BC

1281 W Georgia St #502, Vancouver, BC V6E 3J7  
Seniors Abuse and Information Line:  
604-437-1940 or toll free 1-866-437-1940  
TTY: 604-428-3359 or toll free: 1-855-306-1443  
[SeniorsFirstBC.ca](http://SeniorsFirstBC.ca)

### Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

A national non-profit organization focused on elder abuse prevention and response.  
[cnpea.ca](http://cnpea.ca)

### HealthLinkBC

HealthLinkBC provides 24/7 non-emergency health information to residents of British Columbia. Call 8-1-1 or 7-1-1 for deaf and hearing-impaired assistance (TTY).  
[healthlinkbc.ca](http://healthlinkbc.ca)

### A Dementia Strategy for Canada: Together we aspire

The Government of Canada released these guidelines in 2019, and prioritized four national objectives, including eliminating stigma and promoting measures that create supportive and safe dementia-inclusive communities. To see a full copy of the report, visit:

[A Dementia Strategy for Canada: Together We Aspire - Canada.ca](http://A Dementia Strategy for Canada: Together We Aspire - Canada.ca)

**Alzheimer***Society*  
BRITISH COLUMBIA



**Dementia-Friendly  
Communities**

Building a dementia-friendly B.C.

[www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org)

## **First Link® Dementia Helpline**

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