



Dementia Friendly Businesses



For Minnesota businesses, it's imperative that the “costs of doing business” include awareness of how dementia affects the workplace. Employees and customers are touched personally and professionally, and the bottom line is at risk.



Why it's Important

According to research commissioned by the Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's disease costs U.S. businesses billions each year, stemming from lost productivity and absenteeism with primary caregivers and the business share of health and long-term care expenses. Millions of working caregivers are providing care to a family member or friend with Alzheimer's. Addressing ways to support caregivers in the workplace is smart business.

On the customer front, making it easier for people with dementia to do everyday business out in the community has clear benefits:

Retain existing customers. If customers who have dementia and their family caregivers don't find it easy to use a business, they will likely seek out another.

Attract new customers. Some 60 percent of people with dementia live at home, often with support from families, friends, and the community. Staying engaged in community life means using the businesses that are easy to navigate and have helpful, aware staff.

What is Dementia?

Dementia is a general term for a loss of memory and other thinking abilities that is serious enough to interfere with activities of daily life. Dementia has many causes. Alzheimer's disease, the most common cause of dementia, is a disease of the brain that leads to problems with memory, thinking, and behavior. Alzheimer's and other dementias are not a normal part of aging.

Warning Signs of Alzheimer's Disease

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

Interacting with People with Dementia

- Speak clearly and be patient
- Listen closely
- Smile warmly and make eye contact
- Respond to a look of distress
- Help when confusion is present
- Watch for signs of change and offer help accordingly – every day can be different

Responding to Common Practices of Customers with Dementia

Remembering and finding items.

People with dementia may have forgotten what they came in to buy. They may have a list, but have problems finding the things they want. Offer to help with the list. Help them choose the common amount of an item, particularly if they seem to be buying an unusually large amount.

Making choices.

While having choices is good, for someone with dementia, too much choice can be confusing. Ask what the person would like and then describe two or three options. Allow him or her time to think and make a decision.

Handling money.

Counting money, calculating change, recognizing coins and bills, and knowing the value of money can all be difficult for someone with dementia. Offer to help count out the money and be sure to provide a receipt. When appropriate, help someone through the steps of a credit card transaction.

Forgetting to pay.

People with dementia may forget to pay for something they have picked up. Approach the person before they leave the store, ask them if they are done shopping for the day and say you would be happy to help them check out. Guide them to the checkout lane.

Supporting Employees Who Care for Someone with Dementia

Have a conversation.

Talk with caregiver employees about their dual responsibilities at work and at home. Learn about existing community resources, make print and online resources available to employees, and help equip them to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Provide workplace flexibility.

Find ways to accommodate schedules and show your caregiver employees that you understand they are juggling multiple responsibilities – caring for a loved one and working for you.

Stay in touch.

Check in regularly with these caregiver employees. Keep being flexible and responsive to their needs.

Creating a Dementia Friendly Physical Space

Small changes in a physical space can make a big difference in making an environment feel safe to someone with dementia. A welcoming environment (both indoors and outdoors) helps a person with dementia continue to access your business. There are many best practices you can consider. Most are relatively low cost and can benefit everyone, including people with dementia.

- Entrances should be clearly visible and understood as an entrance. Make sure that glass doors are clearly marked.
- Signage for finding your way around should be clear, should use bold type, and should have contrast between the words and the background.
- Lighting at entrances should be high powered and include natural light when possible. Avoid pools of bright light and deep shadows.
- Flooring should be plain, not shiny, and not slippery. Pathways should be wide and free of clutter.
- Quiet areas for someone who may be feeling anxious or confused can help calm that person enough to independently complete what they were doing.
- Seating areas in large spaces, especially areas where people are waiting, can be a big help.
- Layout of an area should be free of clutter and arranged to make it easy to move around and easy to see products.
- A family/unisex restroom will allow someone to be assisted without causing embarrassment to them or another user.

Resources in Your Community

Alzheimer's Association Minnesota North Dakota

The 24/7 Helpline serves people with memory loss, care partners, health care professionals, the general public, diverse populations, and concerned friends and family. The Helpline offers referrals to local community programs and services, dementia-related education, crisis assistance and emotional support. Call 1-800-272-3900 or visit www.alz.org/mnnd

Senior LinkAge Line®

This resource provides information, assistance and connections to various services and resources in your community. Call 1-800-333-2433 or visit www.MinnesotaHelp.info®

References

Alzheimer's Association, Alzheimer's Disease: The Costs to U.S. Businesses in 2002

www.alz.org/national/documents/report_alzcosttobusiness.pdf

Know the 10 Warning Signs

www.alz.org/alzheimers_disease_know_the_10_signs.asp



Take Action

Learn more about becoming a dementia friendly business and offer the ACT on Alzheimer's Dementia Friendly @ Work training

www.actonalz.org/dementia-friendly-business

www.actonalz.org/dementia-friendly-work

Host a Dementia Friends Information Session to help change the way people think, act, and talk about dementia

www.actonalz.org/dementia-friends

ACT on Alzheimer's: Minnesotans working together to transform Alzheimer's through social change and community engagement.