

# First Link Highlight Report

## 2021 – 2022

### A Community of Support



**“Alzheimer’s disease doesn’t just impact the person, it affects the entire community.”**

Laura Erickson-Lumb, First Link Coordinator  
Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan

*Alzheimer Society*

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# Community Changes Everything

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## A Community of Support

The Alzheimer Society focuses on creating and building a community of support rich in information, experience, and services. We create connections and provide services that people can turn to and tap into when needed. We are a place to go to, not as a last resort, but as a first step.

First Link® is a program of the Alzheimer Society that connects people with dementia and their families to that community of support. Our First Link® Coordinators provide ongoing information, support services, and education as early as possible and throughout the progression of the disease and empower individuals to identify options that meet their unique needs.

### Connecting with First Link® means a client:

- Receives one-on-one support specific to their situation;
- Gets connected to Alzheimer Society programs to learn more about the disease, coping strategies, communication, planning for the future, and receives tools and supports;
- Gets connected to local healthcare providers and community services;

- Meets other people in similar circumstances and exchange experiences; and,
- Receives scheduled follow up calls from a First Link® Coordinator.

**Having access to appropriate supports early in the diagnosis can make a significant difference in the quality of life for people living with dementia, as well as their caregivers and care partners.**

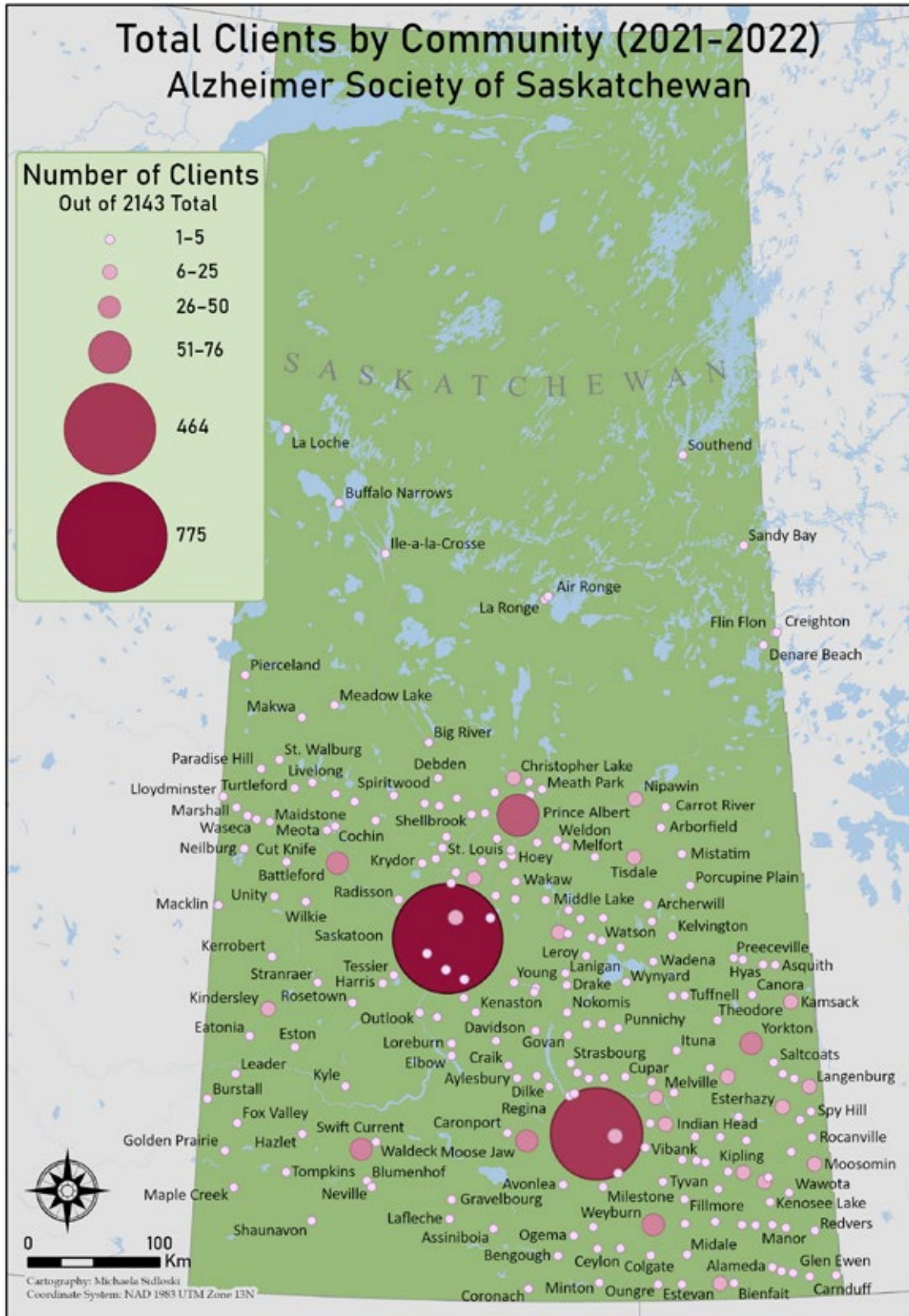
First Link® helps individuals, families, and care providers understand and prepare for the successes and challenges associated with the progression of the disease through practical knowledge and strategies.

The Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan works with health practitioners and community agencies to build awareness about the First Link® program and the benefits of referring their patients to us.

By creating robust partnerships across primary care, community care, and the community support services sector, First Link® establishes access to coordinated care as early as possible after a diagnosis is made.

Evidence shows that clients who are directly referred to First Link® are connected, on average, 11 months sooner to Alzheimer Society programs and services than those who self-refer.

# The Alzheimer Society provided programs and services to over 2,400 clients in 300 communities across Saskatchewan.



# Supporting Clients During Unprecedented Times

Over the past year, the majority of our programs and supports were offered via virtual programming due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Virtual program delivery has enabled us to increase the geographical reach of our services throughout the province. Our staff have worked diligently on outreach strategies to increase the attendance of virtual program delivery and engaged volunteers in the co-facilitation of virtual support groups.

**“Our support groups may be meeting by Zoom right now, but members in the group support and connect with each other, listen to each other, ask some hard questions of each other. Support group attendees are the ones who understand each other – the connection is so valuable.”**

**– Evangeline Patkau, Volunteer Support Group Facilitator, Alzheimer Society**

**“A First Link® Coordinator really brings the family and caregiver perspectives into the memory clinics. They provide the emotional support the family needs throughout the whole process and can advocate for the family in a different way than a health care provider can. Because First Link® Coordinators stay in touch with the family after each clinic, they can contact our team to help facilitate new supports down the road.”**

**— Debra Morgan, Director - Rural and Remote Memory Clinics, Rural Dementia Action Research**

# Supporting Clients to Get a Diagnosis

**Our First Link® Coordinators have many tools and resources to help individuals and families prepare for their doctor’s visit.**

In rural areas, there are generally fewer resources and people have to travel for specialist care. Rural Primary Health Care (PHC) Memory Clinics bring together primary health care teams and First Link® Coordinators from the Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan to help patients and their families access dementia diagnostic supports in their own communities.

The Rural PHC Memory Clinics are spearheaded by the Rural Dementia Action Research (RaDAR) Team and follow an interdisciplinary approach to a dementia diagnosis, with the goal of providing a diagnosis in a day. The clinics also focus on the management of atypical and complex cases and assess psychological health and caregiver burden experienced by the family members or others supporting the patient. Clinics occur in Kipling, Weyburn, Carlyle, and Bengough with more clinics being added.

Having a First Link® Coordinator involved in each clinic helps increase a family’s awareness of the Alzheimer Society and First Link® Program. Furthermore, it helps establish a relationship between the person suspected to have dementia, their family or care partners, and our First Link Coordinator for when any follow up occurs. Individuals must have a physician’s referral to the Rural and Remote Memory Clinics to attend.



**We experienced a 58% increase in referrals from those who diagnose and treat dementia (physicians, specialists, and nurse practitioners) outside of the memory clinic models.**

**92% of clients would recommend our Alzheimer Society's programs and services.**



**75% of our clients report they have better strategies for coping with dementia and managing symptoms related to dementia.**



# A Community of Learning

We offer a variety of opportunities to help our clients learn about dementia, coping strategies, and community supports and services, and we help connect people impacted by the disease with others who are living in similar circumstances.

Three Evenings of Education were offered this past fiscal year with a total of 532 people registered.

## *Safely Home: Reducing the Risk of Wandering*

Heather Van Starckenburg (former CSTM) provided the presentation following Dr. Noelannah Neubauer, who discussed risk levels and strategies (such as locating devices) to reduce the risks of getting lost, as well as the tool she developed- Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering

*Walking through Grief and Loss with a Covid-19 lens: Strategies for Survival.* Presenters Dr. Lorraine Holtslander and Dr. Shelley Peacock spoke on the types of loss and grief as experienced during the pandemic and beyond, discussed how the pandemic has affected people with dementia and caregivers, and shared tools and strategies to build coping and resiliency during grief. Dr. Joel Gajadharsingh and Dr. Jill Bally shared their personal journey of a family member diagnosed with rapidly progressing mixed dementia and how, as a spouse and daughter they coped with personal losses.

**“I was extremely grateful that the staff member took the time to speak with me and provide resources. It was very helpful and comforting. I was about to give up and felt on my own, but now I feel connected again. I see a counsellor about once a month to help but the conversation with your staff member was a lot more informative, useful and supportive. Thank you.”**

**– Alzheimer Society Client**

*Self-Compassion: An Umbrella for our Rainy (and Snowy) Days*, presented by Dr. Donna Goodridge. The presenter spoke about the practice of self-compassion and how it can be used in daily life to help ourselves and others, the proven benefits of self-compassion and how to locate accessible resources to explore the practice of self-compassion.

In addition to our Evenings of Education we offered:

- 6 Minds in Motion® sessions
- 7 Virtual Learning Series
- 8 monthly virtual and telephone-based support groups
- 9 province-wide ABC's of Dementia presentations

# Knowledge Changes Everything

**“They really helped me understand my dad’s dementia, and address issues that come up in a respectful manner. The Alzheimer Society has given me a wealth of information on coping skills, managing the stress, and communication.”**

**– Alzheimer Society Client**

# Community Changes Everything

“To be able to say, ‘You’re not alone, we’re here to walk through this dementia journey with you means a lot to people. When people feel like they’re not alone, they feel empowered to do more.”

– Melody Neufeld, Client Services Team Manager, Alzheimer Society

## Supporting Client Safety

**When a person living with dementia wanders and becomes lost, there is a 50% chance that they will be found injured or dead from hypothermia, dehydration, or drowning if they are not located within 24 hours. Additionally, nearly 60% of missing person cases involving people with dementia occur in community settings.**

Over the past year, we have developed new Safety Plan toolkits and checklists for families and care partners to help people with dementia remain in their homes for as long as possible.

These new resources were informed by the work of the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia and Dr. Noelannah Neubauer, a post-doctoral researcher in the Faculty of Health at the University of Waterloo who was also a guest speaker for our *Safely Home: Reducing the Risk of Wandering* Evening of Education in May 2021.

To determine the level of risk for clients and families living with dementia and the complexity of their cases, a Risk Indicator Tool was developed in partnership and consultation with the Alzheimer Society of Ontario.

Our First Link® Care Navigation program was created in part to support this work. It integrates supports around the person with dementia and their care partners and helps support this work. We help clients and their families sustain self-management goals and strengthen the linkages between care providers across sectors, along a continuum of care for clients with complex care needs.

Our Client Services Team Managers and First Link® Coordinators work with clients and families who may have situational breakdown because of these particular risk indicators to determine for whom there may be a risk, how high the risk for breakdown is, and the different type(s) of support and resources each person may need.

Client Services Team Managers can now make referrals to other health professionals and community agencies for clients who may not be able to refer themselves for a variety of reasons.

This development helps ensure more consistency in care, increased knowledge of system navigation, and our ability to communicate information that a person’s other supports need to know.

# A Community of Support

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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 caring, support and knowledge in the management of dementia in the lives of those living with the disease.

## **Dementia Helpline**

Monday – Friday 8:30 am – 4:30 pm  
1-877-949-4141 [helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:helpline@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Cypress Resource Centre**

Serving Swift Current and Southwest SK  
Ph: 306-673-2685 [cypress@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:cypress@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Prairie North Resource Centre**

Serving Battlefords and Northwest SK  
Ph: 306-445-2206 [prairienorth@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:prairienorth@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Prince Albert Parkland Resource Centre**

Serving Prince Albert and Northeast SK  
Ph: 306-922-2296 [paparkland@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:paparkland@alzheimer.sk.ca)

Our community of support is rich in information, experience, and services – we create resources that people can turn to and tap into when needed.

Our work is about creating a place for people to connect and share their experience and knowledge. We welcome you to join our community of support.

## **Regina Qu'Appelle Resource Centre**

Serving Regina, Moosomin and surrounding areas  
Ph 306-949-4141 [regina@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:regina@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Saskatoon Resource Centre**

Serving Saskatoon, Humboldt, and surrounding areas  
Ph: 306-683-6322 [saskatoon@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:saskatoon@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Sun Country Resource Centre**

Serving Estevan, Weyburn and Southeast SK  
Ph: 306-634-4002 [suncountry@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:suncountry@alzheimer.sk.ca)

## **Sunrise Resource Centre**

Serving Yorkton and East Central SK  
PH: 306-786-3600 [sunrise@alzheimer.sk.ca](mailto:sunrise@alzheimer.sk.ca)