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Alzheimer Society campaign tackles stigma of dementia

See me, not my disease. Let's talk about dementia.

Vancouver, B.C. – Imagine a close friend tells you she has dementia. Would you avoid her for fear of being embarrassed by what she might say or do? If you answered yes, you're not alone. According to a recent poll by Alzheimer's Disease International, 40 per cent of people with dementia reported they had been avoided or treated differently after diagnosis. It's no surprise, then, that one in four respondents cited stigma as a reason to conceal their diagnosis.

That's why, this January during Alzheimer Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society is launching a nation-wide campaign called "**See me, not my disease. Let's talk about dementia.**" The goal is to address myths about the disease, shift attitudes and make it easier to talk about dementia.

Stereotypes and misinformation are what prevent people with dementia from getting the help they need and stop others from taking the disease seriously. For example, Alzheimer's disease is more than having the occasional 'senior moment' or losing your keys. The truth is it's a progressive degenerative brain disorder that affects each person differently. It's fatal and there is no cure.

"Although one in three Canadians know someone with dementia, it is not discussed as openly as other chronic illnesses, so the prevalence is there but the conversation isn't yet and that's what we hope to address," explains Jean Blake, CEO, Alzheimer Society of B.C.

Today, 747,000 Canadians have dementia, 70,000 whom are British Columbians. While dementia can affect people as young as 40 years of age, the risk doubles every five years after 65.

"By talking more openly about dementia, we can all help to increase awareness about the symptoms, encourage earlier diagnosis and provide support for families to have the confidence and skills for the journey ahead," Blake adds.

The number of Canadians with dementia is expected to double to 1.4 million in the next 20 years, including more than 177,000 British Columbians.

To help change the conversation, Canadians can do their part if they:

- Learn the facts about dementia. Help to dispel inaccurate information to change society's attitudes and opinions towards people with the disease.
- Stop making jokes about Alzheimer's which trivialize the condition. We don't tolerate racial jokes, yet dementia-related jokes are common.
- Maintain relationships with people with dementia at home, in the community or at work, especially as the disease progresses.

To learn more about the **Let's talk about dementia** campaign and programs and services available in British Columbia, visit www.alzheimerbc.org.

About the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. provides a province-wide network of support, education, and information resources for families impacted by dementia. The Society is a non-profit organization that also advocates for better dementia health care and raises money to fund research. As part of a Canada-wide Federation, it is a leading health charity for people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Learn more at www.alzheimerbc.org.

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