



Dementia Friendly Utility, Maintenance, and Repair Professionals

More businesses are responding to the impact of dementia on both customers and employees. Around 80% of people living with dementia live in the community (CDC, 2023). Many individuals with dementia continue to live independently and often require services from utility, maintenance, and repair professionals, such as plumbing, electrical, or general home repairs. These tasks can become particularly stressful for people with dementia, as they involve interacting with new people and creating an overstimulating environment in the home. It is important for utility, maintenance, and repair professionals to recognize the signs of dementia and approach these clients with patience and understanding to ensure a supportive service experience.



Ready to implement dementia friendly practices? Follow the steps:

1

Prepare

- Recognize signs of dementia.
- Discover dementia friendly business practices through staff training.

2

Learn

- Learn to use dementia friendly practices.
- Know local services that help people living with dementia and their care partners.

3

Respond

- Utilize the dementia friendly tips in future interactions.
- Establish policies that support customers living with dementia and employees who are care partners.

Definition & Signs of Dementia

Dementia is general term used to describe a wide range of symptoms such as changes in thinking, problem solving skills, memory, communication, and perception, enough to interfere with daily life. Dementia is caused by diseases of the brain. The most common cause or type of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, but there are many other diseases that can cause dementia. Symptoms include:

- Challenges in planning or solving problems.
- Difficulty completing familiar tasks.
- Confusion with time or place.
- Memory loss that disrupts daily life.
- Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships.
- New problems with words in speaking or writing.
- Misplacing things. Losing the ability to retrace steps.
- Decreased or poor judgment.
- Withdrawal from work or social activities.
- Changes in mood or personality.

Dementia + Utility, Maintenance, and Repairs

- People with dementia are more likely to have higher utility bills related to confusion or improper usage of heating/cooling systems or water.
- People with dementia may set their water temperature or house temperature too high because their brain may not understand temperature regulation. This can also increase the risk for burns.
- Paying bills on time may become difficult. This could result in a vulnerable person losing utility supply.
- People with dementia may need more home repairs due to accidentally breaking devices or other components in their home due to confusion.
- Communicating with utility companies or repair service agencies can be overwhelming for someone with dementia, especially when it comes to expressing the specific needs or scheduling appointments.
- Forgetting how to utilize a thermostat, breaker panel, water heater, or other components is common with dementia.
- Dementia can impact the way a person interprets noises around them. A small buzz of the air conditioner could be extremely irritating or loud. Loud noises (drilling, hammering, etc.) can also provoke anxiety.
- Having unknown service workers coming in and out of the home can cause anxiety or irritation.

Dementia Friendly Service Tips

Service Tips:

- Consider providing extra reminder calls the day before as well as shortly before arriving at the home.
- Introduce yourself and clearly explain the process and purpose of the service. Provide extra context such as, "Your daughter, Linda, called me to fix your heater."
- At any point, the individual may forget why you are in the home. Throughout the service, continue to update the individual of what you are doing.
- If the customer seems anxious with you walking in and out of the home, remind them who you are and share that you need to make several trips in and out to carry supplies.
- Treat all customers with respect and dignity, including those living with dementia and their care partners.
- Foster a connection with the customers' care partners if available, but continue to include the person with dementia with eye contact & conversation.
- Offer breaking up the service if possible. For example, perhaps coming in for two-hour timeframes over two days is less disruptive than a full four-hour stretch on one day.
- Provide additional assistance with bill paying. Consider highlighting your direct phone number and name on the bill to contact if they have questions. The individual may need assistance writing the check. Be patient if the person calls multiples times with questions. Provide a grace period or extra reminders.

Environment Tips:

- If utilities are turned off during the service (such as water or electricity), provide reminders for the individual and an update as to when they will be able to utilize the utility (i.e. the toilet) again. Avoid turning utilities off for prolonged periods of time. If this will be the case, provide the information beforehand so they make accommodations.
- When creating loud noises (hammering, drilling, sawing), work to lessen the noise by closing appropriate doors. Give the person a warning beforehand. Suggest a quieter space option for the person to move to such as a different level of the home or outdoors. Limit loud noises whenever possible and avoid unnecessary extra sounds such as phone calls or music.
- If leaving the home mid-job, ensure the environment is safe for the person living with dementia. Make sure dangerous tools or chemicals are stowed away, adequate lighting and utilities are turned on, and walkways or common spaces are uncluttered.
- Do you know creative ways to help the home become more dementia friendly (i.e. water leak detectors, lowering the temperature of the water heater, motion-activated lighting, automatic stove shut-off, or something else)? Suggest these options to the customer or family!
- Have lists of local resources on hand. Encourage family to contact additional supports if it seems they need more assistance in their home.

More Dementia Friendly Communication Tips

- Slow pace slightly and allow time for person to process and respond.
- Use shorter simple sentences, and ask one question at a time.
- Speak clearly and calmly, be patient and understanding; listen.
- Use nonverbals if person can't find the right word.
- Connect instead of correct; step into the reality of the person living with dementia.
- Avoid arguing or embarrassing the person.
- Use approachable body language. Speak in a positive tone of voice. Smile and make eye contact to show you are a friend.
- Seek to understand the person's reality or feelings.
- Apologize and redirect to another environment or subject as needed.