

Toolkit for Councils

Simple tips to make your council area dementia-friendly

What is Dementia?

Dementia describes a collection of symptoms that are caused by disorders affecting the brain. It is not one specific disease.

Dementia affects thinking, behaviour and the ability to perform everyday tasks.

Act Now for a Dementia-Friendly Future

Imagine being treated differently just because you have been diagnosed with a disease like cancer or diabetes.

This is often the reality for people living with dementia, their families and carers.

Around two-thirds of people with dementia live in the community, yet research shows that more than 60 per cent of people would rather not think about dementia. A lack of knowledge and understanding of dementia may lead to people living with dementia experiencing stigma and discrimination in the community.

That's why we're encouraging everyone to take a few simple actions to create a dementia-friendly future for all Australians.

A dementia-friendly future is a future that is better for everyone in the community.

How can your Council create a dementia-friendly future?

If you are a council representative who is interested in how the role of council can support people living with dementia, their families and carers, consider putting yourself forward as a dementia champion. Change can start anywhere in council and on any scale. It may be as simple as starting a conversation with colleagues.

The most successful dementia-friendly initiatives are achieved when all levels of council take a shared approach to supporting people with diverse needs. But this does not mean that a cross-council approach is the only way to start exploring what makes a council dementia-friendly.

How your department can lead the change

The seeds for change can come from any individual and from any council department or function. The section below demonstrates some of the ways in which different departments can begin the journey towards creating a dementia-friendly council.

Corporate Services

Customer service, public relations and communications, human resources

In your role, you may have regular contact with people with dementia and are able to be responsive to their needs. You are in a position to facilitate change within council, both in terms of how councils operate and how you meet the needs of the community.

Some ways you can lead the change include:

- Become the change champion for your council. Bring key internal and external stakeholders together.
- Consult and include people living with dementia in advisory groups, panels or committees when developing and reviewing accessibility and inclusion plans.
- Suggest that customer service staff undertake training on how to communicate well with people with dementia. Consider encouraging them to become a **Dementia Friend**.
- Review your council reception areas for dementia-friendly design principles and make recommendations for small but significant changes or upgrades.
- Ensure that human resources policies support employees with dementia or families and carers of people living with dementia.

Facilities and Infrastructure

Parks and recreation, community facilities, emergency management services, libraries, local laws, roads, footpaths, traffic management, public spaces, community transport

Public spaces, parks and gardens are fundamental components of how people in the community interact, socialise and maintain wellbeing.

Embedding simple strategies and awareness of universal principles in design, review and maintenance can significantly impact the lives of people with dementia.

Planners can ensure universal design principles are embedded in new and revised guidelines and that they inform planned and future activities.

Road infrastructure and community transport are fundamental aspects of social engagement and independence for people with dementia.

Some ways you can lead the change include:

- Ask urban designers to consult with people with dementia and their carers on the design of public outdoor and indoor spaces.
- Ensure that Municipal Emergency Management Plans and Community Safety Plans take into account the needs of people with dementia.
- Talk to libraries about building up their collections on dementia and how to live a positive life following a diagnosis.
- Ensure that planning frameworks address universal design principles and that a plan for implementation is clear.
- Review public facilities to ensure they are accessible and easy to navigate.

- Ensure that all new and upgrade public works embed universal design principles. For example:
 - Seats in public spaces have a plain design and are easily recognised as chairs
 - Signs that use bright primary contrasting colours with easily recognisable pictures to reinforce the location
 - Public amenities that are dementia-friendly in design and signposting
- Support bus drivers to undertake training to understand the needs of people with dementia.
- Apply for state or federal funding to undertake larger-scale initiatives.

Health and Community Services

Aged and disability, cultural, youth and family, health

In your role, you may already have contact with people living with dementia and are informed about their needs. Simple changes to current services or identification of service gaps could lead to opportunities to streamline or economise current services.

Some ways you can lead the change include:

Support service staff and volunteers to undertake free or targeted training to better understand the needs of people with dementia.

- Consider the development of council programs that address the specific needs of people with younger onset dementia (aged under 65 years), given this form of dementia appears at an earlier stage of life when people are likely to be more physically and socially active and programs for older people may not be appropriate.
- Make communities aware of dementia resources for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Consider whether health and wellbeing frameworks are inclusive of people living with dementia.
- Review current services and supports and consider how service improvements can be achieved in a cost-effective way (for example, using volunteers).

Tips for the physical environment

- Use unambiguous seating design (for example, chairs should look like chairs)
- Use high-contrast design features (for example, in a public restroom consider different coloured toilet seats, distinctive buttons for flushing and signage on the inside of the exit door to differentiate it from a toilet cubicle door)
- Avoid sudden changes in light level since shadows can be confusing
- Use clear signage that allows for line-of-sight orientation, and which uses words and pictures
- Consider inclusion of 'quiet spaces' in refurbishments and new buildings



If you would like **support** to make your council area more dementia-friendly contact [**DementiaFriendly@dementia.org.au**](mailto:DementiaFriendly@dementia.org.au)