

# Connections

Linking a community of dementia support



## Alzheimer's Awareness Month 2024: Fostering a supportive community around families

This January marks another Alzheimer's Awareness Month, when we'll be working to dismantle the stigma surrounding dementia and celebrating moments of joy as we show it's possible to live well on the dementia journey. While one in two British Columbians may perceive a dementia diagnosis as the end of a meaningful life, we know there can be unexpected moments of joy in the journey of living with dementia.

This year, we're highlighting the way our programs can help people living with the disease and their care partners find a community of support. We'll

share their stories and provide essential resources. Throughout the month, we're hosting virtual events and sharing practical tips for living well with dementia.

While there's no cure for dementia, we aim to provide solace, understanding and courage. By shifting perspectives, we take a step closer to a more dementia-friendly B.C., where care partners are at the core of building a compassionate and empathetic community. Together, we can ensure that no one faces the dementia journey alone.

**Learn  
more!**

To learn more about this year's Alzheimer's Awareness Month, visit [alzbc.org/fulloflife](https://alzbc.org/fulloflife).

### In this issue

Greetings  
Giving

Page 2  
Page 4

What's coming up  
Research  
Volunteering

Page 5  
Page 7  
Page 8

# Sparking the conversation builds a community of care

As we step into the new year, we often say goodbye to old habits, reflect on the changes we want to make in our lives and set new goals. January is also Alzheimer’s Awareness Month. This year the Alzheimer Society of B.C. is continuing to work to dismantle the stigma surrounding dementia and celebrating moments of joy as we show that it’s possible to live well with the disease. We’ll highlight the way our programs can help people living with dementia and their care partners find a community of support. We’ll share their stories and provide essential resources. We’ll also host virtual events and share practical tips for living well with dementia.

This issue of *Connections* features meaningful engagement through volunteering. We share a research study on how volunteering may help protect the brain against cognitive decline and dementia. We’re also excited to provide updates on the lived experience volunteer committee, an effort to raise the voices of people affected by dementia and allow their experiences to shape how dementia is understood and treated. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. has meaningful volunteer roles, for both people with lived experience and supportive community members, and we’d love to have you join our team.

We highlight the latest dementia events, including two Alzheimer’s Awareness Month panel discussions. The first discussion will be led by Jim Mann, an advocate living with dementia, and the second will be led by Jana Schulz, a caregiver and registered social worker. Read on to learn more about the final webinar in our “Flipping stigma” series. The series is aimed at sparking conversations to help flip the script on the stigma associated with dementia while providing strategies and tips to live well. We are also pleased to announce that our fitness and social program, Minds in Motion®, is now offered in Punjabi and Cantonese.

Finally, we’re calling on everyone to show their support to people affected by dementia this holiday by giving a gift of courage to the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Your donation will help ensure nobody has to walk alone on the dementia journey. Learn more about the campaign on [page 4](#).



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



[alzbc.org/FLDHL](http://alzbc.org/FLDHL)

## Questions or concerns about dementia or memory loss?

### First Link® Dementia Helpline

- |  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>English</b><br>(Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.)                 | <b>1-800-936-6033</b> |
| <b>Cantonese and Mandarin</b><br>(Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.)  | <b>1-833-674-5007</b> |
| <b>Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu</b><br>(Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.) | <b>1-833-674-5003</b> |

# Full of life

with dementia

We can't change the progression of the disease,  
but we can change how we live today.

Learn to live well.  
[alzbc.org/fulloflife](http://alzbc.org/fulloflife)



January is  
Alzheimer's  
Awareness  
Month

*Alzheimer Society*  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

# Help make a difference this holiday season



*We don't have survivor stories.  
We have stories of survival.*

Lester and Cindy Gierach

Lester and Cindy Gierach's love story started the day they met roller-skating at the shore of Lake Michigan. It spans four decades of adventures together, from their early days as a married couple teaching English in Asia, to their years spent putting down roots in the Lower Mainland. It now also includes the latest chapter that started one Valentine's Day, nearly five years ago, when Lester and Cindy sat next to each other as Lester's doctor announced he had Alzheimer's disease and that it was time to get his affairs in order. Through the shock of a blunt diagnosis, the Gierachs committed to learning all they could about the disease and connected with the Alzheimer Society of B.C. for support and education.

While there is no cure today, together we can help people like Lester and Cindy feel like they don't have to face dementia alone. This holiday season, a time that can be challenging for families navigating the dementia journey, you can give the gift of courage.

It's a great time to donate, because thanks to "Friends of the Society," a group of generous donors, all gifts made to the holiday campaign until December 31 will be matched up to \$65,000. This means your impact will be doubled!

Your donation helps us operate our First Link® Dementia Helpline, easing the feelings of isolation for people affected by dementia who connect for support and information. Your donation helps people living with dementia and caregivers access education and support groups. Your donation helps enable research into the possible causes and a cure, and how to maintain quality of life after a diagnosis.

Your donation helps ensure that nobody has to walk the dementia journey alone.

If you'd like to support us before the end of the year, you can make a donation and give the gift of courage this holiday season.

## Donate today

If you donate this month, your donation will be matched. To give, visit [alzbc.org/holidaygiving](https://alzbc.org/holidaygiving).

# What's coming up



**Wednesday, February 21  
2 – 3 p.m. PT.**

**To register, visit  
[alzbc.org/flipping-stigma](http://alzbc.org/flipping-stigma).**

## Upcoming webinar: Flipping stigma in action – part 4

Research focus: The “why” behind the “Flipping Stigma on its Ear” toolkit

Join us for the final webinar of the four-part “Flipping stigma” series, with a focus on research. Representatives from the UBC research team, along with action group members living with dementia, will discuss the importance of participatory action research and address the underlying stigma and misconceptions of dementia that exist in the research field today. We’ll conclude the series with a look at the “Flipping Stigma on its Ear” Toolkit’s global impact and what’s next for the “Flipping stigma” team.



**Two Wednesdays,  
January 10 and 24  
2 – 3 p.m. PT**

**Learn more at  
[alzbc.org/fulloflife](http://alzbc.org/fulloflife).**

## Alzheimer's Awareness Month panel discussions

Don't miss our two upcoming webinars led by extraordinary individuals: Jim Mann, an advocate living with dementia, will moderate the first panel discussion on living life to the fullest on the dementia journey. Jana Schulz, a caregiver and registered social worker, will lead the final panel on the importance of finding a supportive community within our programs and services. These webinars promise unique insights and valuable perspectives. Don't miss these inspiring conversations that will empower and enlighten you, as we come together to build a more compassionate and inclusive future for people facing dementia.



**To register, call the First Link®  
Dementia Helpline:**

**Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003  
Chinese: 1-833-674-5007**

## New! Minds in Motion® programs in Fraser region

Minds in Motion® is a fun and engaging fitness and social program designed for people living with early-stage dementia and care partners, to stimulate both the mind and body. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is now expanding the program to Punjabi- and Cantonese-speaking communities to provide more people with the opportunity to socialize and share feelings in their language of choice.

## Discover Minds in Motion®!

Watch our video to get a taste of what it's like to take part in Minds in Motion®!  
Scan the QR code on your mobile phone or visit [alzbc.org/mm-video](http://alzbc.org/mm-video).



# Sharing your voice: The drive for meaningful engagement opportunities

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. has established a committee for engaging volunteers with lived experience of dementia. This committee is made up of Alzheimer Society of B.C. staff, people living with dementia and family caregivers. The purpose is to ensure the voices of lived experience inform all aspects of our work. We are committed to providing meaningful engagement opportunities that go beyond consulting to collaborating and co-creating.

The committee is pleased to announce the development of a framework guide outlining our commitment to this work. The initiative's guiding principles are:

- Creating an environment of inclusivity and flexibility, where people affected by dementia feel welcomed, respected and valued.
- Including diverse voices that are representative of demography and geography.
- Fostering a culture of empowerment and engagement that emphasizes the voices of people who are experts by experience.
- Engaging with transparency and integrity, with a clear sense of why we are engaging.
- Offering options that fit with people's abilities, availability and interest.

During the development of the lived experience framework guide, several family caregivers and people living with dementia participated in focus groups to ensure what matters most to people with lived experience of dementia was represented. One of the outcomes from these focus groups was the creation of a range of short and longer-term volunteer opportunities.

Taking part in these opportunities will help the Alzheimer Society of B.C. better assess community needs, develop policy and strategy, support research and staff training as well as ensure our programs, services and initiatives are informed by a range of experiences.

Lived experience engagement offers a range of opportunities, such as interviews, committee participation, presentations, working groups and many more! To learn more about our lived experience initiative visit [alzbc.org/LivedExperience](https://alzbc.org/LivedExperience).



## Hear from a lived experience member

“As a volunteer and a caregiver with lived experience, I strive to offer support and hope to others. My commitment to volunteering comes from my belief that volunteers can build compassion and community through participating and contributing to the work of an organization.”

– Geri Hinton, care partner

# Unlocking the power of volunteering for your brain health



Volunteers and staff encourage participants at the *Climb for Alzheimer's*

Volunteers play an essential role in the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s work to support people affected by dementia. Volunteering is a great way to make a difference, not only in the lives of others, but in your own life as well. A recent study (Proulx et al., 2017) found that formal volunteering with organizations like religious or charitable groups (rather than informal help for family and friends) is linked to better cognitive function.

## The cognitive connection

Proulx and colleagues analyzed the survey responses of more than 11,000 participants 51 and older. The results showed that engaging in formal volunteering in mid to later life is linked to higher levels of cognitive function, especially related to working memory and processing. Working memory can be thought of as the brain's notepad, where we temporarily store and process information for understanding and problem-solving tasks, like counting backwards. The link between volunteering and cognitive function appeared stronger for females than males. While not certain, the researchers speculated that engaging in varied volunteer activities that offer physical, social and intellectual stimulation might be particularly crucial for female cognitive health. Additional research is needed to better understand which aspects of

volunteering specifically influence cognitive function and how we can maximize their impact.

While people with better cognitive function tend to be more likely to volunteer in the first place, research (Kail & Carr, 2020) suggests this tendency accounts for only a small portion of the association between volunteering and cognitive function.

## A healthy habit

Volunteer activities provide older adults with an opportunity to increase social interaction, physical activity and cognitive stimulation. Moving forward, volunteering could be used as a lifestyle intervention for maintaining brain health among older adults and may one day be an intervention to slow down cognitive decline related to dementia (Kail & Carr, 2020).

Volunteering isn't just about helping others. It's about helping yourself. To learn more about how to volunteer with the Alzheimer Society of B.C., turn to [page 8](#).

For tips and strategies to help you lead a healthy, balanced lifestyle that reduces your risk of dementia, visit [alzbc.org/BrainHealthyTips](https://alzbc.org/BrainHealthyTips).

## References:

<https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa101>

<https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbx110>

## A focus on research

Interested in learning how the Alzheimer Society of B.C. supports research, the latest in dementia-related research and enhancing your research literacy? Be sure to check out our annual publication *A focus on research*, to be released in early 2024. Visit [alzbc.org/support-research](https://alzbc.org/support-research).

# Make a difference through volunteering



Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do at the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Volunteers in communities all across the province help us expand and strengthen our ability to provide quality programs, support services and community events. There are many opportunities to become engaged as a volunteer!

### Programs across the province are in need of immediate volunteer support

- Our webpage is the best way to find volunteer opportunities. Whether virtual or in-person, working with people directly or behind-the-scenes, you can find it all at [alzbc.org/Volunteer-Opportunities](http://alzbc.org/Volunteer-Opportunities).
- Interested in volunteering on an event committee? We're seeking chairs and committee members to support the *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*, which takes place in 21 communities across the province. To learn more, visit [alzbc.org/event-volunteer](http://alzbc.org/event-volunteer). Locations in need of a *Walk* chair include:

- Kamloops
- Tri-Cities & Ridge Meadows

If you are interested in a *Walk* chair position, please email Nick Dunn at [ndunn@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:ndunn@alzheimerbc.org)

## 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](http://alzbc.org/connections-newsletter)
- **Email** [newsletter@alzheimerbc.org](mailto: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](http://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