



Making your workplace dementia friendly

Information for library service providers



**Dementia-Friendly
Communities**

Building a dementia-friendly B.C.

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Introduction

Thousands of families across B.C. are affected by Alzheimer's disease or other dementias, and this number is growing. The Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s vision is a world without dementia, and that world begins with a more dementia-friendly society, where people affected by dementia are welcomed, acknowledged and included.

Stigma reduction and inclusion are at the core of this movement. Limited conversation about the condition sends people living with dementia into isolation. Instead, when people living with dementia are met with compassion and acknowledged as rightful members of society, dementia is brought into the open where we can address it together, making dementia not just someone else's problem, but everyone's concern.

This is where you come in. Libraries have great potential to be inclusive and accessible spaces where people living with dementia can stay engaged and active in their communities. This resource will help you:

- Recognize and better understand dementia.
- Learn strategies for communicating with people living with dementia.
- Think about specific ways you can support people living with dementia – and how to make programs and services offered at your library more dementia friendly.

"I really commend the staff at [my local library] for their level of interaction and awareness of patrons. I want to go to places that are dementia friendly — where I can do things on my own and have support if I need it."

**— Mario Gregorio,
advocate, person living
with dementia**



Libraries and library service providers are important

Over 60 per cent of people living with dementia continue to reside in their home and community. As their dementia progresses, their abilities will change and they may encounter situations that make it more difficult to access library services. For example, they may be:

- A person who is finding it challenging to use the library catalogue or find a book.
- A person who wants to access more dementia-friendly materials.
- Someone who is having a hard time remembering to return items on time.
- Someone who may find it difficult to sign up for an information session or group activity.
- A participant in a book club who is having trouble keeping up with readings or group discussions.
- A volunteer who is starting to show signs of dementia.

As a library staff member, 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 frustrated. A person living with dementia may need your understanding, emotional support and more time than usual to process information or answer questions asked of them.



Understanding dementia

The word dementia is an umbrella term that encompasses many different diseases, the most known of which is Alzheimer's disease. Different types of dementia are caused by various physical changes in the brain. You can find more information about the different types of dementia at alzbc.org/aboutdementia and its warning signs at alzbc.org/warningsigns.

Some common misconceptions about dementia perpetuate misunderstandings about the disease and create barriers for people living with it. With a little knowledge, we can be more compassionate and inclusive.

Myth	Reality
Dementia is a part of regular aging.	Dementia is not a natural part of aging. Most people do not develop dementia as they age. While there is uncertainty about the causes of dementia, certain risk factors and underlying medical conditions (such as diabetes and stroke) can increase the risk of developing dementia.
Dementia only affects older adults.	Dementia can affect people from their 30s onwards. Dementia is a progressive, degenerative disease of the brain. While people over the age of 65 are most likely to get it, dementia can occur in people under this age. When this happens, it's known as young onset dementia.
People living with dementia become violent and aggressive.	Behaviour is responsive and reactive. Changes in a person's behaviour can be a sign of damage to the brain caused by dementia. These changes may be seen when someone experiences challenges understanding the world around them and have an increased difficulty communicating their needs. By understanding how to better communicate with someone living with dementia, we can reduce these responsive behaviours.
Memory loss means you have dementia.	Many people have trouble with their memory as they get older, but that does not mean they have dementia. For instance, it's perfectly normal to forget where you parked your car, but it's not normal to forget that you drove to the shopping centre. It's best to visit a doctor to determine the cause if you are concerned about memory loss or other symptoms.

Signs of dementia and communication strategies

It is not always immediately clear that a person is living with dementia. The experience and progression of dementia is unique to everyone; however, some common symptoms and patterns emerge. Below are some common signs that someone may be living with dementia, as well as some strategies for responding in a supportive way.

Poor judgement.

A person living with dementia may experience changes in their ability to use their judgement. For example, early in the journey, they may start by trying to return one of their personal items to the library. As the condition progresses, they may experience less social inhibition. For example, they may laugh or make inappropriate comments during a program.

Communication strategies

- Avoid drawing attention to the behaviour or criticizing it. Consider inviting the patron to a more private space or redirecting them to a different activity.
- Make suggestions tactfully. If someone tries to return a personal item, you might say, "It looks like this item belongs to you. I make that mistake sometimes too. Would you like me to help you find a library item of interest?"
- When advertising programs in advance, include suggestions about what to bring (e.g. library card, laptop, tablet, small snack).

Disorientation of time and place.

A person living with dementia may become lost in the library, even if it is a familiar place. For example, aisles that look similar might cause disorientation. It is also possible that the person may become mixed up about the time of day.

Communication strategies

- Someone who is disoriented may just need a friendly approach and short conversation to get them back on track, especially if they are in the early stages of dementia.
- To learn how you can optimize your space to be dementia friendly and reduce disorientation, see page 12.



A person living with dementia may not remember what you said, but they often remember how you made them feel.

"I didn't realize how powerful a smile was."

— Care partner

Problems with abstract thinking.

Dementia changes the ability to engage in abstract thought. It often becomes challenging for the person to make sense of symbols or images, metaphors and some forms of humour. Understanding and counting money can also be difficult.

Communication strategies

- Use concrete language and avoid metaphors. For example, instead of saying, "It's raining cats and dogs," say "It's raining quite a lot today."
- Stay positive and friendly. Using humour can be a form of connection for someone living with dementia. It is, however, important to keep in mind that understanding sarcasm or jokes may require abstract thinking skills.
- Be compassionate and use language that emphasizes agency. For example, rather than asking the person if you can show them where the silent reading room is, you might say "I am heading that way as well, may I walk with you?"

Inability to follow a conversation or find the right words.

Everyone has trouble finding the right word sometimes, but as the condition progresses a person living with dementia may frequently forget words or substitute the wrong word. This can make their sentences or accounts of events difficult to understand.

Communication strategies

- Be patient and do not rush – this may mean taking more time with the person.
- Observe the person's body language as sometimes they may have difficulty expressing thoughts verbally.
- When possible and appropriate, use close-ended or "yes" or "no" questions. For example, instead of asking "What are your favourite reading materials?" you might ask "Do you like audiobooks?"
- Repeat the question a different way or try again later.



Consider offering the person the home library service option to deliver books at home. Ask for the best time to schedule this service and call again the morning of the delivery. Ensure the driver has the needed training and information to provide thoughtful service.

Difficulty with familiar tasks.

Challenges in sequential thinking may cause a person living with dementia to have trouble with tasks, especially if the task has many steps. Even routine activities, such as using the library catalogue or finding a book, may become challenging as the condition progresses.

Communication strategies

- In the early stages, a person living with dementia may need a helping hand or gentle encouragement to continue to do tasks independently.
- If possible, bring the person to a space that is free from distractions and interruptions, where it is easier to concentrate. You might say, "It's quite busy here. Would you mind if we go to the side counter so I can help you with your books there?"
- If you are providing instructions, give them in a simple, step-by-step way. Pause briefly after each step. This gives the person more time to absorb the information and complete a task.
- Try demonstrating as well as providing directions verbally. For example, if you are assisting a person with the library catalogue, point to where you would like them to click or type.
- Focus on what the person is still doing well, rather than the challenges they are experiencing. This means the person living with dementia may complete one or two actions, while you do the remainder needed to complete a task.

Problems with memory.

Most people living with dementia will experience changes in their short-term memory.

For example, they may have difficulty remembering due dates, passwords and library cards. They may also ask the same question or tell the same story several times during their library visit.

Communication strategies

- Do not argue. If someone 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'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 the due date for their borrowed items, 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 "This is a frustrating situation. Let's get this sorted out as soon as we can."

Other tips for communication

- In all interactions, take your time and try to connect instead of correct.
- Avoid using “elder-speak” (for example, “sweetie” or “dear.”)
- Remember to make eye contact and avoid multi-tasking. Your focus and attention will have a positive impact during the interaction.
- Body language is important, especially if language skills are impaired. Take note of your body language and tone of voice. It may be necessary to use prompts, for instance, to ask someone to put on their glasses or turn on their hearing aid.
- Never speak around or about a person living with dementia when they are present. You may choose to address a care partner or family member but ensure that you include the person living with dementia in the conversation as well. Language skills may be impaired, but the ability to feel left out or ignored is not.



At times, other patrons may ask you questions about the behaviour of a person living with dementia. While maintaining confidentiality, this is a great opportunity for you to use your learning and speak about the cognitive changes related to dementia and the ways we can all help a person living with dementia feel included and supported. Raising awareness about dementia is an important step towards removing stigma.



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.



Wayfinding, disorientation and getting lost

How to help someone who is disoriented

Disorientation – which is also sometimes referred to as getting lost or wayfinding – is a direct result of physical changes in the brain, and:

- Is a common behaviour associated with dementia.
- May occur at any time of the day or night.
- May occur on foot, by car or public transportation.

Disorientation can occur when a person living with dementia is trying to find someone, wanting to get to a destination or accomplish a task. While getting disoriented is not a dangerous activity in itself, it can become dangerous when the person living with dementia becomes lost or when the physical environment poses risks to their physical well-being. Risks include dangers like traffic, falls or extreme weather conditions.

Like all people, people living with dementia should have the opportunity to move about as freely as possible, but changes in the brain may mean they aren't able to exercise the judgement and reasoning to do it safely. For example, a person living with dementia may not be able to remember their way back home from the library, putting them at risk for getting on the wrong bus, getting lost, injured and hurt. Here are some examples:

- You are making a delivery for the home library service on a cold November evening, and you see a man wearing shorts and a t-shirt. He is pacing back and forth on the same street, looking lost, confused and scared.
- You are opening up the library one morning and see an older woman sitting on the bench outside. Hours later, she is still there. When you ask her if she needs help, she says that she is waiting for her mother to pick her up.

Although disorientation is more common in the middle or later stages of dementia, it can occur at any point of the condition. If you notice someone who appears to be disoriented or lost, try the following:

- Enter their field of vision from the front to make sure the person can see you approach.
- Speak to the person slowly, calmly and clearly.
- Introduce yourself and start a conversation.
- Provide reassurance and let the person know that you want to help.
- Offer them a glass of water or a warm blanket if available and appropriate.
- Stay with the person.
- If an emergency contact is available, contact them immediately. If not, call 9-1-1.



For more information about disorientation, please visit alzbc.org/disorientation or contact the First Link® Dementia Helpline at 1-800-936-6033.

Making your library dementia friendly

Libraries can adapt their digital, social and physical environments with small, meaningful changes so people living with dementia can feel more supported, comfortable and independent.

Social environment

Everyone in your organization has a role to play in contributing to a dementia-friendly environment. Ensuring that all staff members know how to recognize dementia and communicate appropriately is an important first step to create a workplace that is supportive and inclusive of people living with dementia and their care partners.

Here are some ways to achieve this goal:

- Ensure staff have the tools to recognize the symptoms of dementia.
- Designate a person at your workplace to be the “go-to” person about dementia. Ideally, this person would mentor others and help identify patrons who need dementia-friendly support.
- Build staffing models that encourage interaction between library staff and patrons. While one staff member may require more time to assist a person living with dementia, another staff member needs to be available to help other patrons to access library services.
- Encourage staff to work with patrons and identify materials and services that meet their individual needs, such as access to audiobooks or e-books, assistive technology, translated materials or large print resources.



- Feature books about cognitive changes to encourage conversation and reduce stigma. For example, January is Alzheimer’s Awareness Month in Canada, a great time to share titles exploring dementia or memory loss.
- Make name tags for program participants, library staff and volunteers. A person living with dementia may participate in weekly activities where they are able to recognize someone, but not necessarily remember their name or role. Name tags can help reduce the likelihood of an embarrassing interaction.
- With the permission of the person living with dementia or their care partner, you may consider adding a note in the person’s library account to indicate they might have challenges related to their dementia, so that other staff can be aware. You may want to ensure an emergency contact is on file in case the person is found wandering or is very disoriented.
- Consider your library’s policies. Could you lengthen borrowing periods and waive overdue fines?
- Ensure your website includes easy-to-find information describing accessible services such as home delivery. Patrons living with dementia and their care partners will appreciate easy-to-understand information about accessibility programs at your library.
- If your library does not have an accessible or home library service, approach care partners to let them know if they are able to reserve and borrow books on behalf of the person living with dementia or reserve and borrow books online.

While you may not be certain whether your patron is living with dementia, you can be assured that a dementia-friendly environment will welcome everyone experiencing a range of cognitive changes and help them feel acknowledged, supported and included.

“[Becoming a dementia-friendly library] is really about empowering staff to be aware and take the time that they need with each patron, regardless of if they are someone living with dementia or experiencing another difficulty.”

— Pat Cumming, Head of Customer and Community Experience, West Vancouver Memorial Library

Physical environment

The physical environment and design of buildings can make it difficult to access and navigate libraries. Here are some dementia-friendly actions you can implement to improve the experience of people living with dementia:

- Avoid cluttered spaces and disorganized shelves.
- Designate silent reading rooms away from background noise where it is easier to read without distractions. Someone living with dementia will appreciate this, as will others.
- Ensure lighting is adequate and as natural as possible. Poor or overly bright lighting can make the environment confusing.
- Display large clocks, both analog and digital, throughout the space to accommodate different patrons' needs. Many people living with dementia find it easier to read the numbers on a digital clock.
- Consider creating mixed or family washrooms so care partners and family members can provide assistance if needed. It is important to ensure there is colour contrast to washroom fixtures, and grab rails are beneficial for many library patrons.
- Furniture should be easy to maneuver in and out of. Find fabric or finishings with a plain design with little to no patterns. Similarly, lots of visual stimulation – like abstract paintings or other décor – may make it difficult to concentrate.
- Contrast around door frames will allow a person living with dementia to easily identify entrances and exits. If possible, use contrasting colours to differentiate between the wall, door and floor. Glass doors can be visually confusing and should be clearly marked.



Easy-to-read signage tips include:

- **Use a large font size.**
- Use simple and effective graphics or symbols.



- Avoid decorative fonts with *light type* and *thin strokes*.
- Make sure there is contrast between the writing and the background; for example,

black font on a white background

- Use non-reflective/anti-glare materials.

- Avoid black entrance mats as these may look like large black holes to a person living with dementia.
- Offer assistance when you see a person who might be struggling with library equipment.
- Assign accessible computer stations in close proximity to a service point. Library staff will be able to more quickly observe and assist a person living with dementia.
- At multi-level libraries, ensure that the main floor has most of the essential elements, such as the book drop, checkout, computer stations, information desk and washrooms. This will ensure a person living with dementia can more easily navigate the space. It may also be helpful to ensure that books of the same genre are not spread out throughout various floors but are kept in the same area.



Inclusion and library services

It is important to remember that for the person living with dementia, visiting and taking part in programming at your library is significant. Libraries, with their wide variety of programs and services, are usually considered safe and welcoming spaces.

The following section will help you apply a dementia-friendly lens to the activities that currently exist in your library. When using a dementia-friendly lens, it is key to keep in mind that a person living with dementia is someone with unique abilities.

What are some dementia-friendly activities?

Dementia-friendly activities can be anything that provides an opportunity for people 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 to facilitate participation for people living with dementia. They are planned for and welcome people living with dementia, their care partners and friends. When activities can be adapted to be dementia friendly, they promote participation in the community for as long as possible, contributing to quality of life for people living with dementia and their care partners.

If an activity is dementia friendly, make this clear in the program description. By stating the activity is open and accessible to all people, including people living with dementia, we remove stigma surrounding dementia and move towards an inclusive dementia-friendly society.

You may already have an activity or materials in mind, or existing services you would like to see become more dementia friendly. If you are unsure, here are some guidelines and ideas to help you get started:

1. Find simple games that involve one or two steps and an option to socialize or help each other. Avoid strategic games involving abstract thought, complex rules and extensive decision-making, such as Monopoly. Focus on games that are more guided like Bingo or activities such as jigsaw puzzles with large pieces.
2. Plan for activities that allow for different levels of cognitive function. For example, forgo the complex themes and large literary works of a dystopian fiction club and plan for a reading club that combines reduced text content with images, such as a gardening magazine or Reader's Digest articles.
3. Create clubs that encourage participants to access their long term memory and encourage reminiscing as opposed to clubs that focus on current events and complex thinking. For example, avoid current affairs and debate clubs but consider creating memory banks or photo album sharing sessions.

4. When planning arts and craft sessions, consider activities that can be completed in one session and don't require fine motor skills and precision. For example, hold painting and scrapbooking sessions as these are crafts in which success is up to interpretation. Avoid crafts such as quilting as it requires precision, measurement and extensive fine motor skills.
5. In group activities, small groups that encourage interaction and provide support are more effective than larger groups in which people are expected to be independent.
6. It's important to consider encouraging a care partner to be present during the activity – either as an observer or as an active participant – so that they can provide support where necessary.
7. Consider the timing of your activities. Programming that takes part in the early morning or dark can be difficult for a person living with dementia, as can programming that doesn't align to transit schedules or is rigid in its attendance policy. It is more inclusive to have flexible daytime programming that aligns well with public transit schedules.
8. Programming should not take longer than 45 minutes and should take place in a room that is free of clutter, crowds and noises that may overwhelm someone's senses.

Leading activities that include people living with dementia and their care partners

If you are leading an activity, you may be aware that there is a person living with dementia in your group. 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.
- A person living with dementia may not be able to start or lead an activity. It may be easier for them to watch first and see what others do. If the class only has people living with dementia, make sure you start and lead the activity, or enlist the help of a volunteer.
- Take breaks during longer activities.
- Sometimes people living with dementia will want to get up, leave and come back. Provided they are safe, this is okay.
- If there is seating in rows, offer people living with dementia aisle seats so they can get up and move around more easily. If all attendees are living with dementia, consider sitting in a circle.
- Provide support to help people living with dementia participate, but treat them with the same respect as the other participants in your program.

About the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

In communities throughout the province, an estimated 85,000 British Columbians are living with dementia and this number is growing. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is the only provincial charity dedicated to helping anyone concerned with or facing dementia have the confidence and skills to maintain quality of life.

It will take courage and leadership to break down stigma and shame and take steps to build a society that is friendlier, more accepting and more supportive of people living with dementia, whether they are in our families, our communities or our workplaces. We are available to answer questions and help you find the professional assistance you need.

- Visit our website at alzbc.org to find support in your area.
- Call the First Link® Dementia Helpline:
 - English: 1-800-936-6033
 - Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
 - Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003
- Email us at dementiafriendlybc@alzheimerbc.org for more information about making your organization dementia friendly, including information on requesting Dementia-Friendly Communities training for your organization.

We encourage libraries to plan and create dementia-friendly programs. It is important for people living with dementia to remain connected and engaged, and libraries play a crucial role in facilitating social engagement and providing access to information, literature, media and more. They are a source of support and inclusion for everyone in the community, and with your support, we can bring B.C. a step closer to becoming a truly dementia-friendly province.



Resources for further information

Building dementia-friendly communities

An online self-paced course, specifically tailored to library and recreation professionals, where participants can learn more about dementia and how they can help build dementia-friendly environments.

<http://www.alzeducate.ca>

Seniors First BC

Provides information, advice and support to seniors – and those concerned about them – who may be experiencing issues affecting their well-being and rights.

Seniors Abuse and Information Line:
604-437-1940 or toll free 1-866-437-1940

www.SeniorsFirstBC.ca

Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse

A national non-profit organization focused on elder abuse prevention and response.

<http://www.cnpea.ca>

HealthLinkBC

HealthLinkBC provides 24/7 non-emergency health information to residents of British Columbia. Call 8-1-1 or 7-1-1 for deaf and hearing-impaired assistance (TTY).

www.healthlinkbc.ca

Dementia Diaries

A public resource used to archive one's daily experiences living with dementia. Discussion topics include care and support, family and friends and daily challenges.

<http://www.dementiadiaries.org/>

Reading Well: Dementia

A suggested reading list for people living with dementia, care partners, family members, health-care professionals and the general public.

<http://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/dementia>

Tales and Travel Excursion Guides

A memory program designed for people living with dementia to take imaginary excursions around the world with the help of library staff.

<http://talesandtravelmemories.com/excursions/>

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English 1-800-936-6033
(Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.)

Cantonese and Mandarin 1-833-674-5007
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Punjabi 1-833-674-5003
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