

# Dementia Friendly Community Recreational Guide



“Thanks to the Alzheimer Society presentation, I now feel better able and confident in approaching someone who may seem lost or confused if I see them in our arena.”

– Community Service Staff Member, City of Melville

*Alzheimer Society*

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# Community Changes Everything

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## Community Changes Everything

Approximately 60 per cent of people living with dementia live in their community and, with support, they are able to maintain a good quality of life.

Everyone can help make their community dementia friendly. Often small, simple changes can make a real difference in making our communities more accessible and inclusive for people living with dementia.

Dementia friendly communities support people living with dementia to be engaged and feel welcomed where they work, live and play. A dementia friendly community also focuses on stigma reduction so that people living with dementia feel supported to participate and contribute in meaningful ways.

This resource will help you to:

- Understand and recognize the signs of dementia.
- Learn how to communicate in an effective, respectful way.
- Take action in how your recreation centre, or other community space like a senior's centre, may become more dementia friendly.
- Offer insights about programs and services that are mindful of people in the community who are living with dementia.

## Understanding dementia

The word dementia is an umbrella term that refers to many different diseases. Different types of dementia are caused by various physical changes in the brain.

Types of dementia include:

- Alzheimer's disease.
- Vascular dementia.
- Lewy body dementia.
- Frontotemporal dementia, including Pick's disease.
- Others, including Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

A person can appear to have dementia, but the symptoms (including memory loss, confusion, or disorientation) can actually be attributed to other medical causes such as medication changes, a urinary tract infection, or a vitamin deficiency. In such cases the symptoms may be reversible. Dementia, however, is permanent and progressive, which means that a person's symptoms will get worse over time.

This means that a person living with dementia may only need a bit of help or an occasional reminder when they are first diagnosed, but eventually, they will no longer be able to attend all the activities they had previously enjoyed.

# Friendly Communities Healthy People



## Recreational Centres

Recreation and community centres are central to our quality of life and can offer people living with dementia and their care partners an opportunity to engage with their community.

A person living with dementia may interact with someone like you – a staff member at a recreation centre – in many different ways.

They may be:

- A long-time volunteer who is starting to show signs of dementia.
- A person who is finding it difficult to sign up for art classes or a social card playing group.

- A regular participant in Aquafit classes but has started to have difficulty following the class instructions.
- Someone who is experiencing challenges using fitness equipment.

As a staff person at a recreation centre, seniors centre, neighbourhood house or park, you may meet a person living with dementia when they are having a good day, or on a day when they may be feeling anxious, stressed, or angry.

A person living with dementia may need your understanding, emotional support, and more time than usual to process information or questions asked of them.

## Inclusion, staying active, and recreation services

Many people living with dementia and their care partners continue to enjoy taking part in a variety of leisure and recreation activities. People living with dementia and care partners often feel that programs that consider the needs of people living with dementia are more welcoming and appropriate for them than those that do not.

It's also important to remember that, for the person living with dementia, attending and participating meaningfully is often a more important goal than mastering the activity.

At first a person may tell you that they are living with dementia and need little assistance, but as their dementia progresses, they will start to have more challenges. It is likely there will eventually be a time when they will need some additional support to participate in activities, such as a gym buddy who can help them use the fitness equipment correctly, or a helping hand to scan their membership card correctly at the reception desk.

**The Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan has numerous learning opportunities for individuals and organizations to learn more about dementia and how to make our communities more inclusive and accessible for everyone.**

## What should facilitators and trainers know about leading activities that include people living with dementia and their care partners?

You may be aware there is a person living with dementia in your activity group or be leading an activity that is designed for people living with dementia.

Here are some suggestions to make the activity welcoming to people living with dementia:

- The focus of the activity should be on participation and enjoyment, rather than exact reproduction of the activity.
- Sometimes people living with dementia will want to get up, leave, and come back and that is okay. Just be aware of their safety.
- Asking a person living with dementia to start or lead the activity is difficult. It is easier for them to watch first and see what others do.
- Taking breaks during the activity is recommended.
- If there is seating in rows, offer people living with dementia aisle seats so they can get up and move around more easily.
- Provide the support to help people living with dementia participate but treat them with the same respect as other participants in your program.

Many people living with dementia have difficulty telling time on an analog clock but can still read the numbers on a digital one. For some though, reading the numbers on a digital clock has no meaning. When referencing time, during a program for example, it might be best to make reference to other clues as well. For example, "Our class will be over in 30 minutes, right after the music ends."



# Knowledge Changes Everything

People with dementia and their care partners have a right to live well in their community. As more people are diagnosed with dementia every year and choose to live at home, we need to work together to better support our neighbours living with dementia.

## What are some dementia friendly activities?

Dementia friendly activities can be any type of leisure activity that provides an opportunity for people living with dementia to:

- Enjoy an activity
- Learn or practice a skill
- Maintain a sense of social connection

Dementia-friendly activities are not focused on dementia but are designed in a way that will allow someone living with dementia to participate. They are planned for, and are welcoming to, people living with dementia, their care partners, and friends. Existing activities can be adapted, and new activities can be planned and implemented, provided the facilitator or trainer has an understanding of dementia, experience with the activity, and the ability to coordinate it.

Facilitators, staff, and trainers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the information, support, and education programs, and services offered by the Alzheimer Society. This will increase their understanding of dementia and reduce the likelihood of misinformation.

## Examples of dementia friendly activities can include:

- Memory café social meeting
- Walking group
- Breakfast, lunch, or dinner at a restaurant
- Potluck
- Arts and crafts
- Dancing
- Sharing life stories, experiences, and memories
- Concerts and other musical shows
- Karaoke
- Choir
- Golf
- Gardening
- Cooking classes
- Games & playing cards
- Bingo



### **What makes activities easy to participate in?**

There are a variety of ways that programs can be planned to consider the needs of people living with dementia. If programs are mindful of the needs of people living with dementia, the activities can be recommended as good options to stay involved in the community. A program that is dementia friendly would have the following characteristics:

- They cater to adult interests that avoid treating people living with dementia like children
- They are attentive to inclusivity
- Participants receive high levels of encouragement
- Activities are non-competitive and/or slower paced. Lawn bowling is a good example
- The organizers are mindful of auditory and visual stimulation when considering the environment

For example, it may be helpful to ask participants if they would enjoy having background music, or if they would prefer a quiet environment.

They allow participants to set their own limits. For example, in a yoga class a person may like to use a chair and have an instructor show modified movements.

While scheduling programs or choosing from existing programs to recommend to a person living with dementia, here are some considerations to keep in mind:

- The ability to drop in without mandatory weekly attendance because some days may be “bad days.” This also means considering drop in and cancellation rates.
- While dropping in is an important option, a routine schedule makes it easy for people to know that they can drop in at the same time as they did two weeks ago; this predictability may be helpful.
- Activities should not be too long – 30 to 45 minutes is optimal.
- Smaller class sizes are usually preferable. For example, a class with fewer than 20 participants might be ideal.

# Communication strategies

## Key communication strategies



1. Get the person's attention.



6. Use close-ended questions – yes or no answers.



2. Make eye contact.



7. Allow time for response.



3. Bring the person to a quiet place.



8. Respond to feelings, not stories.



4. Speak slowly and clearly.



9. Connect, don't correct.



5. Share one message at a time.



10. Repeat or try again later.

It is not always immediately clear that a person is living with dementia. Everyone's dementia journey is unique, and they will maintain different strengths and abilities and experience different challenges along the course of the disease. **Here are some signs that someone may be experiencing symptoms of dementia and strategies for responding in a supportive way.**

### Problems with memory.

When a person is first diagnosed with dementia, they may forget the names of people or places once in a while. As the disease progresses, they may forget things more often, especially more recent experiences. For example, they may have difficulty keeping track of a program schedule and may often ask what day a class takes place or repeat the same story frequently.

- Do not argue. If a person living with dementia 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.
- Unless their safety or security is at risk, try to adjust to the person living with dementia's reality because they may no longer be able to adjust to yours. For example, if the person living with dementia feels you forgot to remind them about a program start date, it is better to apologize and acknowledge that they feel frustrated (their reality) than to try to convince them that you sent the reminder (your reality). You may say something like "I can see how frustrated you are. Let's get this sorted out as soon as we can."





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### **Difficulty with familiar tasks.**

Challenges in sequential thinking may cause a person living with dementia to have trouble with previously familiar tasks, especially if the task has many steps. Even routine activities such as using the change rooms or remembering to scan their card may become challenging as the disease progresses.

- If a person living with dementia is in the early stages of the disease, a helping hand or gentle encouragement may be all they need to continue to do tasks independently. For example, they may forget the code to the locker room, but be fully capable of getting ready themselves.
- Be patient, supportive, and speak slowly and clearly.
- If you are providing instructions, give them in a simple, step-by-step way, rather than all at once. This gives the person more time to absorb the information and complete a task.

- Try demonstrating as well as providing directions verbally.
- Focus on what the person is still doing well, rather than the challenges they are experiencing. If possible, bring the person to a quieter space where it is easier to concentrate.

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

Everyone has trouble finding the right word sometimes, but as the disease progresses a person living with dementia may frequently forget simple words or substitute a less appropriate word for the one they really wanted. This can make their sentences or accounts of events difficult to understand. For example, a person living with dementia may have difficulty explaining to staff at the information desk that they would like to renew their community centre membership.

# Wandering

People living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias often experience the need to stay on the move. Wandering behaviour may occur because a person would like to go somewhere specific or accomplish a task.

Wandering may occur at any time of day. In itself, wandering is not a harmful behaviour, but for people living with dementia, wandering is a very serious and potentially dangerous situation because it can expose the person to dangers like traffic, falls or extreme weather conditions.

Changes in the brain can cause a person living with dementia to become confused and disoriented, even when they are in a familiar place. For example, a person living with dementia may not be able to find their way back home from the recreation centre and they may become lost, putting them at risk for injury, or even death.

- Be patient, don't rush – this may mean taking more time.
- Observe the person's body language as sometimes they may have difficulty expressing thoughts verbally.
- When possible and appropriate use closed- ended or "yes" or "no" questions. For example, instead of asking "what are your favourite activities?" you might ask "do you like swimming?" or "do you like painting?" so the person can give "yes" or "no" answers.
- If the person feels comfortable with you helping them find the right word, you might say something like "Do you mean ?". Repeat the question a different way or try again later.
- Consider having greeters at the entrance to the community centre or seniors centre when dementiafriendly activities are planned to help people get to the activity room.
- Ensure all signage is clear, easy to read, and placed at eye level.

## Other Communication Tips:

### Disorientation of time and place.

It's normal to briefly forget the day of the week or your destination. But a person living with dementia may become lost in a familiar place, such as the local park they often visit. For example, pathways that look similar might cause the person to get disoriented. It is also possible that the person will find it challenging to determine what time of the day it is.

- A person living with dementia may be disoriented and just need a friendly approach and short conversation that will get them back on track. In the early stages of dementia progression, a little help may be all the person living with dementia needs to continue with their day.

- Be patient, be understanding.
- Always speak to the person with dignity and respect.
- Remember to make eye contact. If you are making notes or using the computer, take a break and make sure to look at the person.
- It may be necessary to remind someone to put on their glasses or turn on their hearing aid, but do not assume that every person living with dementia has a visual or hearing impairment.
- When you do not know the person, avoid using "elder- speak" (for example, "sweetie" or "dear").
- Never speak about the person as if they are not there, even if they cannot communicate in a verbal way. A person living with dementia may not remember what you said, but they often remember how you made them feel.



## Meaningful engagement

Meaningful engagement is a person-centred approach that encourages and invites people with dementia to purposefully participate in the activities of organizations/communities. Participation includes actively contributing ideas, skills, and abilities, while recognizing that individual participation will vary, depending on abilities, personal histories, and available opportunities.

Benefits of meaningful engagement for the person with dementia include:

- Being listened to as an equal.
- A sense of purpose and routine.
- Being offered an appropriate outlet for empowerment, skills, and experiences.
- An increased self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.
- Being able to address issues related to living with dementia.
- Being offered opportunities to influence policies and programs which can improve quality of life.
- Being able to provide the perspective of a person with dementia and affect decision making.

### Meaningful engagement requires:

- A welcoming, encouraging attitude from staff and volunteers.
- Having staff that are knowledgeable about the effects of dementia on the person.
- A participatory approach: “nothing about me without me”.
- Encouraging people with dementia to speak for themselves.
- Active listening and engagement in dialogue.
- A safe environment for expression of opinions without fear of being judged or dismissed.
- Opportunity to influence what happens and make decisions that matter.
- Recognition of skills and abilities.
- Meaningful and useful participation.
- Being listened to and understood and having views respected and heard.

# A Community of Support

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## 60% of people with dementia live in their community.

When you choose the Alzheimer Society, you join a community of supporters and experts committed to helping each of us thrive.

Our role as a Society is creating and fostering a community of support in the management of dementia in the lives of those living with the disease.

### Dementia Friends

A Dementia Friend learns more about dementia and what they can do to help make our province a more accessible and inclusive place for those affected by it.

By learning more and using this knowledge in their everyday interactions, Dementia Friends help reduce stigma and make our communities more supportive, accessible, and inclusive for people affected by dementia.

### Dementia Friendly Communities

Dementia friendly communities are welcoming to people with dementia, support them to live well, and engage them meaningfully in everyday life.

A dementia friendly community focuses on stigma reduction so that people living with dementia feel supported to participate and contribute in

meaningful ways. Dementia friendly communities promote locally based supports and address barriers experienced by individuals living with dementia and their care partners.

### Community of Support

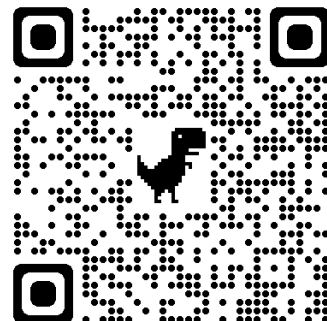
The Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan's programs and services help people with dementia, their care partners, families, and friends by providing information, support, education, and referral to other community services.

Call our Dementia Helpline at 1-877-949-4141

or, email us [helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca).

Our Dementia Helpline is available

Monday to Friday – 8:30am - 4:30pm.



[www.alzheimer.ca/sk](http://www.alzheimer.ca/sk)

1-800-263-3367