

Dementia-Friendly Communities

An Introduction for Washington State

Over 100,000 people in Washington state live with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias, and that number continues to grow. For many people with memory loss, social stigma and barriers to inclusion can lead to shame, fear, and isolation. However, it doesn’t have to be this way. We recognize that people with memory loss are a vital part of our communities, retain remarkable strengths and stories, and deserve the right to fully participate. Here in Washington state, we’re joining the worldwide movement to build dementia-friendly communities.

Do you want to get involved? This introduction will help! Read on to learn more about the key elements of a dementia-friendly community, examples from our state and beyond, sample action steps, and additional resources.

What is a dementia-friendly community?

Put simply, a dementia-friendly community is one in which people with memory loss fully belong. People with memory loss remain actively involved in community life, knowing that whether riding the bus, going to the store, or volunteering at the elementary school, they and their loved ones will be met with respect, understanding, kindness and support. Community members are informed about dementia, equipped to be helpful as needed, and committed to inclusion. As a result, everyone enjoys a vibrant, connected community in which nobody is left out, everyone can fully participate and contribute, and everyone can fully belong.

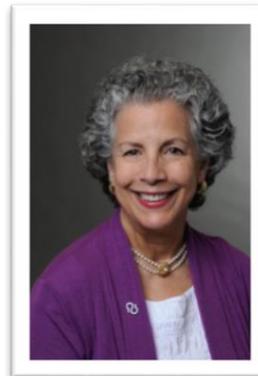
As experts on their own experience, your family, friends and neighbors with memory loss are the ones who can best define what would make your own community more dementia-friendly. If you want to learn more, try asking: “What kinds of things help you feel you belong and can stay actively involved here in this community?” Let what you hear be your guide!

Below, two Washington state advocates describe their own perspectives on dementia-friendly communities:



Bob, Tacoma

“Awareness and respect of persons with dementia and their caregivers help us feel comfortable. There are people in the community where I go routinely (like Denny’s, or volunteering at the golf course) who are aware of my dementia. I am treated with acceptance, patience and respect. I feel good about it.”



Myriam, Seattle

“A dementia-friendly community is where people care for people with dementia. The point is respect - caring about people. I live alone, but I have many, many friends in my apartment building. I tell everyone at some point that I have Alzheimer’s, and they watch out for me.”

Photo credit: Alzheimer’s Association

What does a dementia-friendly community look like?

While each community is unique, the key elements below can be a good place to start.

In a dementia-friendly community, people living with memory loss...

1. Are respected as valuable members of the community.

- **Example:** In Washington's Methow Valley, the local newspaper teamed up with Don Reddington who wanted to publish articles about his experience living with Alzheimer's. With this project, the newspaper recognized Don's valuable perspectives and his important role in educating his community.

issuu.com/methowvalleypublishing/docs/livingwithalzheimers

- **What can you do?** Promote positive messages about people with memory loss and their unique contributions. Model respect in your everyday interactions. Partner with people with memory loss to develop projects that challenge stigma and build understanding – public murals, bumper stickers, billboards or other creative ideas.

2. Can participate confidently in their communities – their neighborhoods, stores, restaurants, banks, libraries, schools, hospitals and more - knowing that the people who live and work there are dementia-aware.

- **Example:** In Bruges, Belgium, employees at local businesses can receive a two-hour training so they know the best way to welcome and serve customers with memory loss. Businesses who have completed the training place a “dementia-friendly” symbol in their window.

www.theguardian.com/society/2015/apr/21/bruges-most-dementia-friendly-city

- **What can you do?** Receive or provide dementia awareness training for local business employees, emergency responders or others who work with the public. Consider a dementia-aware symbol in storefronts. Educate the general public about how to be supportive of people with memory loss and their loved ones.

3. Stay connected to their family, friends and neighbors, while having the chance to develop new relationships.

- **Example:** Alzheimer's Cafes are regular social gatherings in a coffee shop or cafe for people living with memory loss. Originating in the Netherlands, the concept has taken off throughout the world. Many Washington state communities offer this opportunity. Learn more at: www.alzcafes.org

- **What can you do?** Reach out to a neighbor with memory loss and find something you both enjoy doing, and do it together. Help a friend with memory loss stay involved in social networks.

Spread the word about social gatherings for people with memory loss in your area, or if there aren't any, ask a local coffee shop to start an Alzheimer's Café.



David and Daphne lead songs at the Columbia City Alzheimer's Cafe. Photo credit: Full Life Care

4. Enjoy meaningful lives, with access to education, recreation, work or volunteer opportunities, cultural enrichment, and more.

- **Example:** Seattle Parks and Recreation launched their “Dementia-Friendly Recreation” division in 2014, to provide accessible and meaningful recreation opportunities to persons living with memory loss. Programs include walking groups, art classes, and special events. www.seattle.gov/parks/find/dementia-friendly-recreation
- **What can you do?** Ask people with memory loss – What do you enjoy doing? What places do you love? How would you like to make a difference? Then follow up! Create or advocate for dementia-friendly programs in your local senior center, library, college, museum, congregation or volunteer organization.

5. Have a voice in their community and a leadership role in anything particularly impacting the lives of people with memory loss.

- **Example:** Alzheimer's Scotland supports the Scottish Dementia Working Group, the first of what are now many national advocacy groups for people with memory loss around the world. SDWG members advise Scottish national policy that impacts the lives of people with memory loss. www.sdwg.org.uk
- **What can you do?** Use dementia-inclusive practices in any public meeting, alongside other inclusive practices like sign language or interpretation. Establish a dementia advisory group for your dementia-friendly community initiative, and apply the “nothing about us without us” slogan for any new program or policy. If you have memory loss yourself, claim your right to have a voice in your community.

6. Have access to early diagnosis and post-diagnostic resources for themselves and their loved ones, including medical care, education and support, financial/legal services, and advance care planning.

- **Example:** The Alzheimer’s Association offers a free 24/7 Helpline to provide reliable information and support over the phone to people with memory loss and their loved ones. <http://www.alz.org/we-can-help-24-7-helpline.asp>
- **What can you do?** Access and/or provide tools and guidance to professionals who serve people with memory loss and their loved ones. Help start a memory loss support group in your congregation. Tell a friend or neighbor about the Alzheimer’s Association or other resources available in your community.

7. Have transportation options that help them stay involved in their community.

- **Example:** Washington state's Eastside Friends of Seniors relies on a volunteer network of people to provide transportation to medical appointments and to do shopping. Their “door through door” accompaniment policy ensures a person ends up where they want to go. <http://eastsidefriendsofseniors.org/our-services/>
- **What can you do?** Give a ride to a friend or neighbor with memory loss. Arrange for or provide training to public transportation employees and taxi drivers on how to be accessible and supportive to people with memory loss.

8. Have community housing options that provide the level of support they want, in the setting they desire.

- **Example:** The “village model” is a grassroots approach that coordinates access to neighborhood-based services for people who want to keep living at home, but may need some extra support. This could involve help with chores, home repair, social outings and more. Washington state has multiple “villages.” <http://vtvnetwork.org>
- **What can you do?** Locate and provide education about the various housing models in your area depending on how much support a person wants. Advocate for additional housing options as needed. Help a neighbor out with household chores.

9. Can navigate neighborhoods and public spaces because the physical environment is supportive and clear.

- **Example:** The Portland Memory Garden is a city park that incorporates dementia-friendly design principles in order to be particularly accessible to people with memory loss. www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/finder/index.cfm?action=ViewPark&PropertyID=1202
- **What can you do?** Incorporate dementia-friendly supports like landmarks and signs, and use navigation technology to help a person find their way around. Use pictures and symbols, not just words. Use architecture that easily communicates the purpose of a building.



Frye Art Museum *here:now* program. Photo credit: Jill Hardy

Learn more:

If you'd like to learn more, or get connected with others who want to build dementia-friendly communities in Washington state, check out the following resources:

- Dementia Friendly America provides resources for neighborhoods, stores, banks, communities of faith, libraries, emergency response services, hospitals and more to become dementia-friendly, and outlines a general step-by-step plan for building a coalition and moving forward. www.dfamerica.org
- The Dementia Action Collaborative plans to provide networking and resource-sharing opportunities for people working toward dementia-friendly communities in Washington state. Sign up to receive updates by emailing: dementiafriendlywa@gmail.com.

**Community Spotlight:
The Momentia Movement**

There's a grassroots movement spreading across our state! Momentia empowers people with memory loss and their loved ones to stay active and connected in the community. People are working together with favorite local venues to design innovative dementia-friendly programs, like watercolor painting in the park, walking at the zoo, and volunteering at the food bank. View examples and explore how to bring Momentia to your area by visiting www.momentiaSeattle.org.