



LENS

# Dementia-Friendly Communities



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As people around the world live longer, there is more opportunity for an individual to develop a neurocognitive disorder. Alzheimer's is the most common of these disorders. In 2015, it was estimated that the prevalence of Alzheimer's was 4% in those 65 years or younger, 15% in those 65 to 74 years of age, and 43% of those 75 to 84 years of age. After 85 years of age, the prevalence drops to 38%. Often, a person with Alzheimer's disorder will require living in a nursing home or assisted living facility. However, a number of individuals with milder forms of dementia are still able to interact with those in their town or community. In fact, being able to shop for food, attend church, and be with others is important for the health of many of these individuals.

Many retirement communities have trained staff on how to interact with those who have cognitive difficulties. This type of training is now moving to the larger community. There is currently a movement in a number of states such as Minnesota to help communities become more dementia-friendly. The Minnesota plan began as part of a 2009 legislative mandate aimed at addressing the problems of aging. Some 30 communities in Minnesota are now implementing the plan. In Paynesville, Minnesota, a small town of 2,400 people, there are twice-monthly "Fridays and Friends" events for those with dementia and other townspeople designed for socializing. Volunteers also help those with cognitive difficulties with various basic tasks such as buying groceries at the local market (see *Figure 15.22*).

Other U.S. states and nations such as Canada and the United Kingdom are also seeking to make communities more dementia-friendly. In Watertown, Wisconsin, there are programs to train businesses in the community to institute minor changes in their daily operations to make life easier for those with cognitive difficulties. For example, servers who work in coffee shops or restaurants are taught to ask yes-or-no questions rather than naming all of the specials or menu items for the day. Cashiers are taught to slow down the transactions if the person finds it difficult to count his or her money. Even more complicated transitions such as estate planning or money management can be presented in shorter, more understandable segments of a larger presentation. In some other towns, local shops have created special areas of their store where those with dementia can feel calm, comfortable, and in control. Building designers are also considering how features such as lighting, sound, and pathways can make an environment more user friendly.

**Thought Question:** Think about your hometown or school environment: What specific changes would you recommend to make it more dementia-friendly? How would those changes also help other segments of your local population?

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