



The link between climate change and dementia

The days are getting longer and warmer and this can help us feel fresh and energetic. Focus on being present and appreciating the summer's breeze, smell of the flowers or the beauty of the sunrise over our rich landscape. Find what brings you joy this summer.

In this issue of *Insight*, Myrna Norman, our Leadership Editor, reflects on staying safe and keeping socially engaged during hot weather. We also interview a Society staff member who talks about her experience during a wildfire evacuation and we share a list of summer activities suitable for people at any stage of the dementia journey.

We're highlighting what research shows about the link between climate change and worsening neurological disease. We

also profile a researcher exploring the impact of climate change on older adults. Finally, we're inviting all of our readers to help us recruit volunteers who play an integral role in supporting British Columbians affected by dementia. Learn more on [page 2](#).

Join us at the Climb for Alzheimer's

Looking to stay active while supporting the Alzheimer Society of B.C.? On Sunday, September 24, committed fundraisers will ascend Grouse Mountain to celebrate the 12th annual *Climb for Alzheimer's* while helping us provide dementia support and education. Learn more at alzbc.org/ClimbForAlz.

In this issue:

Message from Myrna
Interview

Page 2
Page 3

Research
Meet the researcher

Page 6
Page 7

Rest and recharge during the summer



Myrna Norman

Myrna Norman is an advocate who often shares her expertise as someone living with dementia. She is a regular contributor to this newsletter.

Many of us living with dementia are left feeling restricted by the impacts of climate change such as hot and smoky weather. Many of us are also left feeling restricted by this kind of extreme weather.

Often, we feel socially isolated, detached from our communities or worse. Apathy sets in and instead of being buoyed by

the weather, we feel trapped indoors. Just going for a walk to our local park becomes questionable.

Many of us have lost our temperature gauge as we age and the extreme heat and cold in our outdoors can be devastating. Ultimately, we risk seclusion which in itself is not healthy.

My hope is that you can enjoy a restful summer and continue to do the activities you love while staying hydrated and taking precautions from the heat this season.

- Myrna Norman

You can help us engage more volunteers



Volunteers at the 2023 IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's

Volunteers at the Society help make a difference for people affected by dementia. Our volunteers facilitate support groups, assist with Minds in Motion®, manage education resources, help us raise essential funds – and so much more! You can help us recruit volunteers to better support community members affected by dementia.

Firsthand stories and quotes are powerful tools that help with

recruitment. Stories can highlight the significant value of volunteer involvement and they can motivate community members to join in.

We invite you to share a story about a time you connected with a volunteer and how they affected your journey. These contributions will help us find new volunteers, but they will also remind our active volunteers of the incredible impact of their work.

Please send your stories to volunteer@alzheimerbc.org

For more inspiring stories from 2023's National Volunteer Week, check out our featured volunteers at alzbc.org/NVW2023.

Interview: Planning ahead and asking for help



Kathy Shuflita and family

Kathy Shuflita, one of our Support and Education Coordinators living in Cranbrook, B.C., has always been accustomed to being on high alert to heat emergencies in her area. In an interview, Kathy shares her experience with heat emergencies as well as steps to ensure you are prepared.

There have been trends in B.C. over the recent years of heat warnings and breaking temperature records. Do you have any concerns about your health and your family's health?

Floods and fire evacuations are all threats to our safety. I think about the smoke we inhale from the forest fires and water quality from the flooding that can impact ground contamination. Floods and mudslides impact where you're able to go and can pose threats to your physical safety when you're driving.

When you're on the road and can't predict a mudslide, how do you prepare for this?

It can be nerve-wracking because you're in the middle of nowhere and not prepared to stop for long periods of time.

Always come prepared: keep a case of water bottles in your car as well as snacks, such as granola bars or mixed nuts.

How do climate conditions affect your family's routine?

We have to be aware all the time of these kinds of threats. We had to evacuate our home. We've got apps on our phones for emergency alerts for wildfires that might pop up in our area, we check road reports and I check the air quality first thing in the morning. Am I going for a walk today or am I doing yoga inside? It depends on the air quality advisory.

What measures do you take to stay safe in the heat?

Make sure you're well hydrated, preferably water or electrolytes. Stay out of the sun during peak hours, reduce your activity and listen to your body. Rest if you're feeling fatigued, drink water if you're feeling thirsty and drink water even if you're not thirsty. It's okay to ask for help if you're experiencing heat exhaustion.

Make sure you have a support team that you can either call or that can come check on you. Don't wait, don't feel like a burden. Ask for help. There are also access services available, such as cooling centres in the summer for people who don't have air conditioners at home. Stay cool in public areas, such as the library, recreation centres or the mall.

Interview: Planning ahead and asking for help, continued



You mentioned you've had to evacuate your home before. Can you tell us more about this?

It was back in the mid-2000s. My parents were on emergency alert for days, then the fire truck came right up to the house and they said you have 15 minutes to pack and leave. They don't give you much time, which means you need to be well-prepared ahead of time.

How do you prepare to evacuate on such short notice?

Ideally, you've done a lot of the preparations ahead of time. There are great checklists available online. I recommend visiting the BC Government's and the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s website. You can print a checklist and come up with a safety plan for your family and home.

What can we find on this checklist?

All the important items, including a list of your medications, legal documents, a pillow or toys to hold for comfort and phone numbers of your physician and

family members. I recommend everybody have a look at the checklist before it's wildfire season. Spend 10-15 minutes with your family going through your house and knowing what you really need to take with you. If you have prescriptions you cannot be without, make sure you always have at least a 30-day supply with you.

Do you have any advice for people living with dementia?

It's important to be prepared but hope for a great summer and just live your life. If in the unlikely event you need to leave your home, let the people around you know you are living with dementia. Don't be afraid to make that known.

Learn more!

- Tips for living well with dementia during warm weather: alzbc.org/warm-weather-tips
- Watch our webinar on warmer weather activities and explore the benefits of meaningful activities: alzbc.org/webinar-activities
- Responding in an emergency will be easier with advance personal planning, ensuring the person living with dementia will have their health-care, financial and legal matters taken care of. Learn more at alzbc.org/personal-care-planning

Activities for warmer weather

As the weather warms up and we spend more time outside, there are all sorts of ways to stay active. The activities below are organized by their suitability and benefit for each stage of dementia. Below are some examples you can get engaged with this summer.



	early	middle	late
• Exercising in a park or in the backyard (e.g. stretching, Tai Chi, Qigong, yoga)	✓		
• Going to farms or petting zoos or a wildlife sanctuary	✓		
• Outdoor games (e.g. Bocce ball, horseshoes, bean bag toss, croquet)	✓	✓	
• Doing chores around the yard (e.g. wiping down the lawn chairs, cleaning the picnic table)	✓	✓	
• Collecting shells and driftwood for projects (look online for ideas)	✓	✓	
• Doing arts and crafts (e.g. building bird houses, painting rocks)	✓	✓	
• Painting a fence or a piece of outdoor furniture	✓	✓	
• Hanging clothes outside on the line to dry, or passing the clothes pins	✓	✓	
• Walking through the sprinkler or running hands under the hose	✓	✓	✓
• Going on outings (e.g. going for ice cream or getting a drive-through ice cream treat)	✓	✓	✓
• Spending time outside in the sun and fresh air, watching the changes in light, clouds and insects and wildlife	✓	✓	✓
• Visiting family (e.g. have a picnic or family BBQ dinner together outside)	✓	✓	✓
• Walking through a botanical garden or tea house with lovely grounds	✓	✓	✓

Hot weather and dementia



As climate change raises temperatures around the world, countries like Canada are experiencing more frequent, intense and

longer heatwaves, which can cause health risks. In the summer of 2021, during B.C.'s heat dome, temperatures in some regions reached 49°C. Since many homes in B.C. do not have air conditioning, the high outdoor temperatures led to extremely high indoor temperatures. This is associated with increased thirst, fatigue, physiological strain, sleep disturbances and even death.

Older adults and people living with dementia may experience heightened risks during extreme heat events because of: reduced ability to regulate body temperature; chronic dehydration; certain medications (e.g., certain antidepressants, antipsychotics or heart medications) and the potential for social isolation. Lack of access to resources, communication difficulties and spending the majority of time indoors in air conditioned spaces can also place older adults at increased risk.

Last year, a group of British researchers found that for every 1°C rise in temperature over 17°C, the risk of dementia-related hospital admissions in the U.K. increased by 4.5 per cent. They also predicted that between 2009 and 2030, heat-related emergency hospital admissions could triple. In Australia,

researchers found people living with dementia in care homes were more agitated when indoor temperatures increased beyond 26°C. Reactive behaviours decreased when the average indoor temperature dropped to 22.5°C.

There are many low-cost cooling strategies that can reduce the health risks for people living with dementia. Applying crushed ice wrapped in a damp towel to the body or wearing a cotton T-shirt saturated with water are simple ways to provide effective cooling. According to B.C. Hydro, closing curtains or shades in rooms exposed to direct sun can block up to 65 per cent of heat coming in through windows. While fans won't cool the air in a hot room, they can keep air flowing. Placing a portable fan near a window during cooler hours (in the early morning or evening) can also help draw outside air into the home. Be cautious when using fans in extreme temperatures, however. When air temperature exceeds 35°C, research shows that dry heat flows in, rather than out, of the body. As such, the World Health Organization advises against using a fan when temperatures rise above this threshold.

For a full list of studies cited, click [here](#).

Beat the heat to stay safe

Learn about heat-related illness and tips on how to stay cool outside. Download the guide from HealthLink BC at: alzbc.org/HealthLinkBC-summer-guide.

Meet the researcher: Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch



Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch is a passionate advocate for the health and well-being of older adults, particularly caregivers and people living with dementia. A professor and Canadian Institutes

of Health Research Chair in Sex and Gender Science at the University of British Columbia's School of Nursing, she believes strongly in community-based research and the active engagement of individuals, clinicians, service providers and organizations.

In 2021, British Columbia experienced several climate emergencies in quick succession: a heat dome, forest fires and flooding. Despite the increased vulnerability of older adults and people living with dementia during climate events, she found few researchers had studied this topic. Earlier this year, she received funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for a three-year project to focus on understanding and enhancing the climate resilience of older adults.

Dr. Baumbusch notes that there are both individual and societal factors to address during climate events. For example, age-related changes affect the ability to self-regulate body temperature. By day three of a heat event, there is an increase in older adult hospital admissions. Caregivers should plan how to help someone living with dementia stay cool and hydrated. When climate events

require evacuation, it is also important to caregivers that the place they move to is safe and meets the needs of the person living with dementia.

Large evacuation centres, Dr. Baumbusch says, are rarely set up for people living with dementia and can create sensory overload. Updated policies (like changes to building codes and strata laws) and funding can facilitate the installation of air conditioners in indoor spaces, so people living with dementia can be better supported to remain in their homes through some of these events.

Dr. Baumbusch's team will be leading focus groups to better understand the support needs of people affected by dementia during climate events. Dr. Baumbusch is looking for participants to join the research, as well as people with lived experience to join the project's advisory committee. For more information, contact gero@nursing.ubc.ca.

Watch our webinar and learn more!

In recent years B.C. has experienced a rapid increase in climate-related weather emergencies. People living with dementia are uniquely at risk during climate emergencies. Dr. Jennifer Baumbusch recently held a webinar on strategies to help people living with dementia and their care partners during these events. Access this webinar, along with all of our on-demand content, at alzbc.org/ondemand.

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- Subscribe online at alzbc.org/insight-newsletter
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742

Contribute

We welcome contributions, such as personal stories, photography or original poems, from people living with dementia. Please provide your name, mailing address, phone number and/or email address if you would like to be contacted. All submissions will be considered based on theme and space.

- Email insight@alzheimerbc.org
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742
- Mail to the Alzheimer Society of B.C., care of *Insight*:
300-828 West 8th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

Call the First Link® Dementia Helpline

A confidential, province-wide support and information service for anyone with questions about dementia. Our Helpline is available from Monday to Friday.

- English: 1-800-936-6033
(9 a.m. – 8 p.m.)
- Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu: 1-833-674-5003
(9 a.m. – 4 p.m.)
- Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
(9 a.m. – 4 p.m.)

Email info.helpline@alzheimerbc.org

Are you a caregiver?

Connections is a quarterly print and digital publication produced by the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

To subscribe:

- Visit our website at alzbc.org/connections-newsletter
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742



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