
Dementia-Friendly Communities

What are dementia-friendly communities?

About 60 percent of people with Alzheimer's and other dementias live in the community, with an estimated one-quarter of them living alone. Most can remain active in the community – and, with appropriate support, they will have better outcomes and quality of life at lower costs than if they are institutionalized and isolated. Unfortunately, many people do not know how to interact effectively with those living with Alzheimer's and other dementias – or what small changes in their daily practices can help people with dementia remain independent and engaged. To address these challenges, “Dementia-Friendly Communities” is an emerging movement in which the goal is for people with dementia and their caregivers to receive better community support and to have greater opportunities to stay actively engaged and remain at home as long as possible.

How can communities best support people with dementia and their families?

Dementia-friendly communities seek to ease the challenges posed by dementia to affected individuals, government entities, businesses, and civic groups. Steps toward becoming dementia friendly include efforts to increase public awareness of the disease, improve access to beneficial services for both the person with dementia and his/her caregiver, and eliminate physical and social barriers that unduly hinder the capacity of people with dementia to remain active members of their communities. Becoming dementia friendly can be good for businesses, too, in terms of retaining existing customers, reducing employee turnover and absenteeism, and deepening community goodwill.

What does a dementia-friendly community look like?

The reach of a dementia-friendly community goes beyond health care and direct support systems to mobilize community action and engagement at all levels, beginning with insights from and advocacy by people with dementia and their caregivers. In time, local businesses, community and faith-based organizations, public service providers, and all community residents would be able to recognize early warning signs of dementia and understand how best to support people with dementia and their caregivers. Environmental updates would include clearly marked signage, quiet public spaces during events, and supportive transportation. Government and emergency services would make adaptations to better serve and protect people with dementia, and public policies would remove barriers that may inadvertently isolate people affected by dementia.

What can public health do to get involved?

Public health has a critical role to play in ensuring communities are more supportive and empowering of people with dementia. Specifically, the public health community can:

- Analyze the community support needs of people with dementia.
- Bring together multiple community players to create new partnerships that develop action plans to raise awareness and build support systems for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias.
- Promote the use of evidence-informed practices and educational resources.

For ideas and information, visit the Dementia Friendly America website: www.dfamerica.org.