



## “Beyond Care: Building Dementia-Friendly Communities Through Nursing Leadership and Collaborative Practice”

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**Abstract:** Dementia represents one of the most significant public health challenges of the twenty-first century, affecting millions of individuals and families worldwide. As populations age, the prevalence of dementia continues to rise, creating substantial social, economic, and healthcare burdens. Traditional models of dementia care have primarily focused on institutional and clinical settings; however, increasing attention is being directed toward community-based approaches that promote independence, dignity, social inclusion, and quality of life for people living with dementia. Dementia-friendly communities (DFCs) have emerged as an innovative strategy aimed at creating supportive environments where individuals with dementia can actively participate in community life while receiving appropriate support from healthcare professionals, caregivers, organizations, and community members. Nurses play a pivotal role in the development, implementation, and sustainability of dementia-friendly communities through health promotion, education, advocacy, care coordination, caregiver support, and policy development. This review examines the concept of dementia-friendly communities, their core principles, benefits, and implementation strategies, with particular emphasis on nursing perspectives. The article explores the role of nurses in fostering inclusive environments, enhancing community awareness, supporting caregivers, and promoting person-centered care. Challenges in establishing dementia-friendly communities and future directions for nursing practice, education, research, and policy are also discussed. The review highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and nursing leadership in creating communities that enable people with dementia to live safely, independently, and meaningfully within society.

**Keywords:** *Dementia, Dementia-Friendly Communities, Nursing Perspectives, Community Health Nursing, Person-Centered Care, Older Adults, Caregiver Support, Public Health Nursing, Aging Population, Social Inclusion*

### Introduction

Dementia is a progressive neurocognitive syndrome characterized by deterioration in memory, thinking, behavior, communication, and the ability to perform daily activities. It is not a normal consequence of aging but rather a collection of symptoms caused by various neurological conditions, including Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, Lewy body dementia, and frontotemporal dementia. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 55 million people worldwide live with dementia, and nearly 10 million new cases are diagnosed annually (World Health Organization, 2023). As life expectancy increases globally, the prevalence of dementia is expected to rise substantially, posing significant challenges for healthcare systems, families, and communities.

The impact of dementia extends beyond cognitive decline. Individuals living with dementia often experience social isolation, stigma, discrimination, reduced independence, and diminished quality of life. Family caregivers frequently face emotional distress, financial burdens, physical exhaustion, and social challenges associated with caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, dementia is increasingly recognized as a societal issue requiring comprehensive community responses rather than solely medical interventions.

In response to these challenges, the concept of dementia-friendly communities has gained international recognition. Dementia-friendly communities aim to create supportive social and physical environments that enable individuals with dementia to remain active, engaged, respected, and included in everyday community life. These communities



focus on reducing stigma, enhancing public awareness, improving accessibility, promoting social participation, and fostering collaborative support networks.

Nurses are uniquely positioned to contribute to dementia-friendly initiatives because of their close interactions with patients, families, caregivers, healthcare organizations, and community stakeholders. Through their expertise in holistic care, health education, advocacy, and care coordination, nurses can significantly influence the development and sustainability of dementia-friendly environments. This review explores the foundations of dementia-friendly communities and examines nursing contributions toward creating inclusive and supportive societies for individuals living with dementia.

### **Understanding Dementia and Its Societal Impact**

Dementia affects multiple domains of human functioning, including memory, language, reasoning, judgment, orientation, and social behavior. The progression of symptoms varies depending on the type and stage of dementia but generally results in increasing dependence on caregivers and healthcare services. Individuals may experience difficulties recognizing familiar people, navigating environments, managing finances, adhering to medication regimens, and participating in social activities. The societal impact of dementia is profound. Globally, dementia is among the leading causes of disability and dependency among older adults. The economic burden includes direct healthcare costs, long-term care expenses, and informal caregiving costs. Moreover, the psychological impact on families and caregivers contributes significantly to the overall burden of the disease.

Social stigma remains a major challenge for people living with dementia. Misconceptions regarding cognitive impairment often lead to exclusion, discrimination, and loss of social identity. Individuals with dementia may withdraw from community activities due to fear, embarrassment, or lack of support. Such social isolation can accelerate cognitive decline and negatively affect mental well-being. Therefore, addressing societal attitudes toward dementia is a critical component of comprehensive dementia care.

Healthcare professionals increasingly recognize that quality of life for individuals with dementia depends not only on clinical management but also on environmental and social factors. Supportive communities can significantly enhance independence, confidence, and participation

among people living with dementia. These considerations have contributed to the growing interest in dementia-friendly community models worldwide.

### **Concept of Dementia-Friendly Communities**

The concept of dementia-friendly communities originated from efforts to promote social inclusion and human rights for individuals living with dementia. A dementia-friendly community can be defined as a place where people with dementia are understood, respected, supported, and empowered to participate in community life to the fullest extent possible. Such communities recognize the capabilities and strengths of individuals with dementia rather than focusing solely on their limitations.

Dementia-friendly communities involve coordinated actions by healthcare organizations, local governments, businesses, educational institutions, transportation services, faith-based organizations, and community groups. The primary objective is to create environments that accommodate the unique needs of people with dementia while promoting independence and dignity.

Several key principles underpin dementia-friendly communities. First, awareness and understanding are essential. Community members must possess accurate knowledge about dementia to reduce stigma and misconceptions. Second, accessibility and inclusivity should be incorporated into physical and social environments. Public spaces, transportation systems, signage, and community services should be designed to facilitate navigation and participation. Third, meaningful engagement and participation must be encouraged through opportunities for social interaction, volunteering, recreation, and civic involvement. Finally, collaborative partnerships among stakeholders are necessary to sustain community initiatives and ensure coordinated support.

Dementia-friendly communities differ from traditional healthcare-focused approaches because they emphasize social inclusion and environmental adaptation rather than solely medical treatment. They promote a strengths-based perspective that recognizes the abilities and contributions of individuals living with dementia.

### **Core Characteristics of Dementia-Friendly Communities**

Successful dementia-friendly communities share several defining characteristics. Public awareness and education programs play a central role in promoting understanding of



dementia. Community education helps individuals recognize symptoms, communicate effectively with affected persons, and provide appropriate support.

Accessible physical environments are another important characteristic. Clear signage, adequate lighting, safe walking paths, easily identifiable landmarks, and simplified building layouts can improve navigation and reduce confusion. Public transportation systems that accommodate cognitive impairments also enhance mobility and independence.

Social inclusion is fundamental to dementia-friendly communities. Opportunities for participation in cultural events, recreational activities, volunteer programs, and social groups help individuals maintain meaningful relationships and preserve their sense of identity. Community engagement reduces loneliness and supports psychological well-being.

Support services for caregivers represent another essential component. Caregivers often require education, counseling, respite services, and emotional support. Dementia-friendly communities recognize caregivers as integral partners in care and strive to address their needs alongside those of individuals living with dementia.

Healthcare accessibility is equally important. Integrated healthcare services, memory clinics, community nursing programs, and multidisciplinary support teams contribute to early diagnosis, ongoing management, and continuity of care. Effective coordination among healthcare providers ensures comprehensive support throughout the disease trajectory.

### **Benefits of Dementia-Friendly Communities**

Dementia-friendly communities offer numerous benefits for individuals living with dementia, family caregivers, healthcare systems, and society as a whole. For people with dementia, supportive environments promote independence, self-confidence, social participation, and quality of life. Individuals are more likely to remain active and engaged when communities accommodate their needs and respect their autonomy.

Social inclusion can positively influence emotional well-being and reduce feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Opportunities for meaningful participation enable individuals to maintain valued social roles and preserve a sense of purpose despite cognitive challenges.

Family caregivers also benefit significantly from dementia-friendly initiatives. Access to support networks, educational resources, and community services can reduce caregiver stress and improve coping abilities. Community awareness helps create a more supportive environment where caregivers feel understood and less isolated.

Healthcare systems may experience reduced hospital admissions, delayed institutionalization, and improved care coordination when community support structures are effective. Early intervention and preventive services can contribute to better health outcomes and more efficient resource utilization.

From a societal perspective, dementia-friendly communities promote social justice, equity, and inclusion. They challenge stereotypes, reduce stigma, and foster compassionate attitudes toward aging and cognitive impairment. By recognizing the rights and contributions of individuals with dementia, communities create more inclusive and humane societies.

### **Nursing Perspectives on Dementia-Friendly Communities**

Nurses occupy a central position in the development and sustainability of dementia-friendly communities. Their holistic approach to care aligns closely with the principles of person-centered and community-based dementia care. Nurses interact with individuals across healthcare settings, including hospitals, primary care clinics, long-term care facilities, community centers, and home care environments, providing unique opportunities to influence dementia-friendly practices.

One of the most significant nursing contributions involves health education and awareness promotion. Nurses educate community members, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers regarding dementia symptoms, progression, communication strategies, and available resources. Through educational initiatives, nurses help reduce misconceptions and foster supportive attitudes toward people living with dementia.

Community health nurses play a particularly important role in assessing community needs and identifying barriers to participation for individuals with dementia. They collaborate with local organizations, government agencies, and community leaders to develop interventions that promote accessibility, inclusion, and support. Community assessments conducted by nurses can guide the planning



and implementation of dementia-friendly initiatives tailored to local populations.

Person-centered care represents a cornerstone of nursing practice in dementia care. Nurses advocate for individualized approaches that respect personal preferences, cultural values, life histories, and remaining abilities. By emphasizing strengths rather than deficits, nurses help maintain dignity and autonomy among individuals living with dementia.

Nurses also serve as care coordinators, facilitating communication among healthcare providers, social service agencies, caregivers, and community organizations. Effective coordination ensures continuity of care and timely access to support services. This role becomes increasingly important as dementia progresses and care needs become more complex.

Advocacy is another essential nursing responsibility. Nurses advocate for policies, programs, and funding that support dementia-friendly initiatives. Their clinical expertise and firsthand experiences position them to influence healthcare policies and community planning efforts. Through advocacy, nurses contribute to the development of systems that prioritize the needs and rights of individuals living with dementia.

Furthermore, nurses provide emotional support and counseling to family caregivers, helping them navigate the challenges of caregiving. Educational interventions delivered by nurses can improve caregiver knowledge, confidence, and coping skills, ultimately enhancing outcomes for both caregivers and care recipients.

The growing emphasis on dementia-friendly communities highlights the evolving role of nurses as leaders in community transformation. Their contributions extend beyond direct patient care to encompass education, collaboration, policy development, research, and public health initiatives aimed at creating inclusive environments for individuals living with dementia.

### **Nursing Interventions for Developing Dementia-Friendly Communities**

Nursing interventions are fundamental to the successful implementation and sustainability of dementia-friendly communities. Nurses utilize evidence-based approaches to enhance awareness, support individuals with dementia, empower caregivers, and strengthen community resources. One of the primary interventions involves

dementia education programs designed for community members, healthcare workers, volunteers, and service providers. These programs improve understanding of dementia, reduce misconceptions, and promote compassionate interactions with affected individuals. Educational initiatives often focus on recognizing symptoms, effective communication techniques, behavioral management strategies, and available support services.

Another important intervention is community-based screening and early detection. Nurses working in primary care and community settings can identify early signs of cognitive impairment through routine assessments and referrals for further evaluation. Early diagnosis enables timely treatment, care planning, and access to support services that can improve quality of life and delay functional decline. Nurses also facilitate health promotion activities aimed at reducing modifiable risk factors associated with dementia, including hypertension, diabetes, obesity, smoking, physical inactivity, and social isolation.

Home visits constitute an essential component of community nursing practice. During home assessments, nurses evaluate safety risks, medication management, nutritional status, caregiver burden, and environmental factors that may affect the well-being of individuals with dementia. Recommendations regarding home modifications, assistive devices, and supportive resources help maintain independence and reduce risks of injury or hospitalization.

Nurses also play a significant role in behavioral and psychological symptom management. Many individuals with dementia experience agitation, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and wandering behaviors. Community nurses provide guidance on non-pharmacological interventions such as reminiscence therapy, reality orientation, music therapy, sensory stimulation, and structured daily routines. These approaches often improve behavioral outcomes while minimizing reliance on medications.

Care coordination remains a critical nursing intervention. Dementia care frequently involves multiple healthcare providers and community services. Nurses act as coordinators who facilitate communication among physicians, social workers, occupational therapists,



psychologists, community agencies, and family caregivers. Effective coordination reduces fragmentation of care and ensures continuity throughout the disease progression.

### **Community-Based Programs Supporting Dementia-Friendly Environments**

Various community-based programs have demonstrated effectiveness in promoting dementia-friendly environments. Memory cafés represent one of the most widely recognized initiatives. These informal social gatherings provide opportunities for individuals with dementia and their caregivers to engage in recreational activities, social interaction, and peer support. Nurses often participate in organizing and facilitating these programs, providing education and guidance while fostering supportive relationships.

Dementia support groups are another valuable resource. These groups offer emotional support, education, and opportunities for sharing experiences among individuals living with dementia and their caregivers. Nurses frequently serve as facilitators, helping participants develop coping strategies and access community resources.

Intergenerational programs have gained attention for their ability to promote social inclusion and reduce stigma. These initiatives bring together older adults with dementia and younger generations through educational, recreational, and cultural activities. Such interactions foster mutual understanding, enhance social connectedness, and contribute to positive attitudes toward aging and cognitive impairment.

Community outreach programs conducted by nurses and healthcare organizations further enhance public awareness. Health fairs, educational workshops, awareness campaigns, and dementia-friendly training sessions help disseminate information and encourage community engagement. These initiatives contribute to the creation of supportive environments where individuals with dementia feel respected and valued.

Volunteer programs also play an important role in dementia-friendly communities. Trained volunteers can provide companionship, transportation assistance, respite support, and participation in community activities. Nurses often contribute to volunteer training programs by educating participants about dementia and effective communication techniques.

### **Supporting Family Caregivers: A Nursing Priority**

Family caregivers constitute the cornerstone of dementia care in most countries. They provide substantial physical, emotional, and financial support to individuals living with dementia. However, caregiving responsibilities frequently result in caregiver burden, stress, depression, anxiety, social isolation, and physical health problems. Consequently, supporting caregivers is a critical component of dementia-friendly community initiatives.

Nurses play a key role in caregiver education by providing information about disease progression, symptom management, communication strategies, safety measures, and available support services. Knowledge empowers caregivers to respond effectively to challenges and improves confidence in caregiving roles.

Psychological support is equally important. Nurses offer counseling, emotional support, and referrals to mental health services when necessary. Regular assessment of caregiver well-being enables early identification of stress and burnout. Interventions aimed at enhancing resilience and coping skills contribute to improved caregiver outcomes.

Respite care services provide temporary relief for caregivers and are essential components of dementia-friendly communities. Nurses often advocate for increased availability of respite programs and help families access these services. Short-term relief allows caregivers to attend to personal needs, maintain social relationships, and reduce stress.

Caregiver support groups facilitated by nurses create opportunities for shared learning and emotional support. Participants benefit from exchanging experiences, practical advice, and coping strategies with others facing similar challenges. These groups help reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen caregiver networks.

The promotion of caregiver self-care is another important nursing responsibility. Nurses encourage healthy lifestyle practices, stress management techniques, regular medical check-ups, and utilization of support services. Maintaining caregiver health ultimately contributes to better care outcomes for individuals living with dementia.

### **Interprofessional Collaboration in Dementia-Friendly Communities**

The complexity of dementia care necessitates collaboration among multiple disciplines and sectors. Dementia-friendly communities depend on coordinated



efforts involving healthcare professionals, social service providers, policymakers, educators, community organizations, businesses, and family caregivers.

Nurses frequently function as central members of interdisciplinary teams. Their holistic perspective enables them to identify physical, psychological, social, and environmental factors affecting individuals with dementia. Collaboration with physicians supports accurate diagnosis and medical management, while partnerships with occupational therapists facilitate environmental adaptations and functional support.

Social workers contribute expertise in resource navigation, counseling, and social support services. Psychologists assist with cognitive assessments and management of behavioral symptoms. Pharmacists support medication safety and adherence. Community organizations provide recreational opportunities, transportation services, and social engagement programs.

Partnerships with local businesses are increasingly important in dementia-friendly initiatives. Retail employees, banking staff, transportation personnel, and emergency responders can receive dementia awareness training that enables them to interact effectively with individuals experiencing cognitive challenges. Nurses often participate in developing and delivering such training programs.

Educational institutions can also contribute through awareness campaigns, research initiatives, and service-learning opportunities. Collaborative approaches ensure that dementia-friendly principles are integrated across various sectors of society, creating comprehensive support networks for affected individuals and families.

### **Challenges and Barriers to Dementia-Friendly Communities**

Despite growing recognition of their value, dementia-friendly communities face numerous challenges and barriers. Limited public awareness remains one of the most significant obstacles. Misconceptions about dementia contribute to stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion. Many community members lack the knowledge necessary to recognize and support individuals living with dementia. Financial constraints represent another major challenge. Developing and maintaining dementia-friendly initiatives often require investments in education, infrastructure modifications, transportation systems, support services, and workforce training. Resource limitations may hinder

implementation, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

Healthcare workforce shortages also affect dementia-friendly community development. The increasing prevalence of dementia has created growing demands for specialized healthcare professionals, including nurses trained in gerontological and dementia care. Insufficient staffing may limit access to community-based services and support programs.

Fragmentation of healthcare and social services can further impede effective care delivery. Individuals with dementia frequently require support from multiple providers and agencies. Lack of coordination may result in service duplication, communication gaps, and unmet needs. Nurses often encounter challenges in navigating complex healthcare systems and coordinating care across sectors.

Cultural and linguistic diversity presents additional considerations. Perceptions of dementia, caregiving practices, and healthcare utilization vary across cultural groups. Dementia-friendly initiatives must be culturally sensitive and adaptable to diverse populations. Nurses play an essential role in ensuring culturally competent care and promoting equitable access to services.

Rural and remote communities may face unique barriers related to geographic isolation, limited healthcare infrastructure, transportation challenges, and reduced availability of specialized services. Innovative approaches such as telehealth and mobile healthcare programs are increasingly being explored to address these disparities.

### **Technology and Innovation in Dementia-Friendly Communities**

Technological advancements offer promising opportunities to enhance dementia-friendly communities and support individuals living with dementia. Digital health technologies, assistive devices, and smart home systems can improve safety, independence, and quality of life while reducing caregiver burden.

Telehealth services have expanded access to healthcare, particularly for individuals residing in rural or underserved areas. Nurses utilize telehealth platforms to conduct assessments, provide education, monitor symptoms, and offer caregiver support. Remote consultations reduce travel requirements and facilitate timely access to healthcare services.



Smart home technologies can assist with daily living activities and safety monitoring. Examples include automated medication reminders, motion sensors, emergency alert systems, GPS tracking devices, and voice-activated assistants. These technologies support independent living while providing reassurance to caregivers.

Mobile applications designed for dementia care offer tools for cognitive stimulation, memory support, appointment reminders, and caregiver communication. Nurses can guide patients and families in selecting and effectively using appropriate technologies.

Artificial intelligence and predictive analytics are emerging areas with potential applications in dementia care. These technologies may assist in early detection, risk assessment, care planning, and personalized interventions. Although further research is needed, technological innovations have the potential to enhance community-based dementia support significantly.

However, technology should complement rather than replace human interaction and person-centered care. Nurses play a crucial role in ensuring that technological solutions are accessible, ethical, and responsive to individual needs and preferences.

### **Implications for Nursing Education, Research, and Policy**

The growing emphasis on dementia-friendly communities has important implications for nursing education. Nursing curricula should incorporate comprehensive content on dementia care, community engagement, gerontology, caregiver support, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Students should develop competencies related to person-centered care, communication, advocacy, and community assessment.

Continuing professional development programs are equally important for practicing nurses. Ongoing education enables nurses to remain informed about emerging evidence, best practices, technological innovations, and policy developments related to dementia care.

Research is essential for advancing dementia-friendly community initiatives. Nurses contribute significantly to dementia research through studies examining intervention effectiveness, caregiver outcomes, community engagement strategies, health disparities, and quality-of-life measures. Further research is needed to identify best

practices for diverse populations and resource-limited settings.

Policy development also plays a critical role in promoting dementia-friendly communities. Governments and healthcare organizations should prioritize dementia as a public health issue and allocate resources to support community-based programs. Policies promoting caregiver support, workforce development, accessible healthcare services, and dementia awareness initiatives are essential for sustainable progress.

Nursing organizations can advocate for policies that address the needs of individuals living with dementia and their families. Through leadership and advocacy efforts, nurses contribute to the development of healthcare systems that support dignity, inclusion, and quality of life.

### **Future Directions**

Future dementia-friendly community initiatives will likely emphasize greater community participation, technological integration, and person-centered approaches. Increased involvement of individuals living with dementia in planning and decision-making processes can ensure that programs reflect their priorities and experiences. Their perspectives are invaluable in creating environments that genuinely support independence and social inclusion.

Advancements in digital health technologies may further enhance community-based care and support. Artificial intelligence, wearable devices, and remote monitoring systems have the potential to improve early intervention and personalized care. However, ethical considerations regarding privacy, autonomy, and accessibility must be carefully addressed.

Global collaboration and knowledge sharing can facilitate the dissemination of successful models and best practices. International organizations, governments, researchers, and healthcare professionals should work together to promote evidence-based approaches and reduce disparities in dementia care.

The future of dementia-friendly communities will depend on sustained commitment from healthcare systems, policymakers, community organizations, and citizens. Nurses will continue to serve as leaders, advocates, educators, and innovators in advancing these efforts.

### **Conclusion**

Dementia-friendly communities represent a transformative approach to supporting individuals living with dementia and



their families. By emphasizing social inclusion, accessibility, dignity, and community engagement, these initiatives move beyond traditional healthcare models to address the broader social determinants of well-being. Dementia-friendly communities enable individuals with dementia to remain active participants in society while receiving the support necessary to maintain independence and quality of life.

Nurses play an indispensable role in the development, implementation, and sustainability of dementia-friendly communities. Through health education, advocacy, care coordination, caregiver support, community engagement, and policy leadership, nurses contribute significantly to creating inclusive environments that respect the rights and capabilities of individuals living with dementia. Their holistic and person-centered approach aligns closely with the principles underpinning dementia-friendly initiatives.

As the global burden of dementia continues to increase, the importance of community-based solutions will become even more evident. Investment in education, workforce development, research, technology, and policy reform is essential to ensure the success of dementia-friendly communities. Through collaborative efforts and strong nursing leadership, societies can create supportive environments that empower individuals with dementia to live meaningful, dignified, and fulfilling lives.

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