

Local Government



Government, Community, Mobility Planning, Emergency Planning and Response

Local governments determine many community features that influence our day-to-day lives. By planning and developing the right physical and social infrastructure, the local government can make communities more livable for people living with dementia and their care partners. Dementia friendly practices can:

* Minimize adverse health outcomes and improve quality of life for

people living with dementia, as well as reduce care partner stress.

* Allow a person living with dementia to remain at home longer, cutting costs that would be spent at health care facilities.
* Create a community that is more livable for all residents, including older adults and people with disabilities.
* Benefit local economies by fostering a more attractive, competitive, and sustainable community.1

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a general term for a loss of memory and other thinking abilities that is serious enough to interfere with activities of daily life. Dementia has many causes. Alzheimer’s disease, the most common cause of dementia, is a disease of the brain that leads to problems with memory, thinking, and behavior. Alzheimer’s and other dementias are not a normal part of aging.

Signs of Dementia

 Memory loss that disrupts daily life

 Challenges in planning or solving problems

 Confusion when completing familiar tasks at home, at work, and/or during leisure activities

 Confusion with time or place

 Challenges when attempting to understand visual images and spatial relationships

* Challenges with words when speaking, writing, and/or reading
* Accidently misplacing items and losing the ability to retrace steps
* Decreased or poor judgment
* Withdrawal from work or social activities
* Changes in mood and personality

# Ready to implement dementia friendly practices?

Follow these steps:

1

1. Help stakeholders understand the impact of dementia and community needs:

For Community Planning

* Help community stakeholders understand the impact of dementia2,3 and commit to dementia friendly principles.
* Assess and respond to needs related to dementia and community characteristics.
  + Include public and private agencies, aging and dementia professionals, older adults, people living with dementia, care partners, and the general public in assessments and decision making.

1. Apply dementia friendly principles/best practices for local governments:
   * Plan, assess, design and implement programs and services that value contributions of all generations, abilities, and community sectors.
   * Plan for safe, affordable, accessible dementia capable housing, transportation, public safety and emergency response services.

* Be proactive and willing to partner with others and promote coordination among departments.
* Prepare to adjust budgets, adopt building, or land use changes, update products and services, and change functions or approaches as needed.
* Integrate needs of people living with dementia into comprehensive planning process.
* Provide training and resources to city/county staff, emergency responders, and to staff in public health/human services on serving and communicating with people living with dementia.

1. Gather data:
   * Assess home life, mobility, community life4, and public safety by gathering data, reporting, and analyzing findings to understand characteristics, such as the differences between:

* Rural and urban areas
* Ethnic and cultural considerations
* Needs and wishes of people with dementia and their care partners in your community

2

Considerations for Home Accessibility Modification:5

For Home Life

* Increase diversity of affordable

housing options near transportation and services.

* Expand access to quality home modification and repair services that improve accessibility and meet changing needs.
  + Design features in custom building or remodeling projects that recognize each person’s unique home features and his or her mobility, sensory, and cognitive impairments.
  + Promote coordination among professional trade organizations (home builders/remodelers, architects, occupational and physical therapists, interior designers) to develop standards and practices that would help consumers make informed choices to meet their needs.
  + Make it easy for consumers and practitioners to learn about design guidelines, installation techniques, products, funding sources, and qualified practitioners.

3

Mobility planning and coordination:

For Mobility6,7,8

* Improve planning and coordination

of transportation and services.

* Support increased funding for transportation that serves older users and people living with dementia.
  + Meet mobility and assistance needs by integrating alternatives into transportation planning and services, streets and human services, and coordinate with land use and development planning.
  + Develop policy that fosters complete streets, pedestrian safety and ease, and rural access.
  + Promote easy-to-navigate public spaces that incorporate universal design features: visible, easy-to-read signs and schedules, trails and sidewalks that are wide, smooth, flat/low slope, and non-slip.
  + Recognize increased dependence on automobile, influence of person’s location (rural/urban) on mobility, effect of physical, sensory, and cognitive limitations.

For Community Life

* Offer people with dementia opportunities to engage in community life.

How to support engagement with community life (see DFA Community Based Supports and Services community sector guide):

* Promote participation in a range of social, leisure, faith- based, and neighborhood activities that are:
  + Accessible
  + Inclusive
  + Acknowledge the potential of the person with dementia.
* Challenge stigma and build understanding across generations.
* Develop welcoming, unintimidating physical environments with well-defined restrooms, shelter, and seating with arm and back rests.
* Signs should use large graphics, realistic symbols, and color contrast (dark on light background).
* Know about and direct people with dementia and their care partners to services.
* Support programs (e.g., chore services) that allow people with dementia to remain independent for as long as possible.
* Encourage dementia friendly and responsive businesses and services.

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For Community Life

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Foster community planning and family preparation that considers safety, security, and needs of people with dementia in disaster planning and emergency response:9

5

* + Facilitate coordination among state and local emergency management offices and the aging services network.

For Public Safety, Disaster Planning, and Emergency Response

* + Develop special needs registries identifying people living with dementia who may need help in the event of a disaster.
  + Provide specialized education on disaster preparedness to people living with dementia and their care partners and families.
  + Include people living with dementia and their care partners in the development of local emergency plans; integrate all ages and abilities into disaster planning, response, and recovery.
  + Plan for people living with dementia, who are increasingly vulnerable and may need additional support during disaster or emergency events.

References

1. **AARP, The Livability Economy** <http://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/tool-kits-resources/info-2015/livability-economy.html>
2. **Alzheimer’s Association, 2023 Alzheimer’s Disease Facts and Figures** <https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf>
3. **Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, Guide to Elder Friendly Community Building** <https://www.michigan.gov/documents/Guide_to_EFC_Building1_156733_7.doc.pdf>
4. **American Public Transportation Association, Funding the Public Transportation Needs of an Aging Population**<https://www.giaging.org/documents/APTA_Funding_Transportation_Needs_of_an_Aging_Population.pdf>
5. **Bailey, Linda. Aging Americans: Stranded without options**<https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/aging_stranded.pdf>
6. **National Conference of State Legislatures, AARP Public Policy Institute : Aging in Place: A State Survey of Livability Policies and Practices** <http://assets.aarp.org/rgcenter/ppi/liv-com/aging-in-place-2011-full.pdf>
7. **Alzheimer’s Association, RTI International: Disaster Planning: HCBS for People with Dementia and their caregivers** <https://www.alz.org/media/Documents/spotlight-disaster-preparedness.pdf>
8. **Home Instead Business Training – Alzheimer’s Friendly Business online course** <http://www.helpforalzheimersfamilies.com/alzheimers-care-training/alzheimers-friendly-business-training>

Additional Resources

For additional resources related to the *Local Government* sector and a host of other community sectors, please visit [DFA's resource page](https://dfamerica.org/resource-listing/).

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Local government is just one important part of the community. Working in tandem with other community sectors can help the entire community become dementia friendly. Learn more about the process and how to help your community and others become more dementia friendly at [www.](http://www/) dfamerica.org.

