



## Keeping connected while we're apart

As we adapt to a "new normal," the pandemic continues to pose new challenges for many people living with dementia who may be facing increased isolation and less support in their lives. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. has reviewed how we provide our support during this time. Here is an update on our activities:

- Permanently extended hours of the First Link® Dementia Helpline: It remains open into the evening Monday through Friday.
- More outreach calls to check in on First Link® clients.

- Weekly webinars on topics of particular relevance to people living with dementia at this time. Recorded webinars are also available in Punjabi.
- Surveys of people living with dementia, caregivers and health-care providers to hear about their experiences so we can meet their support needs. See page 3 to learn how to participate.

While we may not be able to be with you in person, Society staff across the province want you to know you are not alone. For a full catalogue of COVID-19-related resources, visit [alzbc.org/COVID-19](https://alzbc.org/COVID-19)

### In this issue:

Editor's message

Page 2

Avoiding loneliness while  
physical distancing

Page 3

Volunteer messages

Page 5

Personal stories

Page 6

## Hello, nice to hear from you, stay in touch.

*Mario Gregorio is Insight's editor and member of the Society's Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia.*

Since COVID-19 struck, it has become a ritual for Gerard, a new dad, to call and show off the antics of his son, Emerson, a restless dynamo of a toddler.

Emerson's annoyingly delightful shrieks add to the cacophony of noises as he staggers around the balcony with a blue cowbell clutched in his clumsy, fat little fingers to salute the nurses and other frontline workers.

We saw him explore his new world of pots and pans in the pantry and scatter newly-folded laundry across the living room. These moments are captured on a cell phone, where we eagerly watched Emerson roll about, crawl, take his first steps and say his first words: "Da da...Da da."

There is a strange feeling of uneasy gratefulness. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to share these moments, now a part of our family history. Unable to visit, touch or hug our grandson, I consoled myself with watching him on a tiny screen.

As I take a quick break from my gardening chores and sip on a mug of sliced fresh ginger tea, I think of how fortunate I am to have friends and family call to ask how I am coping with this uncertain time and how they can help. The pandemic has also allowed me time to reflect on my priorities, my needs and my health-care plans.



Editor Mario Gregorio gives his family "drive-by hugs" in American Sign Language.

My family doctor called and asked about my wishes should I be infected with COVID-19. He took his time and together we developed a plan for my future care.

My caring friends from the Alzheimer Society of B.C. suggested that I visit a few websites and understand advance care planning.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused pain and suffering. It forced us to consider what we value, who we are and our own mortality.

It could also help us rediscover the better version of ourselves.

## Avoiding loneliness while physical distancing

We are living through a challenging time. While physical distancing measures have helped us “flatten the curve” of COVID-19 cases in B.C., the disruption to routines and social visits has led to increased feelings of loneliness across Canada. If you have been feeling lonely in this time, you are not alone. In a recent poll, half of Canadians reported a worsening of their mental health and an increase in loneliness.

Humans are naturally social creatures, meaning loneliness can have serious impacts on our health. It raises levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), causes sleep disruptions and elevates blood pressure. Loneliness may also make you feel anxious, irritable or depressed. It's important to check in with yourself and be honest with others about how you are feeling. Physical distancing should not mean social isolation.

### We want to hear from you!

As part of our ongoing evaluation of First Link® dementia support being undertaken by researchers at UBC, we have just launched a survey which focuses on the impact of the pandemic on people living with dementia and their caregivers. We invite you to complete this short survey and share your views and experiences with us: <http://bit.ly/firstlinkcovid>.



### Tips

It can be incredibly difficult not to see your family and friends, but there are other ways to keep in touch.

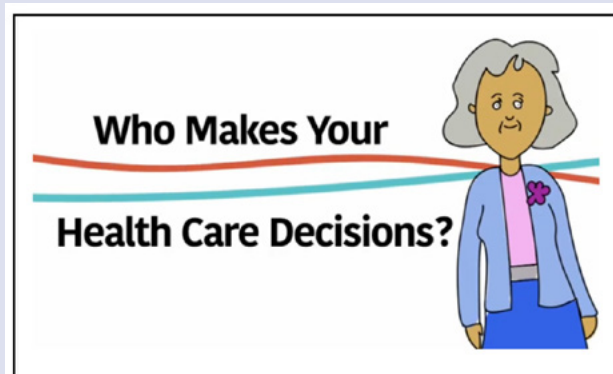
- Stay connected to family and friends over the phone and, if you can, make use of face-to-face technology such as FaceTime or Zoom.
- If you find there are certain times of the day when you are more tired, try to schedule calls when you will feel most alert and engaged.
- Cultivate friendships and look for ways to build new ones. Now is a great time to re-connect with old friends through the phone or by writing a letter.
- From families giving “drive-by hugs” in American Sign Language, to video dance parties through Zoom, online church or community services, book clubs and knitting circles, we love hearing about the creative ways you’re staying connected!



## Free resources to support your mental health

- Our First Link® Dementia Helpline is available Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. to provide information and support at 1-800-936-6033. Service is also available Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Cantonese or Mandarin at 1-833-674-5007 and Punjabi at 1-833-674-5003.
- Contact your family doctor; they may be offering virtual mental health check-ins.
- The bc211 Safe Seniors, Strong Communities program at [alzbc.org/SSSC](http://alzbc.org/SSSC) connects seniors with local volunteers who can provide friendly phone calls and virtual social visits, along with other supports like picking up groceries or prescriptions and meal delivery.
- The British Columbia Psychological Association is offering a free Psychological First Aid Service for any B.C. resident (including health-care workers) experiencing stress, anxiety or uncertainty due to COVID-19. Fill out a form on their website at [psychologists.bc.ca/covid-19-resources](http://psychologists.bc.ca/covid-19-resources) or call 1-604-827-0847 to access this service.
- Mental Health Support Line: Call 310-6789 (no area code) to connect with your local BC crisis line without a wait or busy signal, 24 hours a day. Crisis line workers are there to listen and support you as well as refer you to community resources.
- Seniors' Distress Line: Call 604-872-1234 to speak with a crisis responder. It's available at all hours of the day.

## Get to know your health-care rights with new videos and brochures



It is important to understand your legal rights when it comes to health-care consent. The Canadian Centre for Elder Law has developed a new collection of resources to inform people living with dementia of their legal rights, including a series of short videos and brochures.

Topics covered in the three animated videos include:

- Identifying who can help people living with dementia make their own health-care decisions.
- How to access support.
- How people living with dementia can protect their legal rights.

The videos were released alongside Traditional Chinese, Punjabi and French brochures outlining the same critical information. An English version of the brochure, developed in consultation with people living with dementia, including the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia, is also available.

Watch the videos and download the brochures at [alzbc.org/HCCvideos](http://alzbc.org/HCCvideos).

## Volunteers share messages of support

Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do, and the meaningful relationships that they build make our communities so special. While our in-person groups have been unable to meet in recent weeks, volunteers have shared messages for the people they volunteer with. Read the full letters at [alzbc.org/COVID-stories](http://alzbc.org/COVID-stories).



Cheryl MacDonald  
Support group facilitator

“What I miss most about volunteering is the people. There is a very special bond that is created, and although one cannot experience another’s journey, you live a piece of it with

them through personal sharing and group discussions. I miss being a part of something so important. If I was able to tell my group members anything, it would be: You are courageous, caring and show amazing strength. Thank you for letting me catch a glimpse into your journey.”



Landon Short, Minds  
in Motion® assistant

“While I greatly enjoy volunteering each week, I took for granted that the program and the people would always be there for me. Now with the program on

pause, I have developed a newfound appreciation and love for not only the activities we do, but more importantly the relationships we’ve formed over the years that’s made us a family. The distancing we’ve all been required to do can make us feel alone, but you are not alone. Just as you are thinking of the friends you are missing, remember they are thinking of you, too.”



Deanna Matthewson,  
Support group facilitator  
and community  
outreach support

“As a Society volunteer, I look forward eagerly to the monthly meetings. We always manage to have a few laughs together and come away feeling better than when we started. I miss seeing my groups and I

wonder how they are doing with all the restrictions on our lives. I would like my friends to know I think of them often and sincerely hope they are getting the support they need, especially now as so many programs are closed.”



### How are you adjusting to life during the “new normal?”

What challenges are you facing or successes are you celebrating? Email us at [insight@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:insight@alzheimerbc.org) to share your story.

## Dementia in the days of COVID-19

During this time of increased isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people living with dementia and the people who care for them are disconnected from support networks and facing unexpected challenges. It is the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s mission to ensure that no one walks alone on the dementia journey. Caregivers, people living with dementia and volunteers have been sharing their everyday challenges, successes and words of encouragement as a part of our "Dementia in the days of COVID-19" series. We have included excerpts of two stories below. The full series is available on our website at: [alzbc.org/COVID-stories](http://alzbc.org/COVID-stories).

### Linda and Ruth's story: Celebrating the little wins



Linda Hodgkin and Ruth Seabloom

When Linda Hodgkin, a life-long member of Girl Guides, was diagnosed with dementia, she applied the Guiding Promise to her life.

"I promised I would do my best," Linda says. "So far I am, but it's getting harder."

Linda lives independently in Courtenay with the support of her friend Ruth Seabloom. The two women met through Girl Guiding many years ago and have remained close, spending much of their time together, including weekly attendance at Minds in Motion®, the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s fitness and social program for people in the early stages of dementia and a care partner. Since physical distancing measures were put in place to help stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus, life for the two women has changed drastically.

"I wasn't lonely before when I was on my own," says Linda, whose routine also included drumming, card-making classes and walks around her neighbourhood with her dog Bentley. "I would talk to my neighbours. I would go for walks on the beach. I can't do that anymore. Now I'm trying to celebrate the little wins. I made biscuits last night. I hate to cook, but I did well."

Even though activities might be cancelled, it's important to keep structure in your life and communicate with your friends as much as you can, Ruth says. "No one can be alone all of the time."

"Don't worry about hitting a homer all of the time," Linda adds. "Just get to first base and walk from there."



## Craig's story: Proactive during the pandemic



Keeping socially engaged and physically active are keys to maintaining a healthy lifestyle for anyone – but for people living with dementia like Craig Burns, they're a lifeline.

"I deal with depression with Alzheimer's and this whole scenario is causing quite a bit of anxiety," Craig says. "I've done a bunch of projects around the home, but I've run out of things to do."

Much of his volunteer work continues remotely, but for someone living with dementia on their own, meetings on a screen are no replacement for human contact. Craig tries to keep proactive with virtual or distanced visits with friends and family.

While he waits for social gatherings to return and the activities that once filled his calendar to resume, Craig is walking and reflecting a lot these days. He takes the trails around Okanagan Lake and buys coffee from newly-made friends at a small café. Sometimes he'll sit at the park and watch the osprey and otters at the bird sanctuary.

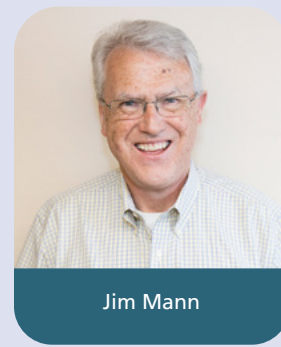
"I've rediscovered the beauty of nature," Craig says. "The beauty of birds singing, the beauty of spring and the blossoms coming out."



### Thank you for keeping active with us!

On May 31, Ron and Geramy Powell in South Delta and many British Columbians joined Alzheimer Societies across Canada in our first ever online *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*.

### Dementia advocate honoured



Jim Mann, a longtime advocate for the rights of people living with dementia, leader in dementia-friendly research and member of the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia, has been recognized with a much-deserved honorary degree from the University of British Columbia. Jim's work has had an invaluable impact on breaking down stigma and building a more inclusive society for people affected by the disease and we are incredibly grateful for his support.

## Subscribe

If you've enjoyed this issue of *Insight* and would like to receive it regularly, please subscribe. Help us reduce our costs by choosing to receive *Insight* by email.

- Subscribe online at [alzbc.org/insight-newsletter](http://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](mailto: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 English Helpline hours have been extended and now run from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m., Monday to Friday. Cantonese or Mandarin and Punjabi Helplines are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday.

- English: 1-800-936-6033
  - Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003
  - Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
- Email [supportline@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:supportline@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](http://alzbc.org/connections-newsletter)
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742



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