



Dementia Friendly Businesses



Businesses of all types play a vital role in creating welcoming and supportive customer experiences. This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that retail, service and customer-facing staff can take to provide supportive and accessible environments for people living with dementia and their care partners, with simple steps to strengthen communication, improve the environment and enhance customer support.

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Dementia is a general term used to describe a group of symptoms that affect memory, thinking, communication and decision-making in ways that interfere with daily life. It is not a normal part of aging. Common symptoms include memory loss, confusion, trouble finding words, difficulty planning or solving problems and changes in mood or behavior. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia. Other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia and Frontotemporal Dementia.

In stores and service settings, dementia may make it harder to find items, use payment terminals or manage busy environments.

BUILD DEMENTIA AWARENESS

Provide dementia-awareness training for all staff through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops.

Integrate dementia education into staff onboarding and annual refreshers.

Support employees who are providing care to someone with dementia by offering flexible scheduling, access to employee assistance programs or referrals to resources like the Eldercare Locator and the Alzheimer's Association Helpline.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND RESPECTFULLY

Engage the person before speaking. Make eye contact, face the person directly and use a friendly greeting or their name if you know it.

Speak slowly and clearly. Use short, simple sentences with one idea at a time.

Use a warm, friendly tone of voice. Be calm, positive and respectful.

Smile and be kind. Friendly expressions help the person feel safe and supported.

Ask one question at a time. Offer simple choices, like yes/no or "Would you like a bag or no bag?"

Give the person extra time to respond. Pause and wait patiently—avoid rushing or finishing sentences.


Repeat or rephrase if something is not understood. Use simple words or shorter phrases to support understanding.

Reduce distractions. Minimize background noise so it is easier to focus.

Pay attention to non-verbal cues. Watch for signs of confusion, stress or discomfort and respond calmly and supportively.

Respond to meaning, not mistakes. If someone says the wrong word or misstates a price, focus on what they meant—for example, say "Let's check together" instead of correcting them.

Use visual cues to support understanding. Point to items, receipts or signage to reinforce verbal communication.



IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Provide large-print, high-contrast signs. Use simple words and familiar icons (e.g., restrooms, exits, customer service) placed at eye level to guide people.

Keep floors safe and dry. Avoid shiny or patterned floors that can cause glare or confusion and mark stairs or ramps with bright, high-contrast tape or paint.

Keep lighting bright and even in all areas, especially hallways and restrooms. Reduce glare and shadows to help people see clearly and feel safe moving around.

Provide comfortable, stable seating that is easy to get in and out of. Place sturdy chairs with armrests near entrances and exits.

Make restrooms easy to find and safe to use. Post clear signs and maintain bright, even lighting. Install grab bars and offer single-use or family restrooms when possible.

Simplify layouts and keep aisles clear. Maintain wide, uncluttered pathways and keep product placement consistent to reduce confusion.

Reduce noise and distractions. Lower music and announcements or schedule quiet hours to provide a calmer environment.

Make staff easy to identify. Provide uniforms or large name badges for quick recognition.

Offer wayfinding support. Greet customers on arrival and offer directions.

SIMPLIFY CUSTOMER SERVICE INTERACTIONS

Offer help early and calmly. Approach customers who seem unsure or lost with a friendly offer of assistance—small gestures prevent confusion and help people feel supported.

Keep choices simple. Limit decisions to two clear options, such as “Would you like this one or that one?”

Guide transactions step by step. Explain one action at a time (“Now insert your card... now press the green button”) to make checkouts easier to follow.

Respond kindly to mistakes. If someone forgets to pay or makes an error, address it quietly and helpfully to preserve dignity and avoid embarrassment.

Offer reassurance when someone appears anxious or confused. Use a calm tone, allow extra time and provide a place to rest if needed.

Prepare for emergencies or lost customers. Create a simple plan for assisting anyone who becomes lost, distressed or separated from a care partner and train staff on how to respond and contact family or emergency services if needed.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Become a Dementia Friend
dfamerica.org/become-a-dementia-friend/

Alzheimer's Association Helpline
800-272-3900 | www.alz.org



Find or Start a Memory Cafe
dfamerica.org/

Eldercare Locator
800-677-1116 | eldercare.acl.gov



Scan or visit
dfamerica.org/resource-listing



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