



# Building impactful and empowered dementia-friendly communities



## What is the focus of the research?

Working with dementia-friendly community projects to develop evaluation tools they can use to understand and improve their impact.



## Why is it important?

A dementia-friendly community is a place where people are supported to live a high quality of life with meaning, purpose and value. These inclusive communities help to address the stigma, isolation and discrimination experienced by many people living with dementia.



## What is empowerment evaluation?

An approach to evaluation that helps groups monitor and evaluate their own performance. It is commonly used for community-based initiatives as it centres around stakeholder inclusion, accountability and creating ownership. An expert in empowerment evaluation equips groups with the tools and knowledge to self-evaluate, make improvements and accomplish common goals that benefit the whole community.



**Our goal is to build grass-roots capacity to create even better places for people living with dementia and their carers.** ”

— Associate Professor Lyn Phillipson

Over the past 10 years, an increasing number of communities have been established in Australia and overseas. The first in Australia began in Kiama, New South Wales, in 2014. Building on this project, the government-funded Dementia-Friendly Communities program now includes more than 20 projects nationally, with the support of local organisations.

Key to these communities is that people with lived experience are involved from the outset and work toward the common goals of raising awareness, reducing stigma and improving the built environment, so people with dementia can live well.

Tools exist to help create dementia-friendly communities and implement activities that achieve their goals. However, they lack ways to evaluate the impact of their efforts. This is often due to limited resourcing and/or capacity of community members to conduct needs assessments and monitor and evaluate the activities.

Associate Professor Phillipson's Communities for Dementia fellowship project aims to address this. Her team will use an empowerment evaluation approach to a) design an evaluation and monitoring framework and toolkit that enhances program outcomes and community control, and b) build staff capacity to collect data and use evidence to direct the social and environmental change they desire.



## How will this happen?

**Stage 1:** use empowerment evaluation to co-design the Australian dementia-friendly community evaluation framework and toolkit.

**Stage 2:** desk-based mapping and baseline evaluation to determine essential activities of dementia-friendly communities and impact indicators, followed by the selection of pilot sites.

**Stage 3:** empowerment evaluators to support capacity building and piloting of the framework and tools in six pilot sites.

**Stage 4:** share the results with dementia alliances and their stakeholders to improve their capacity for evidenced-based dementia-friendly practice.



## What will this mean for communities?

- New knowledge about how to improve community environments for people living with dementia.
- Evidence to inform policy for planning and improvements to community environments, so people can live well at home for longer.



## Who's undertaking the research?

**Associate Professor Lyn Phillipson, University of Wollongong**

Associate Professor Phillipson is an award-winning public health academic engaged in research and action to promote aged- and dementia-friendly communities. She uses qualitative and participatory methods to work with older people to promote understanding and change in the social, physical and service environments that contribute to their wellbeing.

Associate Professor Phillipson has expertise in the development and practice of inclusive research methods with people with dementia and their care partners, as well as members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. In 2018, she was appointed an Age-Friendly Mentor by the World Health Organisation and International Federation on Ageing.

The title of her project is *Communities for Dementia*, which she is undertaking as part of her Dementia Centre for Research Collaboration mid-career research fellowship.