



Dementia Friendly Neighborhoods

Neighborhoods help people living with dementia feel safe, connected and welcomed in everyday life. This Dementia Friendly America Sector Guide outlines practical actions that neighbors, community groups and local organizations can take to provide supportive and accessible environments for people living with dementia and their care partners, with simple steps to strengthen communication, build trust and support community connection.

LEARN THE COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA

Dementia affects each person differently, but there are several common signs that neighbors may notice. These changes may appear gradually and vary from day to day.

Memory and Thinking: People may forget recent information or repeat the same questions. They may have difficulty planning organizing or solving problems and often find it harder to adjust to changes in routine or environment.

Everyday Tasks: Tasks that were once familiar—like managing bills, following directions or preparing a meal—may become confusing or overwhelming. Individuals may also lose track of time, seasons or where they are, even in familiar places.

Communication and Language: Finding the right words can be difficult. Some may pause mid-sentence, struggle to follow conversations or misunderstand what others are saying.

Behavior and Emotions: Mood changes are common and may include increased anxiety, irritability or sadness. People may withdraw from social activities or hobbies or display behavior that feels out of character—such as suspicion, agitation or wandering.

Vision and Physical Changes: Some may experience vision or spatial problems, like difficulty judging distance or recognizing objects. Movement may become slower and balance may be less steady.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND KINDLY

These everyday communication tips help neighbors with dementia feel respected, understood and safe.

Use a warm, respectful approach when speaking. Say the person's name, make eye contact, smile and face them directly. A calm tone and kind gestures help the person feel safe and connected.

Use respectful, people-first language. Say "person living with dementia" instead of "dementia patient."

Speak slowly and clearly with short sentences and one idea at a time. This makes communication easier to follow and less overwhelming.

Ask one question at a time and offer simple choices. Try: "Would you like to sit here or over there?" instead of open-ended or complex questions.

Pause and wait patiently for a response. Give the person time to process and reply without rushing.

Watch for nonverbal cues like confusion or stress. Respond calmly and gently if the person seems overwhelmed.

Ask how your neighbor prefers to be supported or spoken to. Everyone is different—some may want help, others may prefer independence.

Keep communication routines familiar. Use the same times, places or phrases when checking in to build comfort.

Start with a simple step: Become a Dementia Friend. This short awareness session will help you better understand what it's like to live with dementia.

CONNECT WITH NEIGHBORS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

People with dementia want to stay involved in daily life.

Greet neighbors by name and with a friendly hello. Familiar greetings help build connection and routine.

Invite them to participate in simple, familiar activities. A walk, a porch visit or a shared hobby can brighten someone's day.

Offer help respectfully—don't assume. Say, "Would you like help with that?" instead of stepping in uninvited.

MAKE OUTDOOR SPACES SAFE AND COMFORTABLE

Simple environmental adjustments can support independence and reduce anxiety.

Keep sidewalks and walkways clear, smooth and well-lit. Good lighting and clean paths help prevent falls and support orientation.

Use visible, high-contrast house numbers and simple signage. Clear visual cues help neighbors recognize homes and navigate confidently.

Use familiar visual landmarks to support recognition. A colorful door, bright planter or unique mailbox can help someone find their way.

OFFER PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Small, thoughtful actions help neighbors stay safe, connected and supported.

Help with daily tasks when needed. Bring in mail, carry groceries or roll out trash bins—especially if routines are missed.

Check in during weather events or power outages. People with dementia may forget alerts or safety routines; a quick check-in can help.

If a neighbor seems confused or lost, approach calmly and offer support. Introduce yourself, speak gently and help them return home or contact a family member.

Share safety programs with care partners. Let them know about MedicAlert® + Alzheimer's Association Safe Return.

STAY CONNECTED

Friendly, consistent communication helps neighbors feel valued and included.

Create a simple check-in routine. Porch visits, short calls or text messages can ease isolation and build trust.

Share information in clear, easy-to-remember formats. Use both printed and digital formats like notes, flyers or calendars.

Use consistent, visible places to post messages or reminders. Posting in the same spot (like a front door or mailbox) supports routine.

Check in on care partners. Offer a listening ear or give them a short break—small gestures matter.

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



Dementia Friendly America
is administered by **USAging**