

Inclusive Communities Fund

Dementia Australia submission

28 August 2026

What needs to change?

- Community organisations need better support to become more inclusive and accessible for people living with dementia.
- Staff and volunteers need greater awareness and understanding of dementia so they can respond confidently and appropriately to people living with dementia.
- Organisations need practical tools and resources to identify and remove barriers to participation.
- People living with dementia and carers should be involved in designing and evaluating initiatives that aim to improve inclusion

What is Dementia Australia recommending

- Fund dementia education, practical resources, implementation support and access to dementia-specific expertise for community-facing staff and volunteers.
- Support dementia-friendly environments, community education and evaluation.
- Enable local governments to lead place-based partnerships and locally responsive approaches.
- Require funded organisations to show how people living with dementia and carers influenced the design, delivery and evaluation of initiatives.
- Ensure the Fund complements, rather than replaces, individual disability supports.

If actioned, what impact could these recommendations have?

- People living with dementia could remain active, connected and included in community life.
- Organisations could identify and remove barriers, improve communication and create more accessible environments and activities.
- Changes could become part of routine practice and continue beyond the life of a grant.

How has Dementia Australia advocated for this position?

- This submission draws on targeted feedback from Dementia Advocates, including people living with dementia and carers.
- Dementia Australia has offered to support further consultation with people living with dementia and carers as the Fund is designed, implemented and evaluated.

What's next?

- The first round of Inclusive Communities Fund funding is expected to begin by June 2027.
- Dementia Australia is seeking careful transition planning and monitoring as NDIS social, civic and community participation budgets begin to be progressively adjusted from 1 October 2026.

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Introduction

Dementia Australia welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the design of the Inclusive Communities Fund.

Dementia Australia is the peak body representing the estimated 446,500 people living with dementia and their carers across Australia. As the trusted source of information, education, and support services, we advocate for positive change for people living with dementia, their families, and carers, and support vital research across a range of dementia-related fields. Dementia prevalence in Australia is set to increase to more than a million people by 2065 [1]. Dementia is the leading cause of death for all Australians, as well as a leading contributor to disease burden [2]. An estimated 1.7 million people in Australia are involved in the care of people living with dementia [1].

Dementia is not a normal part of ageing and can affect people of all ages including children and young adults. Young onset dementia refers to any form of dementia diagnosed in individuals under the age of 65. In 2026, there are an estimated 29,000 people living with young onset dementia in Australia. This figure is projected to increase to an estimated 41,000 in 2054 [1]. People with young onset dementia are underrepresented in the NDIS with only around 30% accessing supports through the scheme [3].

The misconception that dementia is a condition of old age exacerbates the challenges experienced by young people with a diagnosis of dementia. The experiences of people with young onset dementia can be different from those diagnosed with dementia at a later stage of life. They often receive a diagnosis when they are in full-time employment and actively raising and financially supporting a family.

Dementia Australia recognises that dementia affects all people differently but that challenged and barriers may be compounded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people living in rural and regional areas, people with disability and other priority populations.

This submission draws on targeted feedback from Dementia Australia's **Dementia Advocates**.

Dementia Australia advocates for the Inclusive Communities Fund to strengthen dementia-inclusive capability across mainstream community organisations so people living with dementia can remain active, connected and included in community life.

Recommendations

1. Build dementia capability among community-facing staff and volunteers through Government-funded education, practical resources, implementation support and access to dementia-specific expertise.
2. Support practical organisational activities that help identify, address and evaluate barriers to dementia-inclusive participation, including dementia-friendly environment audits, organisational inclusion plans, self-assessment tools, workforce development, community education and evaluation activities.
3. Support local governments to facilitate place-based partnerships and locally responsive approaches to dementia-inclusive community participation.
4. Require funded organisations to demonstrate how people living with dementia and carers have influenced the design, implementation and evaluation of inclusion initiatives.
5. Ensure the Inclusive Communities Fund complements, rather than replaces, the individual disability supports some people require to access and participate in community life.

What support, resources or changes would help organisations become more inclusive and accessible?

Community awareness of dementia as a disability remains limited. Unlike many physical disabilities, the cognitive changes associated with dementia can be under-recognised, hidden or invisible. This can contribute to stigma, stereotyping and exclusion, and can affect how people living with dementia are treated when participating in community life.

"I wonder if, for the person living with dementia, it all becomes too hard, too embarrassing and they become a silent population who don't access mainstream organisations because it is too hard." ~ carer of person living with dementia

People may experience exclusion because staff or volunteers do not understand dementia, make assumptions about capability, communicate in ways that are difficult to follow, or provide activities that do not respond to a person's needs, preferences, interests or abilities.

"When I discussed with my husband's golf club that he would need a support worker to assist and if this would be a problem, they said they had never had this question before." ~ carer of person living with dementia

Building dementia capability is critical to achieving meaningful inclusion. People living with dementia and carers consistently report that positive participation experiences depend on the understanding, confidence and responsiveness of staff and volunteers.

Government investment could support access to dementia education, practical implementation resources, dementia-friendly environment guidance and ongoing capability-building support for community organisations. Dementia Australia already provides a range of relevant resources

through its Dementia-Friendly Communities initiative and **professional development and training programs**, including dementia education, community education resources and dementia-enabling environmental audits. As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Dementia Australia is well placed to support workforce development and help community organisations build dementia capability and create more inclusive environments.

“I find most people want to help but do not have experience/exposure to dementia to know how to help.” ~ carer of person living with dementia

Communities play a critical role in enabling inclusion, reducing discrimination and supporting access to services, activities and spaces that all people have a right to. Dementia Australia's **Dementia Friendly Communities** initiative provides practical resources and examples that support dementia awareness, accessibility and participation. Dementia-friendly **environment principles** can also support communities, including in care environments.

Approaches to inclusion should also be person-centred. Feedback from people impacted by dementia emphasised the importance of understanding a person's interests, history and preferences when supporting community participation:

“It should be person centred ... tailored to them in the community.” ~ Person living with dementia

Community participation should enable people to maintain the interests, relationships and roles that are meaningful to them.

Recommendation: Build dementia capability among community-facing staff and volunteers through Government-funded education, practical resources, implementation support and access to dementia-specific expertise.

What activities should the Fund support, given that it will not pay for service delivery?

Funding should support practical organisational activities that help identify, address and evaluate barriers to participation for people living with dementia. This could include dementia-inclusive communication and accessibility reviews; dementia-friendly environment audits; development of organisational inclusion plans; volunteer dementia training and capability development; self-assessment tools; awareness initiatives; and evaluation activities that help organisations understand whether changes have improved participation and inclusion.

Advocate feedback identified demand for practical mechanisms that help organisations understand what dementia inclusion looks like, assess their own practice and demonstrate their commitment to becoming more inclusive.

“Develop criteria so that community organisations can self-assess whether they are dementia friendly and make it something that we all aspire to.” ~ Carer of a person living with dementia

Funding should prioritise activities that create lasting organisational change and can be embedded into routine practice beyond the life of the grant.

Existing Dementia Australia resources, including **Dementia-Friendly Communities tools**, **dementia-friendly organisation resources** and **dementia-enabling environmental audits**, demonstrate practical ways organisations can assess and improve inclusion for people living with dementia.

Recommendation: Support practical organisational activities that help identify, address and evaluate barriers to dementia-inclusive participation, including dementia-friendly environment audits, organisational inclusion plans, self-assessment tools, workforce development, community education and evaluation activities.

What role could local governments play in supporting community inclusion?

Local governments are well placed to support place-based inclusion through their role in libraries, community centres, recreation facilities, public spaces, local events and relationships with sporting, cultural and community organisations.

Under Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, local government is recognised as an important partner in creating inclusive and accessible communities. Local governments can play a significant role in bringing together community organisations, people living with dementia and carers; identifying local barriers and opportunities; and supporting practical action to improve inclusion.

Local governments can also help embed dementia-inclusive principles within community planning, council-funded infrastructure and the approval of residential and commercial developments. There is an opportunity to encourage consideration of dementia-inclusive design principles in public spaces and community facilities to support ongoing participation and inclusion.

Meaningful inclusion also depends on people living with dementia being able to influence local decisions that affect them. Local governments should ensure community consultation and engagement processes are accessible and inclusive for people living with dementia and carers.

Local governments can also support culturally safe and locally responsive approaches to inclusion through partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, culturally specific organisations and local disability organisations. This may be particularly important in regional, rural and remote communities where access to dementia expertise and community participation opportunities may be more limited.

Recommendation: Support local governments to facilitate place-based partnerships and locally responsive approaches to dementia-inclusive community participation.

How can organisations build meaningful and lasting inclusion?

Dementia Australia recommends that the Fund draw on existing dementia inclusion expertise and lessons from established initiatives, as well as the experiences of people living with dementia and carers, when considering how to build sustainable and lasting community inclusion.

Dementia Australia's Dementia-Friendly Communities initiative demonstrates practical approaches that can support lasting inclusion, including dementia awareness, accessible environments, community engagement and involvement of people living with dementia in identifying barriers and solutions.

Meaningful involvement of people living with dementia and carers is also critical to ensuring inclusion initiatives remain relevant and effective over time. Dementia Australia supports the principle that organisations should actively consider the perspectives of people living with dementia, carers and their representative organisations when developing policies, programs and services that affect them. Dementia Australia's **Half the Story** emphasises that meaningful consultation involves more than seeking feedback. It requires organisations to actively involve people with lived experience of dementia in decisions that affect them and to demonstrate how their views have influenced outcomes.

"Have representatives on boards at local communities who either live with dementia or are close to someone living with dementia so that making environments welcoming is part of what they do." ~ Carer of a person living with dementia

Recommendation: Require funded organisations to demonstrate how people living with dementia and carers have influenced the design, implementation and evaluation of inclusion initiatives.

Broader reform context

Dementia Australia recognises that changes to NDIS Social and Community Participation supports are outside the specific scope of this consultation and are expected to be considered through a separate market reform consultation. However, the Fund is being developed within the same broader reform environment, and its implementation should not be considered in isolation.

Investment in more inclusive communities is important, but community accessibility and individual disability support address different barriers. A community organisation may be accessible and inclusive, but a person living with dementia may still require individual support to travel to an activity, navigate an unfamiliar environment, communicate, participate, or remain safe. For some people meaningful community participation may therefore require both an inclusive community environment and individualised disability support.

"The other members help him when they can as part of their golf round but on days where the pace is faster we need to employ a worker to assist." ~ carer of person living with dementia

It will be important that changes to NDIS Social and Community Participation funding continue to recognise these individual support needs and do not assume that greater community capability removes the need for funded assistance for individuals to access and participate in community life.

The Government has announced that participant budgets for social, civic and community participation supports will begin to be progressively adjusted from 1 October 2026, while the first round of Inclusive Communities Fund funding is expected to begin by June 2027. This

creates a need for careful transition planning and monitoring so that people with disability do not experience reduced opportunities for participation while community capability is still being developed.

Dementia Australia's broader NDIS advocacy has also highlighted risks relevant to this interface, including thin service markets, regional gaps, the inappropriateness of disability settings for people with young onset dementia, and the potential for unmet support needs to increase reliance on family and unpaid carers. These issues should be examined in detail through the forthcoming Social and Community Participation market reform consultation

Recommendation: Ensure the Inclusive Communities Fund complements, rather than replaces, the individual disability supports some people require to access and participate in community life.

Conclusion

Dementia Australia supports investment in strengthening community organisations so that people living with dementia can remain connected members of their communities.

The Fund provides an opportunity to build dementia-inclusive capability across community settings through workforce development, practical organisational change, and meaningful involvement of people living with dementia and carers.

For some people living with dementia, meaningful participation will continue to require individual disability supports in addition to more inclusive community environments. The Fund will therefore be most effective when it complements, rather than replaces, the individual assistance some people require to access and participate in community life.

We welcome the opportunity for further consultation, including supporting the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing and the National Disability Insurance Agency to engage with people living with dementia and carers as the Fund is designed, implemented and evaluated. We would also welcome engagement on the forthcoming Social and Community Participation market reforms.

For more information, please contact the Dementia Australia Policy and Advocacy team on [**policy@dementia.org.au**](mailto:policy@dementia.org.au).

References

1. Dementia Australia. *Facts and Figures*. 2026; Available from: [**https://www.dementia.org.au/about-dementia/dementia-facts-and-figures**](https://www.dementia.org.au/about-dementia/dementia-facts-and-figures).
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Dementia in Australia: Summary*. 2026-07-30; Available from: [**https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/summary**](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/summary).
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Dementia in Australia*. 2025, Australian Government.