

28 October 2020

## **People living with dementia now better able to stay connected online, with new video conferencing guide**

Resources to support people living with dementia to stay connected by video conferencing are now available through Dementia Australia.

Developed by people living with dementia, for people living with dementia, the resources are designed to support the use of video conferencing to stay in touch.

The need for the guides was identified by the Dementia Australia Advisory Committee, which is made up of people living with dementia.

With members across Australia, the team often meets by the Zoom video conferencing platform.

Dementia Australia Advisory Committee member Dennis Frost was involved in the discussion about the challenges of using Zoom and suggested the group develop some resources to support people living with dementia to navigate Zoom video conferencing.

“I have an IT background and I spend about 10 to 15 hours a week in online meetings, so I understand the challenges personally”, Mr Frost said.

“For people living with dementia background noises are very distracting and there have been a few times that’s it’s been hard to concentrate on calls and this has made me understand how environmental issues are a big issue for people living with dementia.

“On the other side, our Dementia Australia Advisory Committee meetings have been clearly structured with agendas available in advance and that makes a difference. Like any meeting, whether online or face-to-face, having a clear structure makes it easier to follow what’s happening.

“As a means of communications, Zoom fills a lot of needs and sometimes you can’t meet in person. Having something like this may help someone reconsider connecting with others by using Zoom.”

The guides include practical step-by-step instructions on how to use the technology, and helpful tips on how to get the best out of the online experience, including preparing written signs to use during the meeting such as ‘I want to speak’ or ‘I agree’.

There are also tips on how to hold a dementia-friendly meeting, including taking a five-minute break every 30-45 minutes or when needed, ensuring everyone’s name is clearly displayed on screen, and making sure any meeting papers are emailed rather than in a link.

Members of the Advisory Committee developed the resources, and then sought feedback from others living with dementia and staff from Dementia Australia.

Juanita Hughes, who lives with dementia and is also a member of the Dementia Australia Advisory Committee, believes the guidelines promote the vision of people with dementia.

“There is so much raw talent in just the one group of people who are all living with dementia and we have been using Zoom to connect and learn long before this pandemic,” Ms Hughes said.

“Sure, you might take some extra time and effort, but it doesn’t mean you don’t have the ability to participate and contribute.

“Just because you have dementia doesn’t mean you don’t have capacities.”

Dementia Australia CEO Maree McCabe said the guides would be valuable for the estimated 459,000 Australians living with dementia, many of whom live in the community and need to use technology to keep in touch with family, friends, carers and health care professionals every day and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“People with a lived experience of dementia are best placed to understand the unique challenges they live with and they have developed resources which will be useful for so many people in the community and the aged care sector,” Ms McCabe said.

“While we have been in isolation due to COVID-19, everyone has adapted to a new way of working, which has included a heavy reliance on video calling and conferencing.

“This comes with its own challenges and for people living with dementia the experience has an added layer of complexity and video conferencing can be a frustrating, overwhelming and negative experience.

“Instead of video conferencing being a way to connect with others, it can often be a barrier for people living with dementia and further embed feelings of social isolation.

“These guides aim to support people with dementia feel better equipped to access video conferencing in order to stay connected.”

The free, online resources are available at <https://www.dementia.org.au/about-us/advisory-groups/dementia-australia-advisory-committee>.

Dementia Australia is the source of trusted information, education and services for the estimated half a million Australians living with dementia, and the almost 1.6 million people involved in their care. We advocate for positive change and support vital research. We are here to support people impacted by dementia, and to enable them to live as well as possible. No matter how you are impacted by dementia or who you are, we are here for you.

For support, please contact the **National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500**. An interpreter service is available and the Helpline is open 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday excluding public holidays. The National Dementia Helpline is funded by the Australian Government. People looking for information can also visit [dementia.org.au](https://www.dementia.org.au)

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When talking or writing about dementia please refer to [Dementia-Friendly Language Guidelines](#).