



Dementia Friendly Local Government



Local governments help shape safe, accessible and welcoming communities for people of all ages and abilities. This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that municipal leaders, departments and frontline staff can take to provide supportive and accessible services for people living with dementia and their care partners, with simple steps to strengthen communication, improve facilities and support community connection.

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 municipal settings, dementia may make it harder to understand instructions, navigate buildings or complete public-service processes.

BUILD AWARENESS AND WORKFORCE CAPACITY

Provide dementia-awareness training for all public-facing staff (clerks, police, EMS, housing, etc.) through programs such as Dementia Friends or invite local experts to lead educational sessions or workshops.

Integrate dementia education into new employee orientation, annual training and professional development programs.

Designate a dementia champion or liaison in each department to promote ongoing learning, identify improvements and serve as a point of contact for dementia-friendly practices.

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 INTERACT RESPECTFULLY

Engage the person before speaking. If you don't know their name, make eye contact, smile and use a friendly greeting such as 'Hello' or 'How can I help you today?'

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 to meet here at the desk or in the seating area?"

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.

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Promote public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and highlight local dementia-capable initiatives.

Co-sponsor community events such as Dementia Resource Fairs, Brain Health Expos and Awareness Months.

Engage people living with dementia and their care partners in advisory roles and community planning efforts.



DELIVER DEMENTIA FRIENDLY SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

Offer written summaries and clear instructions to help residents remember key details and next steps.

Simplify application and payment processes by providing clear signage and offering in-person or assisted completion options.

Provide user-friendly online forms with step-by-step instructions and confirmation screens.

Add a webpage to the city website that presents city services in clear, easy-to-read formats and connects residents to local dementia and care partner resources.

Provide dementia-friendly recreation and community activities such as gentle movement, art, or intergenerational programs.

Ensure emergency shelters and response systems are accessible, calm, and supportive for people with cognitive changes.

Integrate dementia protocols into emergency preparedness and first responder training.

Host or co-sponsor Memory Cafés, resource fairs, or caregiver support groups.

ENSURE ACCESSIBLE AND DEMENTIA-CAPABLE TRANSPORTATION

Provide dementia-capable public transportation by training drivers and staff using National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) toolkits.

Establish a dementia-capable transportation policy outlining how drivers, dispatchers and support staff assist riders who may appear disoriented or confused.

Coordinate with transportation providers to ensure reliable, door-to-door options for residents with dementia.

CREATE DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS AND FACILITIES

Use large, high-contrast signage with simple language, clear symbols and consistent color cues.

Provide calm waiting areas, non-slip flooring and seating for stability.

Ensure entrances, stairs and ramps are well-lit, accessible and equipped with sturdy railings.

Maintain smooth sidewalks, safe crosswalks and clutter-free building pathways.

Offer family or unisex restrooms with grab bars and clear wayfinding.

Schedule quiet hours or low-sensory service times for residents sensitive to noise or crowds.

Conduct periodic environmental audits using dementia-capable or universal design checklists to identify improvements.

INTEGRATE DEMENTIA AWARENESS INTO POLICY AND LEADERSHIP

Apply a dementia lens to new ordinances, projects and services—especially those related to housing, transportation, emergency response and customer interaction.

Incorporate dementia-capable design, communication and service standards into municipal procurement, contracting and policy reviews.

Adopt a formal dementia-capable city or county resolution and develop an implementation plan with clear goals, responsibilities and timelines.

Integrate dementia-capable principles into comprehensive, public health and accessibility plans to ensure long-term policy alignment and sustainability.

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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