

Transportation Services

Transportation services have a vital role to play in keeping people living with dementia safe and involved in the community. In fact, the majority of people living with dementia are living in the community rather than a long-term care facility. It is likely that transportation services may encounter someone living with dementia as a rider or as someone inquiring about services.



What is Dementia?

Dementia is an overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms associated with a decline in memory or other thinking skills severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities. Dementia has many causes. Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia, is a disease of the brain that leads to changes with memory, thinking, and behavior. Alzheimer's and other dementias are not a normal part of aging.

Signs of Dementia in Your Setting

- Memory loss that disrupts daily life (forgetting an appointment or scheduled ride)
- Challenges in planning or solving problems
- Challenges with money (paying fares, making change, etc.)
- Confusion with time or place (showing up at the wrong place or wrong time; getting off at the wrong stop)
- Trouble understanding visual images or reading information (maps, routes, signs, tickets, etc.)
- Difficulty understanding schedules, routes, directions
- New problems with words in speaking or writing
- Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps (forgetting belongings in the bus/vehicle)
- Decreased or poor judgment
- Withdrawal from typical routines or activities
- Repetitive speech or behaviors (calling to schedule the ride several times)
- Changes in mood, personality, or behaviors

Dementia Friendly Communication Tips for Drivers

- Introduce yourself; kindly explain the process
- Provide reminders of upcoming stops or arrival information
- Speak slowly and clearly. Use a gentle and relaxed tone of voice
- Use shorter simple sentences, and ask one question at a time. Provide one instruction at a time
- Avoid arguing with or embarrassing the person
- Remind the person where you are taking them
- Encourage nonverbal communication (point to the door when it's time to exit, etc)
- Patiently wait for a response while the person takes time to process what you said
- Be aware of your body language: smile and make eye contact at eye-level
- Ask if assistance is needed if the person looks confused
- Be friendly & kind in order to minimize feelings of anxiety

Other Considerations for Dementia Friendly Transportation Service

Procedures to consider implementing:

- Provide extra reminders of rides – calls, messages, notes, etc
- Allow for extra assistance & explanation of the ride or ticket system
- Wait for them to be seated before moving
- Check to make sure they didn't leave belongings in their seat
- Turn down music/noise distractions
- Ensure the person properly enters where they are being dropped off at
- Be cautious if the passenger asks to get off at a destination other than what is scheduled. The person may be confused with locations or time of events. Check the passengers' destination sheet if available to you.
- Allow care partners of passengers with dementia to ride free of additional charge
- Lower the step – ensure the bus or vehicle is physically accessible
- Partner with care partners/family – have contact information on file
- Approach the person slowly and from the front, never from behind so they are less likely to be surprised or startled
- When in doubt, talk to a supervisor, social worker, or community partner organization about your concerns

Additional Resources

- **Dementia Friendly Iowa** | <https://dementiafriendlyiowa.org/>
- **Dementia Friendly America- Transportation Video** | <https://www.dfamerica.org/sector-videos/>
- **Dementia Friendly America- Transportation Resources** | <https://www.dfamerica.org/resources/#transportation>
- **Alzheimer's Society UK: Dementia-friendly Emergency Services Guide** | https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/defaultfiles/2019-11/Dementia%20Friendly%20Emergency%20Services_Guide.pdf
- **NADTC Accessible Transportation** | <https://www.nadtc.org/news/blog/accessible-transportation-for-people-living-with-dementia/>
- **Alzheimer's Society Dementia Friendly Transport** | <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friendly-communities/organisations/transport>
- **Alzheimer's Association | 800-272-3900** | <https://www.alz.org/>
- **LifeLong Links & Iowa Area Agencies on Aging | 866.468.7887** | <https://lifelonglinks.org/>