



Dementia-Friendly Health Departments

Local and state public health agencies are important partners in the establishment of dementia-friendly community initiatives. The increasing occurrence of dementia over time and the social, economic, and health impacts of dementia on families, caregivers, and communities support the classification of dementia as a public health issue.

According to the 2012 World Health Organization's *Dementia: a Public Health Priority*, improvements in health care in the past century have contributed to people living longer and healthier lives. The number of Americans surviving to age 80, 90, or beyond is expected to grow dramatically, resulting in an increase in the number of people with noncommunicable diseases, including dementia.

Currently, lack of dementia awareness and understanding is prevalent. Although Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are now viewed as chronic diseases, many people still perceive dementia as a mental illness or consider it a normal part of aging. Factors that increase the risk for Alzheimer's disease and other dementias overlap with those of other chronic diseases, such as heart disease and stroke, diabetes, and cancer. These modifiable risk factors include tobacco use, poor nutrition, physical inactivity, and alcohol misuse. Public health has played a key role in strategies to address these risk factors through partnership efforts.

Wisconsin's state health plan, Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 (HW2020), serves as the statewide agenda for improving health in the state. HW2020 includes chronic disease prevention and management as one of the 12 key health focus areas. Given that Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are chronic diseases, state and local health plans should consider how to implement strategies and activities related to dementia in order to improve the health of the communities they serve.

WHAT IS THE DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY INITIATIVE?

The dementia-friendly community initiative is focused on supporting people living with dementia so that they are able to live good, independent lives and continue to be a part of the community. Areas of need to be addressed include, but are not limited to:

- Public awareness

Increasing public awareness of dementia could reduce the stigma associated with these illnesses.

- Promotion of early detection

Early detection of dementia allows for early planning and better overall health management. Memory screenings can serve as a first step toward early detection.

- Creation of environments that support the reduction of anxiety for those with dementia

Memory cafés provide a safe environment where people with dementia and their caregivers can socialize without fear of embarrassment.



- Crisis capacity for mobile crisis teams

Emergency preparedness plans should include people with dementia and their caregivers. A person with dementia often does not fare well outside of their day-to-day routine, so plans should address what to do in these situations.
- Voluntary sheriff registry and wandering programs

People with dementia can easily become lost and unable to remember how to get home on foot, using public transportation, or driving in a car. Establishing a voluntary sheriff registry and wandering program can ease the process of getting people with dementia home to their loved ones.
- Dementia-friendly businesses

A dementia-friendly business recognizes the challenges that accompany dementia and enables people with dementia to avoid isolation by participating more comfortably in everyday activities.
- Partnership

Throughout Wisconsin, a variety of organizations and businesses are working to address dementia-related issues. Connect with the local ADRC or other aging coalitions to join the initiative.
- Data collection

Data collection is an important step in determining the impact of dementia. Include questions related to dementia in the Community Health Assessment. Consider evaluating death certificates to see the prevalence of dementia as a primary or secondary cause of death.

RESOURCES

For more information on dementia and how to become dementia-friendly, visit:

- Is It Dementia: A Resource for Recognizing the Signs of Dementia
<http://isitdementia.com.au>
- A Toolkit for Building Dementia-Friendly Communities
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p01000.pdf>
- Dementia Care Specialist
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/dementia-care-specialist-program.htm>
- Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/consumer/index.htm>
- Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org
- Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin
www.alzwisc.org
- CDC Healthy Brain Initiative
www.cdc.gov/aging/healthybrain

