

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.

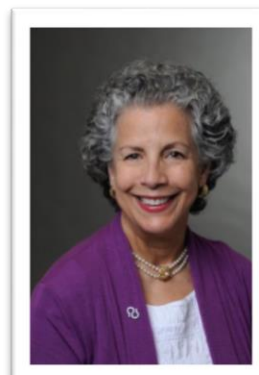
As experts on their own experience, your family, friends and neighbors with memory loss are the ones who can best define what would make your own community more dementia-friendly. If you want to learn more, try asking: “What kinds of things help you feel you belong and can stay actively involved here 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.
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.
3. Stay connected to their family, friends and neighbors, while having the chance to develop new relationships.
4. Enjoy meaningful lives, with access to education, recreation, work or volunteer opportunities, cultural enrichment, and more.
5. Have a voice in their community and a leadership role in anything particularly impacting the lives of people with memory loss.
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.
7. Have transportation options that help them stay involved in their community.
8. Have community housing options that provide the level of support they want, in the setting they desire.
9. Can navigate neighborhoods and public spaces because the physical environment is supportive and clear.



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

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.momentiasattle.org.

Learn more:

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

- Dementia Friendly America provides resources for particular sectors to become more 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.