

Connections

Linking a community of dementia support



Accessing remote support this fall

As we navigate ongoing uncertainty and challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic this fall, the Alzheimer Society of B.C. remains committed to helping anyone affected by dementia through the continued development of remote support. We want anyone affected by dementia to know that they're not alone. Please connect with us, and virtual support and education, through:

The First Link® Dementia Helpline: The Helpline continues to operate into the evening Monday through Friday (9 a.m. until 8 p.m.), with support available in Cantonese, Mandarin and Punjabi from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Minds in Motion® online: We are now offering this fitness and social program online. Visit alzbc.org/MM for details.

Virtual support groups: We are continuing to roll out groups across B.C. If you are interested in participating, by phone or online, please call the First Link® Dementia Helpline for more information.

Webinars: Register for a live webinar every Wednesday and access recordings of recent weekly webinars on topics such as “Communication changes” and “Considering the transition to long-term care” at alzbc.org/webinars.

Read and learn more

For a full catalogue of COVID-19-related resources for people living with dementia, caregivers and health-care providers, visit alzbc.org/COVID-19.

In this issue

Greetings
Caregiver story

Page 2
Page 3

Information
Giving
Volunteering

Page 5
Page 7
Page 8

Supporting each other through times of transition

My name is Jen Lyle, and I would like to introduce myself to readers as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Some of you may know me through my last role as the CEO of SafeCare BC, a non-profit workplace health and safety association for B.C.'s continuing care sector. After many years of collaboration with the Society to provide foundational dementia education and support for care providers, I am thrilled to begin this exciting new chapter.

With each season that passes, we're confronted with changes, and often new challenges, related to living well during COVID-19. As we move into fall, we are hopeful positive changes are on the horizon, and the most challenging days of the pandemic are behind us. While many of us are starting to engage in some of the in-person activities we missed, we also acknowledge that, for some people affected by dementia, this transition will come with its own unique set of challenges. We are here to offer strategies to help manage stress and stay healthy during uncertain times and changing caregiver responsibilities.

In this issue of *Connections*, we delve into the link between hearing impairment and developing dementia. We also hear from Erin Beaudoin, the CEO of a care community for people living with dementia, and Lynn Vail, a donor who chose to honour her friend's legacy by establishing an endowment fund to support families for years to come.

It remains incredibly important to focus on supporting people living with dementia and the people who care for them during these days of change, and every day. If someone in your life is affected by dementia, continue to offer your support, and if you are affected personally, don't be afraid to ask for help. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is here with virtual support groups, Minds in Motion® sessions and ongoing support through the First Link® Dementia Helpline. Please contact us.



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



First Link®
DEMENTIA HELPLINE

Questions about dementia or memory loss?

English: 1-800-936-6033
Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003

English: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Cantonese or Mandarin and Punjabi: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Dementia in the days of COVID-19

In the spring of 2020, we began sharing stories of how the pandemic was impacting people living with dementia and those who care for them in our “Dementia in the days of COVID-19” series. This summer we continued the series through a collection of interviews exploring the ongoing challenges and successes people affected by dementia are facing, and their reflections from an unprecedented year of increased isolation.



Erin Beaudoin

We heard from people living with dementia and the people who care for them, including Erin Beaudoin, the Chief Motivator, CEO of Eden Gardens, a non-profit long-term care home community in Nanaimo that provides person-centred care for

people living with dementia. Erin has been outspoken about the impact COVID-19 had on Eden Gardens’ community members, including staff, residents and families. She joined us to reflect on the impact the pandemic has had on her community and decisions she made in leading the organization through such an incredibly difficult time. Find the full series at alzbc.org/COVID-stories.

Community comes together in crisis

When Erin Beaudoin talks about all the ways people in Nanaimo came together to show people living with dementia at Eden Gardens that they weren’t alone during the pandemic, it’s like watching a highlights reel of feel-good community news stories. Ballerinas danced outside windows. Musicians played saxophones, trumpets and guitars. A car show. A motorcycle brigade. Youth 2020, a volunteer group,

painted four-foot-tall wooden kids and put them around the property, so when residents were out, they were reminded of the kids who weren’t able to see them. At the outset of the pandemic, local hotels donated sheets and volunteers came together to sew 600 gowns and masks as emergency PPE.

“We’ve had some really beautiful moments,” Erin says.

With the generosity and words of encouragement from the community came hope, confidence, love and joy during such a difficult time. The impact of this support was immense, yet it did not outweigh the struggle of life during COVID-19. The once-vibrant community – home to visitors, pets, students, volunteers and celebrations for every holiday – has come out of its darkest days of COVID-19, but the wounds the pandemic left behind will take much longer to heal, Beaudoin says.

The struggle ensued

“The staff really were dedicated to doing everything they could and more to try and maintain life as much as possible, but as staff started to burn out, that became more and more difficult,” she says. “It got quiet, then it started to get lonely and depressing for everybody. Our staff workload is hard and without our volunteers and families, the workload massively increased.”

Then residents who relied on facial expressions to communicate stopped communicating. Responsive behaviours increased. Families wanted important updates that staff often weren’t able to provide. All families were hearing was bad news.

“When we stopped seeing the joy, it got tough to remember our mission, what we’re here to do and the benefits of this honourable line of work,” she says.

Residents and staff went through traumatic experiences with violating COVID test swabs, 14 days of isolating during an outbreak in February and a first round of vaccinations from public health staff who needed more support. It was tense. The second round of swabbing and vaccinations was much improved by collaborating with the public health team on better understanding the needs of people living with dementia.

Acceptance

As the pandemic wore on, Erin aimed to educate herself on vulnerable leadership during difficult times. But the resiliency workshops made the situation worse.

“They preached balance and balance wasn’t an option,” Erin says. “I came to a point of just accepting that I couldn’t be balanced and forgave myself.”

With that acceptance comes the open acknowledgement of mistakes she made at the helm of the organization. While there is always something else to do – from reviewing public health orders or the latest changes to collective agreements – she urges other leaders to ensure they make the time to do

rounds. If she could go back, she would opt to spend more time with the people who do the work that keeps residents alive and well.

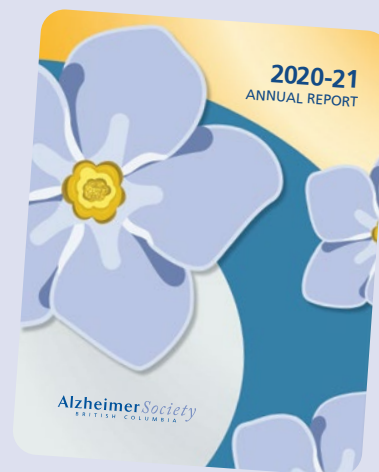
Health-care providers, families and people who have spent the pandemic inside care homes are left to replay incredibly challenging situations and scenes of loss. For Erin, it’s the people left separated from their parents until just hours before their passing, the crying kids unable to say final goodbyes to dying grandparents – and those people who died living with dementia and unable to feel the love if their families in the room next to them. Those are the losses we won’t soon recover from.

“People died of broken hearts,” she says. “We almost incarcerated a very vulnerable population of our society with the very best of intentions and it did some serious damage.”

Since the spring, amid loosening COVID-19 restrictions, more visitors have been welcomed inside Eden Gardens. The once-locked down home is starting to see the return of the spirit in the halls. It’s a slow recovery process, and one Erin, residents and the community are grateful has begun.

Read our 2020-21 annual report

The last year has been one of challenges and innovation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a year of undeniable losses, we have much to be proud of and we are grateful for all of the clients, donors, volunteers, partners and other community supporters who were with us along the way. The Alzheimer Society of B.C.’s 2020-21 annual report is available now. Learn how we continued our mission to show people affected by dementia that they’re not alone at alzbc.org/annual-report.



Have you heard? The link between hearing impairment and cognitive decline



While there is still much to learn in research about the cause of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, scientists have begun to zero in on modifiable risk factors for dementia. Scientists believe that approximately 40 per cent of dementias worldwide could be prevented through action on these risk factors. The 12 modifiable risk factors, identified by **the 2020 Lancet Commission**, include: lower levels of education, hypertension, smoking, obesity, depression, physical inactivity, diabetes, low social contact, excessive alcohol consumption, traumatic brain injury, air pollution and hearing loss. While there are no guarantees, taking action to address these modifiable risk factors may help reduce your risk or delay the onset of dementia. It's never too late to take action!

Hearing impairment and dementia

The link between hearing loss and dementia is one you may not expect. Hearing loss is associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia, and studies have suggested that untreated hearing loss can almost double the risk of developing dementia.

Scientists are still working to understand the mechanism behind this relationship.

The strongest hypothesis is that hearing loss can lead to social isolation, due to the difficulty in communication, which reduces cognitive stimulation and increases one's risk of cognitive decline. Another hypothesis is that hearing loss causes the brain to put more energy towards processing sound rather than other cognitive processes which can lead to cognitive decline.

The science is clear that addressing hearing loss early appears to be protective against cognitive decline.

What causes hearing impairment?

The most common causes of hearing loss are:

- **Noise.** The exposure to loud noises over time can slowly change the structure of the inner ear. To prevent noise-related hearing loss, avoid loud noises, turn the volume down and wear hearing protection when appropriate.
- **Age.** Changes to the inner ear can happen with age and cause a slow but steady loss of hearing.

Other causes of hearing loss can include an object in the ear, injury to the ear or head, earwax buildup or an ear infection, among others.

Hearing aids

Hearing aids do not cure hearing loss, but instead amplify sounds you're having trouble hearing. They are small battery-powered devices that vary in size, features and the way they're placed in the ear.

Hearing aids have come a long way in appearance, function and technology. Today's hearing aids are smaller and more inconspicuous than ever with different features such as background noise reduction, rechargeable batteries or new wireless capabilities like Bluetooth, allowing them to be synched directly to a smartphone.

Where to go to take the next step

You may wish to start a conversation about changes you're experiencing with a health-care provider who can do a physical examination.

Additionally, in B.C. you can book a hearing test appointment directly with an audiologist or hearing instrument practitioner without a referral. Keep in mind that services with these professionals, as well as hearing aids, are typically not covered under B.C.'s

Medical Services Plan (MSP). Some private insurance will cover all or part of the cost of hearing tests and hearing aids.

You can also dial HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 (or 7-1-1 for the deaf and hard of hearing) to speak to a health service navigator and registered nurse to talk about next steps. Translation services are available for HealthLink BC in 130 languages.



Is someone in your life experiencing hearing impairment? Here are some tips to start a conversation about seeking treatment:

- **Find the right time.** Be mindful that this can be a sensitive subject. Find a time to start the conversation when the person is relaxed and open.
- **Focus on the benefits.** Using a hearing aid can bring a mix of feelings. People may worry about stigma or feeling a loss of independence. Focus on the benefits of hearing aids: feeling more included, improving quality of life, reduced risk of falls and the potential to delay the onset of dementia.
- **Come prepared with information.** The wide variety of hearing aid models and features on the market can be intimidating to navigate. Doing a bit of background research on hearing loss and hearing aids may make the conversation less daunting.
- **Be a partner.** Ask how you can support. Perhaps you can offer to accompany them to their next doctor's visit, help them to set up an appointment with an audiologist or support them in considering the different options available for hearing aid models.

A legacy in honour of a friend



Lynn Vail and John Bramble

When Lynn Vail turned 50, she committed to giving \$10 each month to five charities. When she was updating her will in 2020, she thought about her dear friend John Bramble and the impact Alzheimer’s disease had on him and his family. She decided to do more. Working with Society staff, Lynn set up the John F. Bramble Endowment Fund to honour her friend and to help support other families on the dementia journey, especially those facing a diagnosis of young onset Alzheimer’s disease.

“I thought only rich people did endowments,” Lynn says with a laugh. “You want whatever you have left to go to something important.”

Lynn met John in the ‘80s through mutual friends in her Surrey neighbourhood and eventually introduced him to his future wife Lucie, a newcomer from

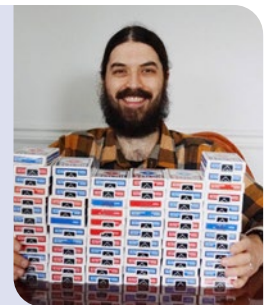
Quebec with whom he shared a love of motorcycles. John was an electrician for the City of Vancouver, Lynn’s “computer guru” and someone she could always share a laugh with. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease in his 50s when he and Lucie had two young children at home.

“He was a family man,” Lynn says. “He was funny. He was a great friend.”

Witnessing her friends going through their experience with the disease motivated Lynn to set up the endowment. She is particularly interested in ensuring the families of people living with young onset dementia have access to more support early in the dementia journey. She also hopes to see improvements in health-care provider education to improve dementia care settings.

Creative fundraising from a memory master

Three-time Canadian National Memory Sports Champion Braden Adams poses with 70 decks of playing cards. As this newsletter went to press,



Braden was preparing to memorize the correct order of the 70 decks shuffled – one for every thousand people living with dementia in B.C. The creative fundraiser, which he planned to stream live on Twitch, was an example of how you really can do *Anything for Alzheimer’s!* Learn more about how to host your own unique event at anythingforalzheimers.com.

Volunteers grow Chinese community support

For the past five years, an inspiring group of community members have volunteered their time and engaged their networks to increase understanding of dementia and Alzheimer Society of B.C. support available within B.C.'s Chinese community. The Society's Chinese Advisory Committee, led by co-chairs Tony Yue and Vivian Lam, tirelessly raises awareness and funds for culturally-relevant supports for Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking caregivers and people living with dementia in the province.

The deep relationships these volunteers have in the community are key to the group's success. When the pandemic forced the cancellation of a planned gala, committee members reached out to the Society's media partner Fairchild Television and pulled together the Society's first-ever Cantonese-language variety show, the *Telethon for Alzheimer's*. We are excited to share that the second *Telethon* is set to air on Fairchild Television on Saturday, November 13 at 8 p.m.

The committee's list of fundraising achievements is impressive. Working with Society staff, the group has organized an annual *Charity Dinner for Alzheimer's* (where the menu features delicious dishes that are also brain healthy), hosted a world-class performer



for a charity concert and continues to rally passionate volunteers who raise funds and awareness at the Society's *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* each year.

The remarkable members of the Chinese Advisory Committee, and the many other volunteers who help make community fundraisers like these happen, are true champions for the Society and for the families they have helped connect to dementia education and support. A heartfelt thank you goes out to all committee members. We are grateful for your expertise, passion and commitment to supporting a community of care for all those affected by dementia.

To learn more about the *Telethon for Alzheimer's*, visit alzbc.org/telethon2021. Find more resources for the Chinese community at alzbc.org/Chinese.

About Connections

Connections is a quarterly print and digital publication produced by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Articles cannot be reproduced without written permission.

Contact us to contribute content or to subscribe to receive *Connections* regularly.

- **Online** at alzbc.org/connections-newsletter
- **Email** newsletter@alzheimerbc.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

Help us reduce costs by subscribing to *Connections* by email.

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.



The Standards Program Trustmark is a mark of Imagine Canada used under license by the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

Charitable registration number:
#11878 4891 RR0001