

Dementia Friendly Towns Project

York and Manjimup

Introduction

A Dementia Friendly Town is a place where people living with dementia are supported to live with meaning and purpose in their community. At the heart of a Dementia Friendly Town is the recognition that people with dementia deserve to participate in everyday life, and require support and understanding to do so.

The number of people living with dementia in Australia is set to double over the next twenty years. Stigma and various symptoms of the disease can cause a person with dementia to withdraw from their local community. The Dementia Friendly Towns project was developed to address these issues.

Key stakeholders

The Dementia Friendly Towns project is an initiative of Alzheimer's WA, supported by the Shire of Manjimup and Shire of York.

The project was funded through the Southern Inland Health Initiative and overseen by the WA Country Health Service as part of a collective regional development project.

A whole of town approach to being dementia friendly

The Dementia Friendly Towns project, the first of its kind in Australia, was designed to work within the framework of an existing community - using a whole of town approach to engage community members, local government, businesses and service providers to better support people living with dementia.

The regional towns of Manjimup and York are considered retirement hubs, with a large number of local residents aged 65+. They were chosen for the project based on a number of factors including local demographics, and capacity of the local Shire and community to work with Alzheimer's WA.

Working teams formed in each town encouraged regular engagement between Alzheimer's WA, the Shire, local schools, businesses, aged care providers, Community Resource Centres, other community members, carers and people living with dementia.

Regular consultation was key to creating 'buy-in' from community members.

Case study: Dementia Friendly Towns Project - York and Manjimup

Specific initiatives included:

- » A Regional Coordinator located in each town, employed by Alzheimer's WA to provide local support
- » Consultations with advocates and carers to ensure their needs and concerns were identified and addressed
- » Inclusion of dementia friendly planning in the Shire's Age Friendly Plans
- » Training local supermarket and service provider (banks, post office, pharmacy) staff in how to communicate with a person with dementia
- » Training local businesses in dementia friendly design principles
- » Providing training to the general community about what dementia is and how people can live well with dementia
- » Certificates of Commitment and Achievement for all businesses who participated in training
- » Intergenerational activities arranged between local aged care facilities and high school students
- » Implementing 'quiet hours' at local supermarkets
- » Creation of Memory Cafés: a regular meeting point, such as a café, where people with dementia can socialise and meet others in a welcoming environment
- » Introduction of volunteering opportunities for people living with dementia
- » Easy wayfinding: updating public signage making it easy to read and understand
- » Upgrading public facilities making them more accessible to people with dementia, for example using colour to distinguish doorways.

The Dementia Friendly Towns project was rolled out over 14 months, starting in April 2017, with funding and support from the WA Department of Communities and WA Country Health Service. The scope of the project included building capacity within each town to ensure the project's sustainability into the future.

Key outcomes from the project included a reduction of stigma in each community, a positive shift in the perception of the value of older people, reduced social isolation for people living with dementia, and a greater understanding of the needs of people living with dementia in the community.

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Health benefit

A whole of town approach to being dementia friendly can lead to significant health benefits in the person living with dementia and their carer.

- » Reduction of stigma, leading to improved levels of self-worth and wellbeing
- » Reduction of social isolation, leading to an increase in social activity
- » Recognition of the value of the person - despite their diagnosis of dementia - leading to opportunities for volunteering
- » Carer stress may also be reduced.

Economic benefit

Dementia is the single greatest cause of disability in older Australians (aged 65 years or older).

The cost to Australia is estimated to be \$15 billion annually.

With the prevalence of dementia set to double over the next 20 years and a rapidly ageing population, the ability to drive cost savings in the health and aged care sectors will be crucial.

The Dementia Friendly Towns project will contribute to cost savings through supporting more people to age in place.

Environmental benefit

Enhanced understanding of how a dementia enabling design can foster enablement, autonomy and wellbeing in a person living with dementia.

- » Making the physical environment easier to navigate and safe for people living with dementia
- » Implementing improved 'wayfinding' such as pathways and signage
- » Improving accessibility to community facilities, facilitating a sense of autonomy for people with dementia.

Community benefit

- » People living with dementia are treated with respect, empathy and dignity
- » Social groups are welcoming and inclusive
- » Employers provide support for people living with dementia to stay in the workforce
- » Volunteering opportunities are offered to people with dementia who are no longer able to work in a paid capacity
- » Businesses provide accessible services and staff trained to help people with dementia
- » Ongoing understanding to further develop dementia friendly initiatives
- » People living with dementia accessing dementia friendly community spaces such as supermarket 'quiet hours', Memory Cafés and regular social groups.

Dementia friendly design and planning principles

The Dementia Friendly Towns project draws on dementia friendly design and planning principles set out in the [Guidelines for the Development of Dementia Friendly Communities](#) document found on the [Alzheimer's WA website](#).

One of the key components of a dementia friendly community is maintaining a person's opportunities to continue to access the community and its services.

Barriers to access are often due to poor physical environmental design.

With very limited guidance on dementia specific design in Australian Accessibility Standards or Universal Design guidelines, this area is often neglected by architects and urban designers when creating public access buildings and spaces.

Over 70% of people with dementia continue to live in their own home and will access public buildings and local community spaces. Simple changes can be made to existing public spaces to make them more accessible for people living with dementia.

Wayfinding and orientation

Principle 6: Support Movement and Engagement

Dementia enabling signage should be clear, have good contrast, be easily visible, lead a person on a pathway to the destination, and not be surrounded with other information.

Symbols and words used should be easily recognisable. Signs should be located on the door they relate to. Signage should also lead a person back from the destination if appropriate.

A person living with dementia on finding public toilets at the local shopping centre:

"I can find the toilet ok, but when I come out it is very confusing and I never know which corridor to take to get back to the shops. Sometimes I end up in the store room!"



Photo 1

Common public toilet signage that is reflective and provides poor contrast for someone with perception difficulties.



Photo 2

Readily available public toilet sign that is clear with good contrast.

Case study: Dementia Friendly Towns Project - York and Manjimup

Enhancing accessibility

Principle 4: Reduce Unhelpful Stimulation

A common issue for people living with dementia is flooring patterns and materials in public buildings. Floor patterns can significantly impact a person living with dementia in the way they see the floor surface and then how they respond.

Choosing floor surfaces and coverings that have minimal colour crossovers or bold patterning, low glare and non slippery surfaces will assist a person living with dementia.

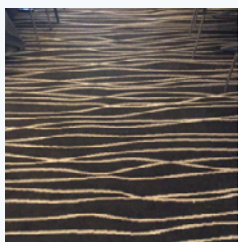


Photo 1
Patterned carpet in hotel that would create difficulties.

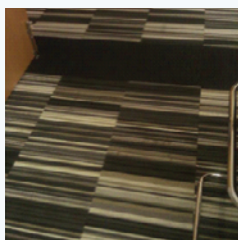


Photo 2
Carpet design creates illusion of steps or holes.

Australian standards require raised tactile floor surfaces to assist visually impaired people. If these are done in a solid dark colour, it can create the perception of a large hole for someone with dementia. Using a sensitive design tile can avoid this.



Photo 1
Dark tiles create illusion of a hole.

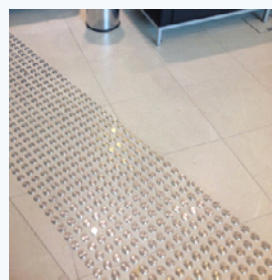


Photo 2
Dementia enabling design maintains function but does not impair a person with dementia.

Supporting independence and enablement

Principle 7: Create a Familiar Space

The push for aesthetic modern design and minimalism can often have a negative outcome for people with dementia who may be relying on longer term memories.

Using cross head taps, paper towels or obvious hand dryers, and other fixtures and fittings with obvious purpose, can support independence and enablement.

Wife talking about her husband's difficulties at his local restaurant:

"We have local, great food! Problem is in the toilets, the sink has no taps. You wave your hands around under it and sometimes water, sometimes soap, sometimes nothing comes out! He has great difficulty understanding it."



Photo 1
No obvious taps or instructions on how to use.



Photo 2
Cross head taps that are colour coded will enable a person with dementia to easily identify and use them.

10 Dementia Design Principles

These evidence-based principles of dementia design were developed by Alzheimer's WA in partnership with the University of Wollongong.



1. Unobtrusively reduce risks

People with dementia require an internal and external environment that is safe, secure and easy to move around in order to support their wellbeing. Safety features and barriers need to be as minimal as needed and be sympathetic to the rights and expectations of an adult.



2. Provide a human scale

The experience of scale is determined by three factors: the number of people that a person encounters; the overall size of a building; and the size of the individual components such as doors, rooms and corridors. A person with dementia may feel intimidated by the size of the surroundings, or when confronted with a multitude of interactions and choices.



3. Allow people to see and be seen

It is important for people with dementia to recognise where they are, where they have come from and what they will find if they head in a certain direction. When they can see destination points, they are more able to find where they want to go. This is known as 'good visual access'. Good visual access gives a person with dementia the confidence to explore their environment.



4. Reduce unhelpful stimulation

Dementia often reduces the ability to filter stimulation and prolonged exposure to large amounts of stimulation may cause stress. The environment should be designed to minimise exposure to stimuli that are not helpful, for example background noise or confusing signage.



5. Optimise helpful stimulation

Enabling a person with dementia to see, hear and smell things that gives them cues about where they are and what they can do can help to minimise their confusion and uncertainty.



6. Support movement and engagement

Purposeful and safe walking can be supported by providing a well defined pathway, free of obstacles and complex decision points that guides people to their destination. Clear signage to aid orientation as well as land mark features to assist wayfinding are beneficial.



7. Create a familiar space

A person with dementia is more able to use and enjoy spaces and objects that were familiar to them in their earlier life. Familiar tapware or furniture can help a person with dementia understand the purpose of the object and assist in its usage.



8. Provide opportunities to be alone or with others

People with dementia need to be able to choose to be on their own or spend time with others. Creating mixed public spaces gives the person a choice depending on their needs.



9. Provide links to the community

Many people with dementia state that they often feel isolated and lonely, disconnected from friends and their community. Considerate urban design that encourages community interaction and provides opportunities for neighbours to socialise can benefit people with dementia greatly.



10. Respond to a vision for a way of life

The environment should support a person with dementia to lead a life that has meaning and value to them. Well designed community spaces and public buildings will encourage a person with dementia to continue to go to the shops, attend community groups, visit the cinema or walk the dog.

References






Alzheimer's WA - Dementia Friendly Communities: alzheimer'swa.org.au/dementia-friendly-communities

Guidelines for the Development of Dementia Friendly Communities: alzheimer'swa.org.au/dementia-friendly-communities

Memory Café guidelines: alzheimer'swa.org.au/memory-cafe

Dementia Enabling Environments website: enablingenvironments.com.au

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