

Working Together : Creating a Dementia- Friendly Community in the Comox Valley

A guide for local businesses



Working Together: Creating a Dementia - Friendly Community in the Comox Valley

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The Comox Valley is situated on the Unceded Traditional Territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

We practice these land acknowledgments not only as acts of recognition, but also as a reminder to attune ourselves to the real, lived impacts of colonial forces on people in our community.



What is a Dementia-Friendly Community?

The Comox Valley is a unique and vibrant community. From coming together on Facebook to help someone find their way home, to employees at a local drugstore taking the time to know their customers' routines and preferences, the Comox Valley is rich with examples of empathy and interconnectivity. We believe there is a strong potential to nurture a dementia-friendly community in the Comox Valley.

Dementia-friendly communities include, respect, and value people living with dementia.

They support people to be independent and ensure that people feel like they belong.



How can you contribute?

In your work environment, you may interact with people with dementia. The population in the Comox Valley is older than other parts of the province. While dementia can affect people at any age, it is most common for older adults. As such, we want to ensure our community is dementia-friendly. The goal of this resource is to provide people who work in the Comox Valley with information and tools to support people living with dementia who may enter your workplace.

What is Dementia?

Dementia describes a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking, and social abilities.

It is not a normal part of aging or a single condition, but a collection of symptoms including loss of memory and language, problems with judgment and reasoning, and difficulty with problem solving and abstract thinking.



Why is awareness important?

People living with dementia might have challenges following instructions, have difficulty understanding what is going on around them or may become disoriented to time and place.

They often need more time to think things through when responding to questions. People living with dementia may say things that seem out of place and have requests that are confusing or difficult to satisfy. If people enter your workplace exhibiting these challenges, we want to provide you with tools to safely and respectfully support them, with confidence.

Myth-Busting

We have included some myths about dementia as they might pertain to your workplace. It is important to dispel myths around dementia as they can make people fearful and can contribute to stigma and discrimination. If you would like to learn more about the medical side of dementia, see our resources page at the back of this booklet.



Myth

Dementia is the same for everyone.

Reality

Dementia affects different people in different ways, and someone's symptoms might even change throughout the day. It's important not to make assumptions about a person's capabilities.

Myth

If a person is diagnosed with dementia, it means their life is over and they can't engage in their usual activities.

Reality

Most people diagnosed with dementia live meaningfully and actively for many years, including continuing to live in their community. There are many opportunities for people living with dementia to contribute to their communities.



You can always tell when someone is living with dementia.

People living with dementia look the same as everyone else. They are not always accompanied by a caregiver, and can often do things independently. While people over the age of 65 are most likely to get dementia, it can affect younger people too. When this happens, it's known as young onset dementia.

Only people in medical fields work with people living with dementia, and I won't be able to help someone in my workplace.

People living with dementia are part of our community and may enter your workplace or shared public spaces. You may or may not know if someone has dementia, but awareness goes a long way. You may notice that someone is having challenges understanding what is going on, struggling with answers to questions or seems confused.

You might not know a lot about someone's medical condition, but you can always be patient, supportive and respectful.

What You Can Do

If you notice that someone in your workplace might have dementia or require extra support, you can help. Remember that a person struggling is a person who wants to be understood. Here are some examples of scenarios you might encounter and how you might approach the situation.

CONNECT, DON'T CORRECT

A person with dementia experiencing confusion may say things that don't make sense to you. Rather than trying to correct them or argue, validate their concern.



VALIDATE WHAT SOMEONE IS SAYING

If someone makes an observation that is confusing but requires no further help, you can acknowledge what they've shared and redirect the conversation. Remember, their experience of reality is just as real to them as your reality is to you. Validation goes a long way!



ONE QUESTION AT A TIME

People with dementia often need lots of time to process and then respond to questions. After you ask your question, you may feel the need to explain yourself and ask a follow up question. Instead, wait patiently for their response then simplify the question as needed.



AVOID MAKING ASSUMPTIONS

Remember that not all people living with dementia require the same kinds of support. Getting to know your regulars is another useful way to understand the individual needs of people living with dementia in your community.



SUGGEST AND SIMPLIFY OPTIONS

New information and environments can be overwhelming for people living with dementia. If a customer seems confused, it can be helpful to give them a bit more time and if needed, a suggestion or a few options to choose from.



BEING PREPARED

The experience of being dismissed is a significant challenge faced by people living with dementia. They can sometimes become upset if they feel that they are not being heard or that their needs are not being met. Validation and patience can go a long way to de-escalate a situation, but sometimes it can be helpful to seek support. Educating yourself and having conversations with fellow employees about how to be dementia-friendly can better prepare you to support people in your community.

Reflecting on your Workplace

Consider the experience someone living with dementia might have if they were to walk into your workplace today. Reflect on what makes your workplace dementia-friendly, and what might feel challenging or overwhelming.

Consider how spaces can be configured to minimize sensory overload. One solution being used in other BC communities is offering quiet/low-sensory shopping times for an hour once a week.

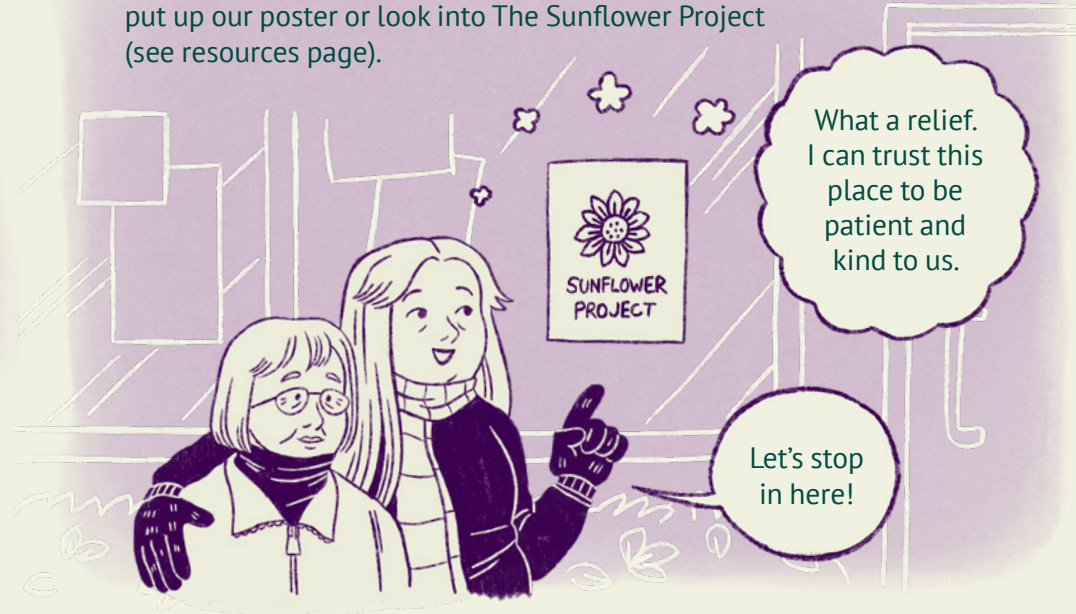


Seek out resources and ensure all team members have training on dementia awareness. You can find more free, online resources at the end of this booklet.

Reflect on how you can be proactive in noticing when customers might need additional support.



Consider how you can outwardly show that your place of business is dementia-friendly. For example, you can put up our poster or look into The Sunflower Project (see resources page).



Resources

Learn more online for free

WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia

Resources from Alzheimer Society of Canada about dementia and how people with dementia can manage their illness through lifestyle changes and medication.

DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY BUSINESSES

alzheimer.ca/bc/en/take-action/dementia-friendly-communities

Resources from the BC Alzheimer Society on creating dementia-friendly businesses.

ONLINE DEMENTIA EDUCATION COURSES

alzeducate.ca/course/index.php?categoryid=21

A collection of free, self-guided education modules surrounding dementia care.

FLIPPING STIGMA TOOLKIT

flippingstigma.com

An online toolkit helping users to recognize and respond to the stigmas faced by people living with dementia.

SUNFLOWER PROJECT

hdsunflower.com

An international initiative offering resources, a regional store locator, program news, and information on how individuals and businesses can participate in supporting those with non-visible disabilities.

THINGS NOT TO SAY TO A CAREGIVER

[youtube.com/watch?v=Vt9lrzJR_fs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vt9lrzJR_fs)

Educational video series with a lighthearted tone.



Acknowledgments

This Dementia-Friendly Community resource was co-created by members of the Comox Valley Dementia-Friendly Partners Group, a group of 6 Comox Valley residents with lived experience of dementia, in partnership with researchers from the University of Victoria and the Health Design Lab at Emily Carr University of Art + Design. Together we have pulled on existing resources on dementia while contextualizing this information specifically for the Comox Valley community by embedding the stories and experiences of real people who live here.

We all play a role, individually and collectively, in creating welcoming spaces and fostering interactions that are inclusive for everyone. Thank you for reflecting on your role in creating a dementia-friendly Comox Valley.

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