

Dementia Friendly Business Training



What is dementia?

Dementia is a clinical term used to describe a set of symptoms caused by more than 100 different medical conditions, diseases, and disorders. The most common cause of dementia is **Alzheimer's disease**. Other types of dementia include **Lewy body dementia** (including Parkinson's disease dementia), and **frontotemporal degeneration** disorders. These three types represent the majority of dementia cases and are known as neuro-degenerative disorders that damage brain tissue, causing symptoms to grow worse over time. There is no cure and few effective treatments. Another major type of dementia is called **vascular dementia** which most often results from strokes.

What are the signs and symptoms of dementia?

Most types of dementias share common signs and symptoms; however, they may appear at different times over the course of the disease and some symptoms may be more noticeable than others. For example, the main symptom in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease is memory loss; but with other types of dementia memory may remain intact until late in the disease. Common symptoms shared by many people with dementia also include confusion and disorientation; some people with dementia may wander and get lost, even in familiar surroundings. Many people with dementia may struggle making decisions and have difficulty completing tasks that require multiple steps. They may have difficulty writing a check, using a debit/credit card, or counting the correct change. Dementia almost always leads to communication difficulties, and people with dementia may lose the ability to speak. People with dementia often find it difficult to find the right words to describe what they want or need. Some people with dementia also show major changes in their personality and behaviors; some may become anxious, depressed, or aggressive; some experience hallucinations or act impulsively.

Who gets dementia?

Most people diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease are over the age of 65; however, a small percentage is diagnosed with early age onset Alzheimer's disease in their late 50's and early 60's. Vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia and frontotemporal degeneration can be diagnosed much earlier. While some research shows dementia may run in families, the cause of most dementia is unknown.

How many people have dementia?

According to the Alzheimer's Association, 1 in 9 people over the age of 65 has Alzheimer's disease; that's over 5 million people. When we consider those with other forms of dementia, including early onset (before age 65), the number of people living with dementia is actually much higher. In Wisconsin, it is estimated that as many as 150,000 people have dementia; in Wood County, about 2,000 people have dementia. Within the greater Marshfield area (30 mile radius) it is estimated that over 1,200 people have some form of dementia.

What is a dementia friendly community?

A dementia-friendly community is a place where people living with dementia are supported to live a high quality of life with meaning, purpose and value. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services is encouraging cities across Wisconsin to become dementia friendly communities. Marshfield Area Purple Angels, a new non-profit organization, is leading the initiative to make Marshfield the next dementia friendly community in Wisconsin.

What is a dementia friendly business?

A dementia-friendly business has trained staff who are able to recognize the signs and symptoms of dementia, who can effectively communicate with individuals who have dementia, and who are able to locate resources and support services for themselves and for individuals with dementia and their families.

Ten ways businesses can help make Marshfield a dementia friendly community

- 1. Be aware that many people in and around Marshfield are living with dementia.** In the Marshfield area, over 1,200 people are living with dementia. About 80% still live in their own homes or with family. Many in the early stages of dementia lead independent lives; many still drive (or have access to a vehicle). They visit our health care facilities, businesses, shops, restaurants, churches, and parks. Becoming more dementia aware and dementia friendly helps create environments where people with dementia feel welcomed and respected.
- 2. Learn more about dementia and provide ongoing training for staff.** Marshfield Area Purple Angels has trained volunteers who can provide training for your staff. Most training takes about 30 minutes, but more in-depth trainings are available. Marshfield Area Purple Angels can also provide additional resources.
- 3. Understand the symptoms of dementia.** People with dementia often live in a reality that while true to them, is very different from the world the rest of us experience. While memory loss is a main symptom of Alzheimer's disease, those with other types of dementia may not experience any loss of memory. Nearly all people with dementia, however, experience challenges with communication. Also know that people with dementia may leave your store or business without paying for items. This is not intentional and can usually be cleared up while still maintaining a high level of dignity and discretion for the person with dementia.
- 4. Be more patient and friendly.** Good customer service is something you already provide; however, some people with dementia may need additional assistance. They may need extra time when making decisions or need help using a debit card, writing a check, or counting the correct change. They may need help finding the items they want to purchase. A friendly smile and a slower pace can make a big difference.
- 5. Use dementia friendly communication.** Here are some things you can do to make communication easier:
 - Approach from the front
 - Make eye contact and introduce yourself
 - Use the person's name (if you know it)
 - Speak clearly and use short sentences
 - Listen carefully and give plenty of time
 - If possible, use gestures, objects or pictures, or write your message down to help the person understand you better.
- 6. Develop a "code purple" plan.** Some people with dementia can quickly become confused and disoriented. They may wander away from their caregiver or family member. Particularly in large stores and businesses, it is helpful to have a "code purple" plan. When a customer reports that a person with dementia is missing, staff should ask for a description of the person, including what they are wearing. Staff should then check throughout the building including all bathrooms and "employee only" areas, as well as outside the building, until the person is found.
- 7. Subscribe to Wisconsin Silver Alerts.** Silver Alerts notify the public that an adult with dementia is missing. You can sign up to get Silver Alerts by email, fax or text at www.wisconsincrimealert.gov/silveralert.html.
- 8. Support the caregivers and family members of those who have dementia.** Many people with dementia who come into your business will likely be accompanied by a family member or caregiver. Offer assistance even when you are not asked to do so; do not assume that the caregiver would not appreciate your help. Be patient and understanding; let the caregiver know that there is no hurry. Speak to the person they are caring for; do not only interact with the caregiver. Smile and make them feel welcome.
- 9. Support employees who are living with dementia.** If an employee is diagnosed with an early onset form of dementia, be aware of your legal responsibilities as an employer and also ask how you can help. If an employee is caring for a family member who has dementia, understand and be respectful of the employee's dual responsibilities at work and at home. Establish supportive policies and practices, such as work schedule flexibility, and do what you can to support their role as a caregiver.
- 10. Get more information.** Visit the Dementia Friendly Marshfield website, contact Marshfield Area Purple Angels at 715-383-0897, or email doug@marshfieldpurpleangels.org.