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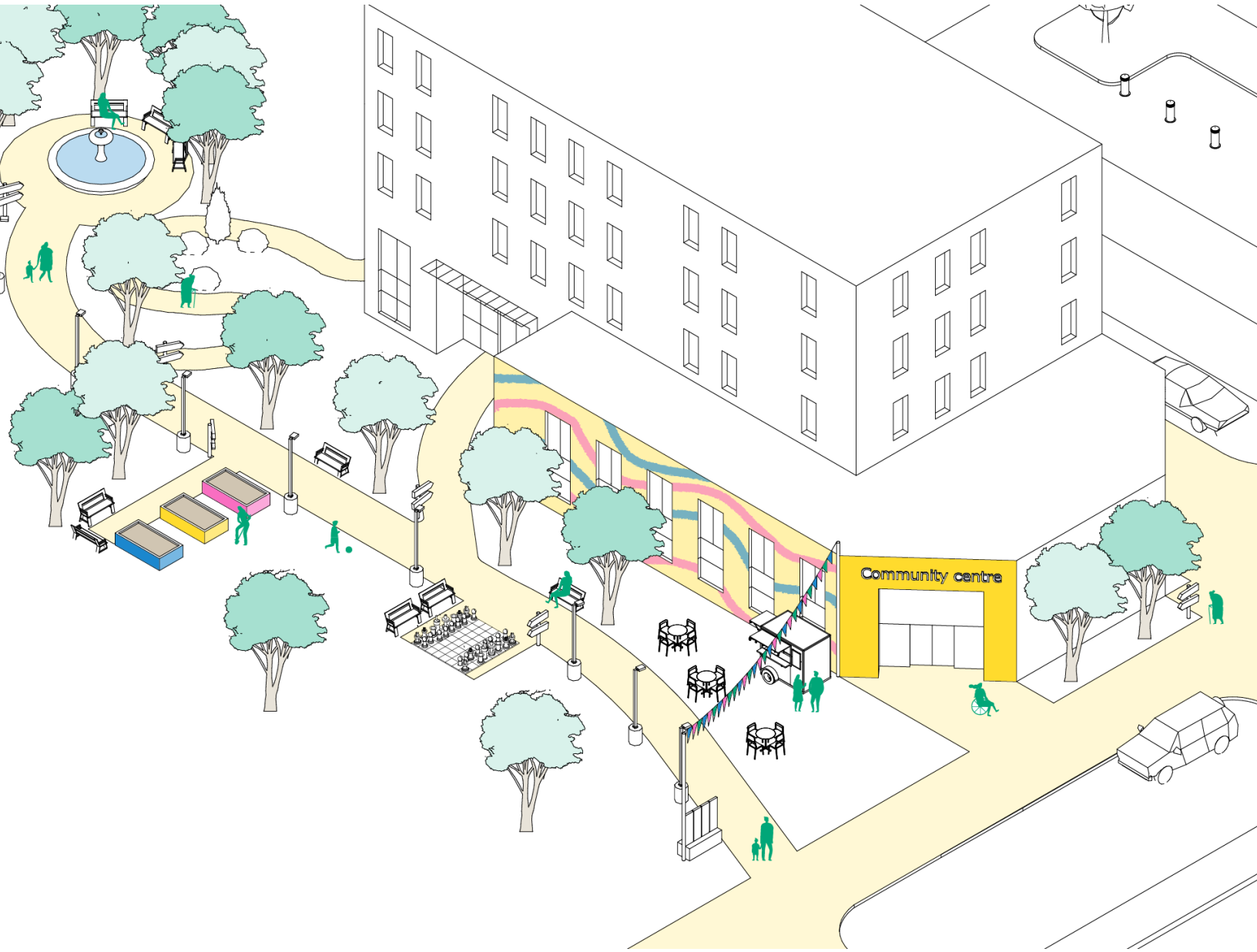
DemSCAPE



Age and dementia inclusive neighbourhoods

Planning and design guidelines

May 2025

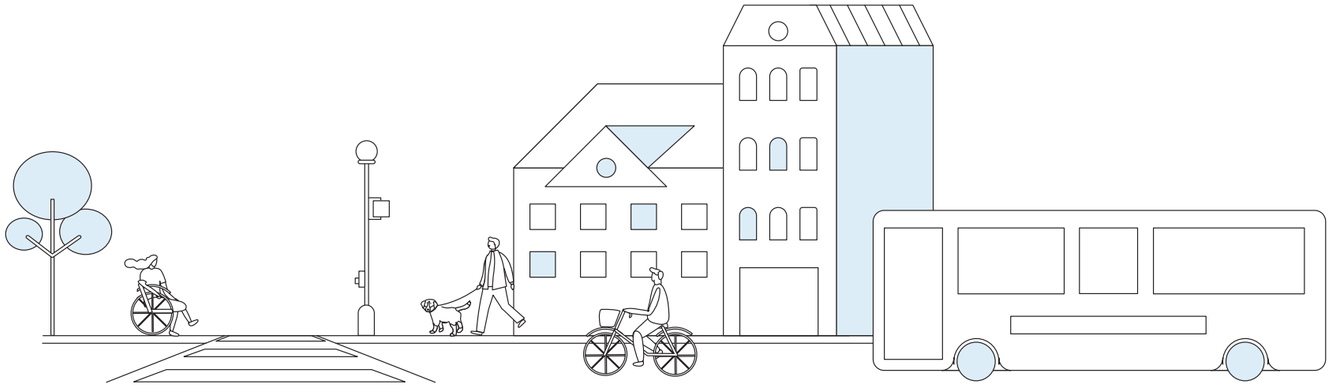
About these guidelines

The global population is aging, with more than 833 million people worldwide over the age of 65. The United Nations expects this trend to continue over the coming decades, with people age 65 and older expected to outnumber children under 18 by 2080. As our communities age, the prevalence of dementia will also increase. Presently, at least 55 million people live with dementia worldwide—a number that is expected to triple by 2050.

There is a growing need to design age-friendly and dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods where people of all ages and abilities can meet daily needs and participate in community life close to home.

This document offers a toolkit of urban planning and design strategies to support wellbeing for older adults, with an added focus on people living with dementia. People living with dementia have specific needs in navigating their neighbourhoods, which are often not captured by broader age-friendly design guidelines. This document considers the needs of both older adults and people living with dementia, with clear strategies and actions that can support wellbeing for people of diverse ages, abilities, and life experiences.

The guidelines in this document can help municipalities, developers, community-based services, and individuals make informed decisions and advocate for more age-friendly, dementia-inclusive communities. The actions focus specifically on the role of the built environment in supporting wellbeing at three scales: the neighbourhood, the street, and detailed design. In addition to older adults and people living with dementia, this document aims to improve urban environments and wellbeing for all community members by boosting comfort, safety, inclusion, and sense of place.



Contents

1 | Introduction 6

2 | Guidelines 15

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale 18

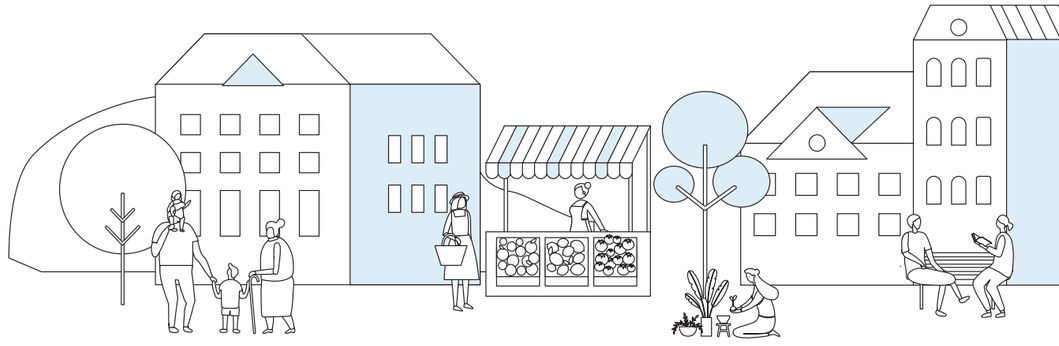
Realm 2: Street scale 30

Realm 3: Detailed design scale 42

3 | Implementation 64

4 | Case studies 68

References 94



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Alzheimer Society BRITISH COLUMBIA

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These guidelines were first published in 2023 with the title, *Dementia-inclusive Planning and Design Guidelines*. Happy Cities and DemSCAPE updated the document and published this second edition in 2025, with an expanded focus on age- and dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods. To learn more, visit: dementiainclusiveneighbourhood.com

Happy Cities

DemSCAPE

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About Happy Cities

Happy Cities is an urban planning, design, and research firm that uses an evidence-based approach to create happier, healthier, more inclusive communities. We harness the science of wellbeing to advise housing providers, municipalities, developers, and organizations around the world on how to design buildings and urban spaces that support people's health and happiness.

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DemSCAPE

About DemSCAPE

The goal of the DemSCAPE project is to generate evidence-based knowledge, knowledge mobilization tools, and resources for informing policy and practice to create dementia-inclusive communities. There is limited research in this area, reinforcing the importance of evidence-based neighbourhood design principles to support people living with dementia in maintaining independence and community connections for as long as possible. The goals of this project are to: A) identify common neighbourhood destinations and built environment features that affect mobility, engagement, and participation in the community for people living with dementia; and B) develop tools and resources including planning and design guidelines for dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods, an easy-to-use environmental audit and advocacy tool, and a short video highlighting the lived experience of mobility in the neighbourhood for people living with dementia.

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Introduction

Introduction

Infographic sources: Alzheimer Society of Canada, n.d.; Government of Canada, 2024; Statistics Canada, 2024; United Nations, 2024; WHO, 2023a.

Neighbourhood planning and design play a critical role in supporting inclusion and wellbeing for everyone. Well-designed neighbourhoods ensure that people of all ages and abilities can meet daily needs close to home, while maintaining community connections, mobility, good health, and independence as much as possible.

As in many places around the world, Canada's population is aging. As the number of older adults increases, the number of people living with dementia is also expected to grow. Although dementia can affect people of any age, most people who are diagnosed are 65 or older.

Statistics Canada estimates that, by 2030, over 9.3 million people in Canada will be 65 or older, while close to one million will be living with dementia.

Neighbourhood planning and design have significant impacts on quality of life. With changing demographics, there is a growing need for age-friendly and dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods that support essential aspects of healthy living and wellbeing, including mobility, physical activity, social connection, independence, a sense of belonging, and access to transit, shops, and services. In particular, research suggests that older adults are at risk of social isolation. Inclusive neighbourhood design helps ensure that people can maintain community connections and activities even as their physical or cognitive abilities change.

This document provides evidence-based planning and design guidelines to ensure that neighbourhoods can meet the needs of and support wellbeing for older adults and people living with dementia.

Globally,

833+ **million** are over the age of 65

55+ **million** live with dementia

In Canada,

9,301,900 will be 65 or older **by 2030**

955,900 will be living with dementia **by 2030**

There will be four seniors (over 65) for every 10 adults **by 2038**

2x The number of people over 65 will double in 25 years, from 2013 to 2038

30% of seniors are at risk of social isolation

Age-friendly cities and communities

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies eight core components to age-friendly cities and communities (AFCC):

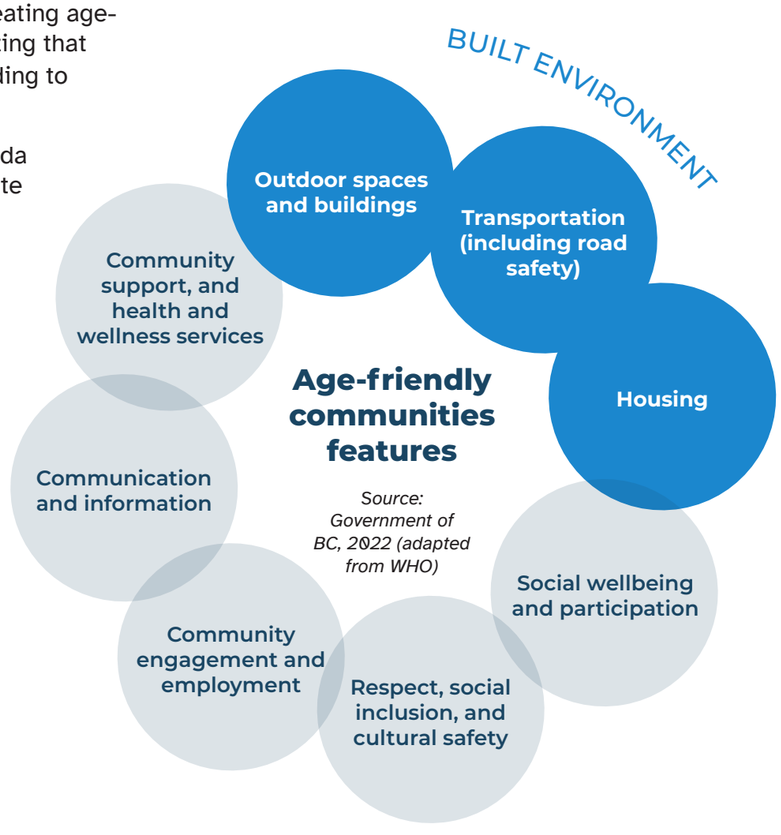
1. Community and health care
2. Transportation
3. Housing
4. Social spaces
5. Outdoor spaces and buildings
6. Respect and social inclusion
7. Civic participation and employment
8. Communication and information

The AFCC framework addresses social inclusion through programs and services, as well as physical elements of the built environment. The list offers a starting point for creating age-friendly communities, while recognizing that priorities and needs may vary according to local context.

For example, British Columbia, Canada adapted the WHO framework to create its own Age-friendly Communities program, which municipalities can apply to achieve recognition from. The adapted framework includes:

1. Outdoor spaces and buildings
2. Transportation (including road safety)
3. Housing
4. Social wellbeing and participation
5. Respect, social inclusion, and cultural safety
6. Community engagement and employment
7. Communication and information
8. Community support, and health and wellness services

This document primarily address the role of physical elements of built environment—such as transportation, housing, outdoor spaces, and buildings—for supporting age-friendly communities. An inclusive built environment supports other components of the age-friendly framework by ensuring that everyone can access neighbourhood spaces and buildings to participate in social activities, use services, and meet daily needs.



Source: Government of BC, 2022 (adapted from WHO)

Understanding the neighbourhood built environment

Planning and design shape the built environment, and play a critical role in creating inclusive communities for people of all ages and abilities. Chapter 2 provides more detailed guidance on these elements of the built environment through three design realms: neighbourhood scale, street scale, and detailed design scale.

Supportive features and amenities

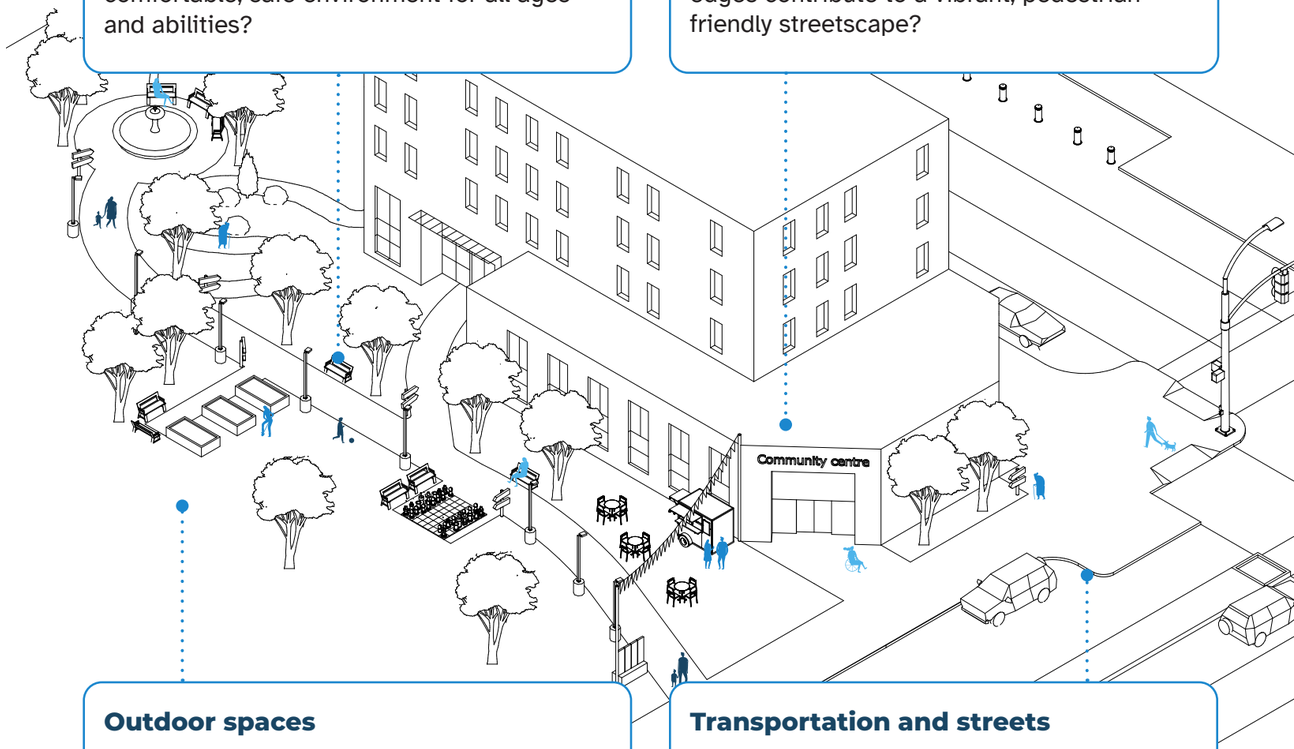
Do furniture, surfaces, lighting, and other detailed design features create a comfortable, safe environment for all ages and abilities?

Destinations, shops, and services

Do neighbourhoods allow for mixed land uses, where homes can exist alongside shops, community facilities, services, and other destinations within walking distance?

Buildings

Are buildings distinct and accessible to people of all ages and abilities? Do building edges contribute to a vibrant, pedestrian-friendly streetscape?



Outdoor spaces

Do neighbourhoods include accessible parks, plazas, or other green spaces? Do these spaces provide opportunities to socialize, join activities, engage with nature, and observe or participate in community life?

Transportation and streets

Can older adults get to the places they want to go by any travel mode they choose? Do neighbourhoods offer convenient, accessible public transit and safe, comfortable streets for walking and rolling?

Dementia-inclusive communities

Age-friendly community frameworks offer a strong foundation for supporting wellbeing among older adults. However, there are specific neighbourhood design considerations that are unique for people living with dementia, which are not always identified in broader accessibility plans or age-friendly strategies.

Due to cognitive decline and sensory changes, people living with dementia can experience difficulties finding their way around the neighbourhood, understanding their surroundings, and accessing local destinations and amenities. Dementia can also contribute to heightened sensory sensitivity, which can make it challenging for people to navigate complex urban environments and increase their likelihood of feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

If the environment is not designed to meet the needs of people living with dementia, it can pose challenges to their safety and effective functioning in the community. Over time, people living with dementia need support from care partners to maintain their activities in the community. If the neighbourhood does not meet their needs, people may gradually abandon visiting community places and stay at home. In turn, this can lead to deteriorating cognitive, mental, and physical health—and social isolation.

There are four main components to dementia-inclusive communities:

1. Education and awareness
2. Built environment
3. Programs and services
4. Support for people living with dementia and their care partners

While action in all four areas is essential, these guidelines focus on how decision makers can reduce stigma and foster inclusion through the planning and design of the **built environment**, with a focus on the neighbourhood context.

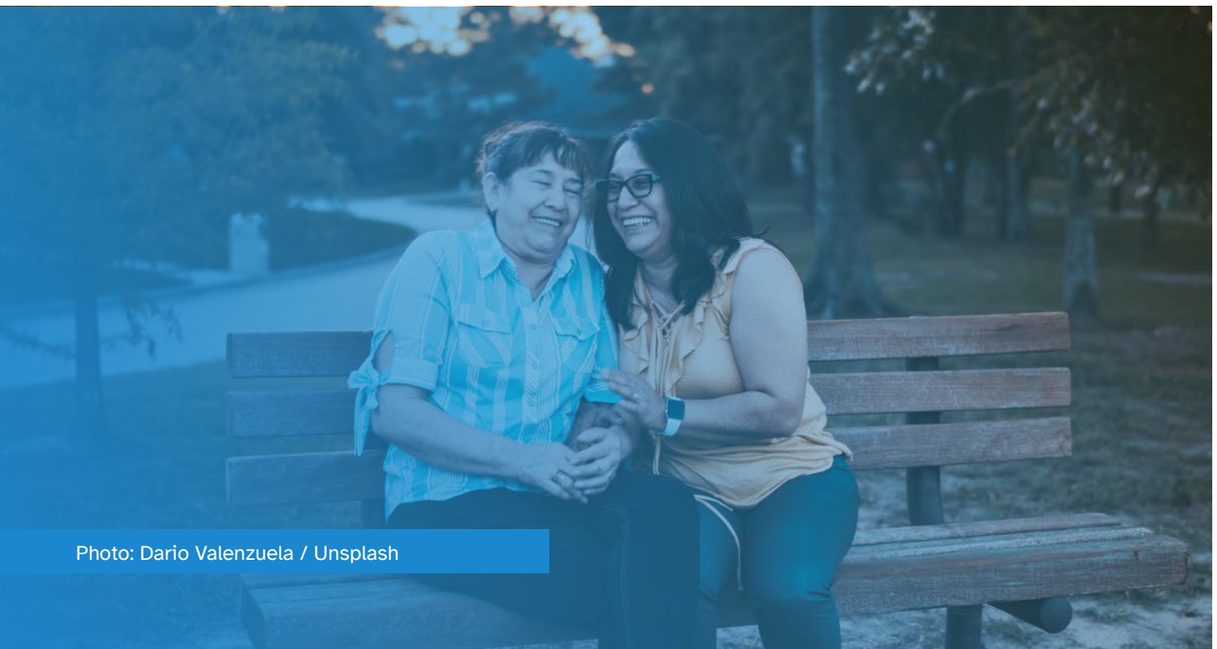


Photo: Dario Valenzuela / Unsplash

Dementia-inclusive design principles

Research identifies six principles for dementia-inclusive design. These principles benefit people of all ages and abilities, but go beyond typical age-friendly frameworks to highlight how urban design can positively impact people living with dementia and their care partners. These design principles also address age-friendly planning and design principles.

Familiar

Familiar environments help people living with dementia recognize where they are and find where they want to go by designing features that people have seen before and can easily recognize. Familiar neighbourhoods support independence and wayfinding.

Legible

Legible spaces help people living with dementia navigate their neighbourhoods by using obvious design cues to clearly communicate the function or purpose of a space, feature, path, or building.

Distinct

Distinct environments include features that are unambiguous, varied, and interesting. People living with dementia rely on distinctive spaces and landmarks as visual cues for wayfinding.

Accessible

Accessible environments make it easy and convenient for people of all ages and abilities to participate in their community, by removing barriers and providing access to services and amenities close to home. Accessibility applies to all aspects of the built environment, and supports independence and social inclusion.

Comfortable

Comfortable environments are welcoming and non-intimidating. People living with dementia may have difficulties with sensory overstimulation, such as with bright lights, crowds, or loud noise. They can benefit from serene, quiet, and pleasant spaces to pause, rest, or socialize.

Safe

Safe environments allow people to spend time in the public realm without experiencing fears or risks. People living with dementia may be less aware of physical and social dangers and can experience contrast sensitivity, which increases the risk of falling.

Source: Mitchell, L. & Burton, E., 2010. For more information and references, please refer to the appendices.

How we created the guidelines

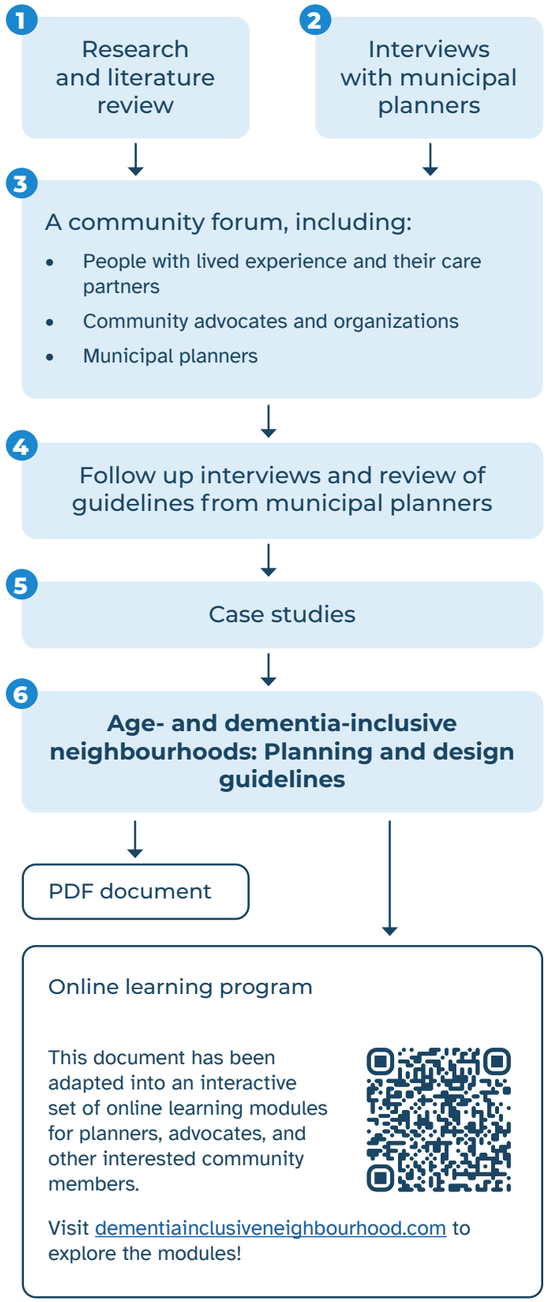
This document was developed through comprehensive background research and engagement with municipal planners and community members, including older adults, people with lived experience, care partners, and community advocates.

Who the guidelines are for

These guidelines offer a resource on age-friendly and dementia-inclusive planning and design for anyone involved in shaping city streets and spaces. This document additionally seeks to help community members, people living with dementia, and care partners understand how the environment can support their independence, comfort, and safety.

Key audiences include:

- **Municipalities**
- **Developers**
- **Community organizations** (i.e., advocacy groups, seniors centres and community centres, housing organizations, etc.)
- **People with lived experience and care partners** (to better understand how the environment works at a planning and design level)



Snapshot of what we heard

People living with dementia often face stigma—from strangers and close family and friends alike. People who attended the community forum mentioned that dementia is "invisible," which can make it difficult for bus drivers or other community members to recognize and understand that the person may need support or help. Further, participants often faced denial or a lack of understanding from family members, who sometimes tried to prevent people living with dementia from maintaining independence or running errands on their own in the community. Participants also mentioned experiencing a lack of understanding, ignorance, and stigma from others, which can make it difficult to share their needs and feel comfortable in public spaces.

In general, all community forum participants were supportive of the guidelines. Participants agreed on the importance of all the chosen strategies and actions, while offering many related ideas and examples to improve these strategies. During the community forum, participants were asked to select their top three to five strategies from these Guidelines for dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods. The three that rose to the top were: 2.1) Pedestrian paths and sidewalks, 3.4) Public toilets, and 3.5) Signage. Feedback from municipal interviews and the community forum has been incorporated throughout these guidelines.

In addition to improving urban design in the public realm, people with lived experience whom we engaged shared additional challenges and action areas for dementia-inclusive communities:

- **Lack of education and awareness** around what it means to live with dementia
- **Stigma** around dementia
- **Limited resources** to offer community services for people living with dementia
- **Limited community spaces** to support programming for people living with dementia (both indoors and outdoors)
- Maintaining **social connections** since the COVID-19 pandemic
- Difficulties in navigating **changing urban environments**

The DemSCAPE community forum primarily sought input from the experiences of people living with dementia, who are typically not considered in broader age-friendly plans.

For broader age-inclusive community guidance, this document draws extensively on background research and engagement with older adults through a range of related research and engagement projects conducted by DemSCAPE and Happy Cities.

One example includes the 2024 Urban Accessibility Community Forum, hosted in Burnaby, Canada. The forum brought together planners, advocates, people with lived experience, and older adults to discuss needs and priorities for accessible, age-inclusive communities.

Good neighbourhood design benefits everyone.

Age- and dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods offer universal benefits for everyone. The strategies and actions in these design guidelines—such as improving pedestrian paths, crosswalks, and placemaking—can improve streets and public spaces for all community members. In addition to older adults, the guidelines in this document can significantly benefit groups such as people with cognitive impairments, children, people who do not speak or read English, people with disabilities, and people who are neurodivergent.

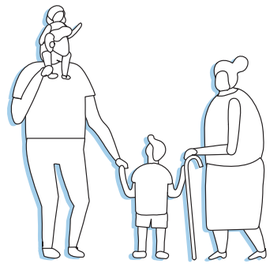


Photo: Micheile Henderson / Unsplash

Guidelines 2

Design realms

These guidelines address **three design realms** within the **built environment** (as introduced on p. 9). The design realms help organize information based on the scale and stage of implementation.

Each realm includes several strategies, which identify high-level categories of action within the built environment. The strategies are listed on this page. In total, there are **20 strategies** across the three design realms.

The following pages in this chapter detail the actions under each strategy. Actions provide specific examples of how to support older adults and people living with dementia through the built environment. There are **70 actions** in total.

Understanding the actions

Broadly, all actions and strategies in this document support age-friendly and dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods.

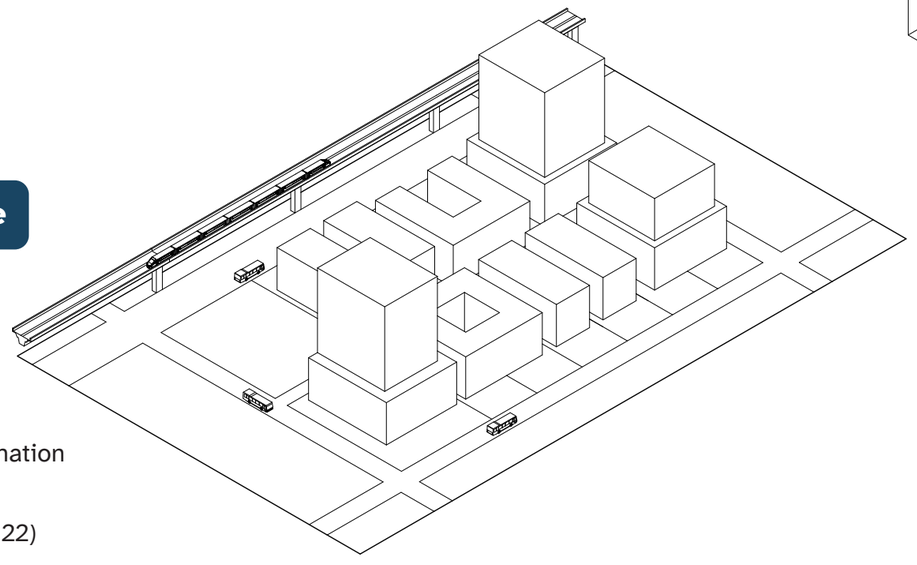
Look for the pink bubble below to identify actions that focus specifically on the needs of people living with dementia:

Dementia focus

1

Neighbourhood scale

Guidance on high-level urban planning decisions



Strategy 1.1. Land use designation (p. 20)

Strategy 1.2. Street grids (p. 22)

Strategy 1.3. Building form (p. 24)

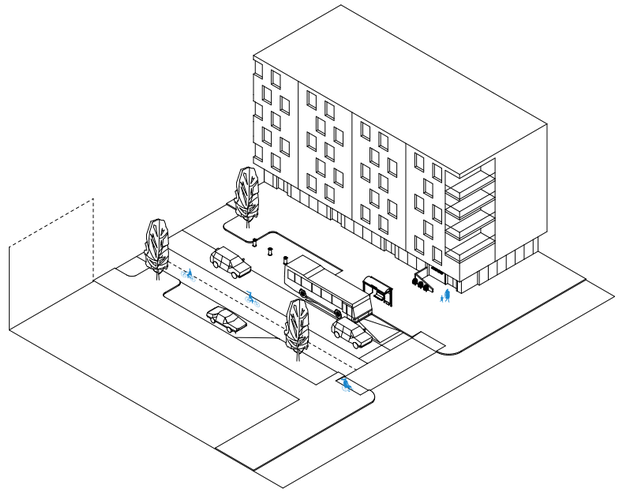
Strategy 1.4. Transit routes (p. 26)

Strategy 1.5. Open spaces (p. 28)

2

Street scale

Mid-scale design decisions for pedestrian and road networks



Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths and sidewalks (p. 32)

Strategy 2.2. Pedestrian crossings (p. 34)

Strategy 2.3. Building edges and entrances (p. 36)

Strategy 2.4. Transit stops (p. 38)

Strategy 2.5. Parking and drop-off (p. 40)

3

Detailed design scale

Design of the micro-environment and supportive amenities

Strategy 3.1. Seating (p. 44)

Strategy 3.2. Public art (p. 46)

Strategy 3.3. Placemaking (p. 48)

Strategy 3.4. Public toilets (p. 50)

Strategy 3.5. Signage (p. 52)

Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments (p. 54)

Strategy 3.7. Grade (level) changes (p. 56)

Strategy 3.8. Lighting (p. 58)

Strategy 3.9. Acoustics (p. 60)

Strategy 3.10. Vegetation (p. 62)

Realm 1:

Neighbourhood scale

Neighbourhood planning and design provide the framework and foundation for walkable, age-friendly, dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood scale decisions are made at the early planning stages of community design.

The neighbourhood scale involves high-level urban planning considerations, such as street networks, land use designation, overall building form, open spaces, and transit routes.

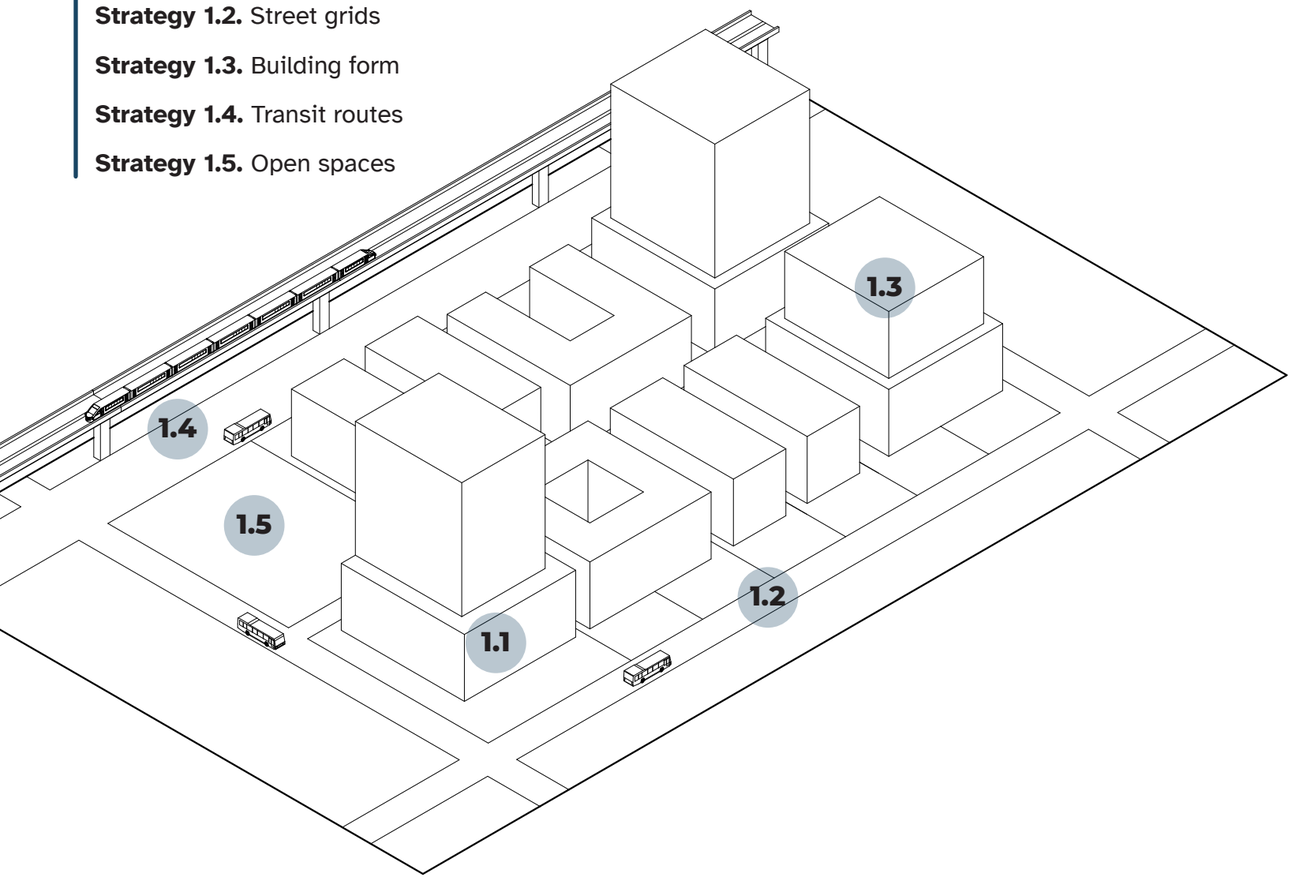
Strategy 1.1. Land use designation

Strategy 1.2. Street grids

Strategy 1.3. Building form

Strategy 1.4. Transit routes

Strategy 1.5. Open spaces



The importance of the neighbourhood

- Many older adults and people living with dementia rely on walking and transit to navigate the city. People living with dementia spend much of their time close to home.
- Dementia leads to challenges in understanding spaces and sensory changes, which can make it difficult to navigate the neighbourhood built environment.
- Evidence shows that well-planned, complete neighbourhoods can positively impact quality of life for older adults and people living with dementia, by fostering greater autonomy, dignity, a sense of belonging, opportunities for social interaction, and mental and physical health.
- Low-density suburban and rural areas often struggle to offer amenities, shops, and services within walking distance. Municipalities can consider which areas may be under-served, and support accessible resources and community-based services for older adults and people living with dementia in those areas.
- People living with dementia are less likely to visit natural areas due to challenges in accessibility and a lack of supportive facilities. As a result, access to open spaces and green areas within the neighbourhood is crucial to support wellbeing for people living with dementia.

When should you consider this realm?

- In new developments or communities
- In new and existing neighbourhoods, when considering transit planning
- In new and existing neighbourhoods, when making rezoning and land use decisions

What policies can influence this?

- Official community plans (OCP)
- Secondary plans and zoning by-laws
- Parks, open space, and recreation strategies and master plans
- Transportation plans

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.1. Land use designation (overview)

Land use designation determines which land uses—such as housing, business, or parks—are permitted within the neighbourhood. Designing complete, walkable communities benefits people living with dementia by providing access to core services and social opportunities within easy walking distance.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

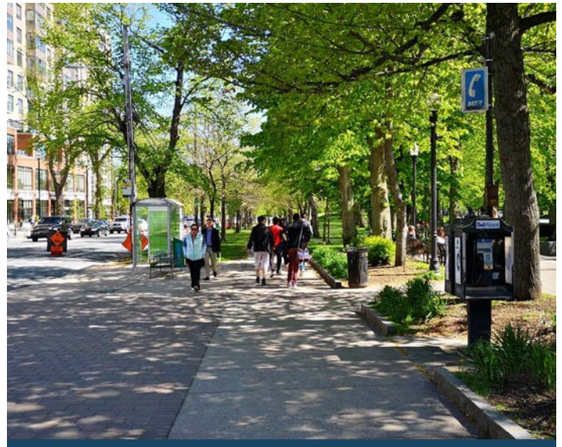
- **Accessible**: *Mixed-use areas provide easy access to core services within walking distance of home.*
- **Distinct**: *Mixed-use areas provide diverse building forms and recognizable businesses to help navigation and wayfinding.*

Action 1.1.1.
Provide walkable access to primary services

Action 1.1.2.
Provide access to local commerce and small shops

Action 1.1.3.
Prioritize access to community spaces

A corner grocery store in a residential neighbourhood in Vancouver. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities



A walkable street in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Photo: Tristan Cleveland / Happy Cities

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.1. Land use designation (detailed actions)

Action 1.1.1.
Provide walkable access to primary services

- Locate primary services within the range of around 500 metres from home (such as groceries, post offices, pharmacies, transit)
- Locate secondary services within 800 metres from home (such as shopping malls, community centres, parks, medical services).

These distances are community-specific, and often depend on zoning and street grids.

Action 1.1.2. *Dementia focus*
Provide access to local commerce and small shops

- Include ground-level shops to aid with wayfinding and provide opportunities for social interaction along the street.
- Integrate small-scale, local shops in residential neighbourhoods to provide convenient and familiar services for people living with dementia.
- Consider implementing a dementia-inclusive business recognition program, which can increase awareness and provide safe neighbourhood destinations for people living with dementia. For example, the Township of Langley has implemented an Age-friendly Business Recognition Program.

Action 1.1.3.
Prioritize access to community spaces

- Prioritize access to community centres, which can provide programming for older adults, people living with dementia, and care partners.
- Provide free-to-use, flexible, indoor or weather-proof spaces, which offer essential, safe spaces for older adults, people living with dementia, and care partners to maintain social interaction.

The Shipyards in North Vancouver offers a weather-proof, free community space. Photo: Happy Cities

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.2. Street grids (overview)

Intuitive street grids (e.g. with suitable block sizes and a legible hierarchy of street types) are crucial to create a positive pedestrian experience. A well-connected street grid makes it easier to walk or roll to local destinations and navigate the neighbourhood.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Legible:** *Clear and connected streets allow pedestrians to navigate the environment with ease.*
- **Distinct:** *Clear differentiation and hierarchy of streets sets a foundation for easy navigation.*

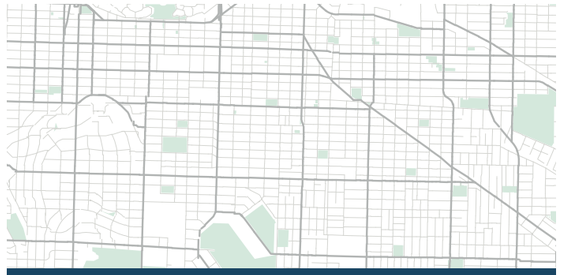
Action 1.2.1.
Provide a clear hierarchy of streets

Action 1.2.2.
Create small street blocks

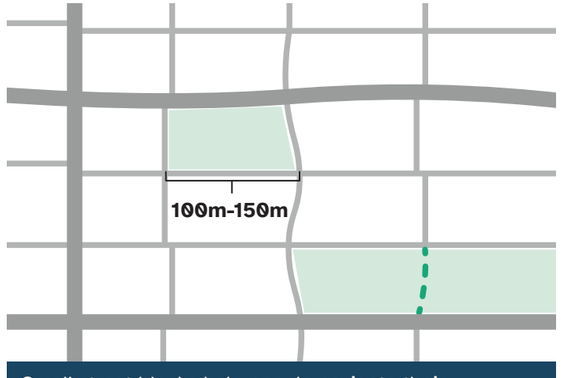
Action 1.2.3.
Create a varied grid pattern

Action 1.2.4.
Create gently winding and connected streets

Action 1.2.5.
Design slow streets



Vancouver's streets follow a clear hierarchy. Illustration: Happy Cities



Small street blocks help people navigate their neighbourhoods more easily. Illustration: Happy Cities

A gently winding pedestrian street in Logroño, Spain. Photo: Isabel Garcia / Happy Cities

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.2. Street grids (detailed actions)

Action 1.2.1.
Provide a clear hierarchy of streets

- Differentiate main streets, local streets, laneways, and walking paths through design (i.e., width, pedestrian infrastructure, and signage).
- Design pedestrian routes that avoid busy main streets.

Action 1.2.2.
Create small street blocks

- Create blocks that are 100 to 150 metres long per side. This distance equals around two to four minutes of walking time.
- Where large blocks exist, break them up with mid-block pedestrian connections and crosswalks.

Action 1.2.3. *Dementia focus*
Create a varied grid pattern

- Consider adding some variety in block size and shape to aid wayfinding.
- Where possible, avoid monotonous blocks that lack distinctiveness. Repetitive grids can feel confusing for people living with dementia.

Action 1.2.4. *Dementia focus*
Create gently winding and connected streets

- Where longer blocks are unavoidable, creating gently winding streets. Winding blocks provide a sight line for better navigation and wayfinding.

Action 1.2.5. *Dementia focus*
Design slow streets

- Design a network of connected, slow streets that offer safe, calm routes for walking and rolling. Where possible, set a default city-wide limit of 40 km/h, with further reduced speeds on designated slow streets.
- Implement slow zones (30 km/h) around key destinations or street corridors.
- Use traffic calming features (e.g. speed bumps, curb extensions, chicanes) to ensure that cars drive slowly on local neighbourhood streets.

Chicanes add curves in the road on a slow street in Singapore. Photo: Singapore Land Transport Authority.

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.3. Building form (overview)

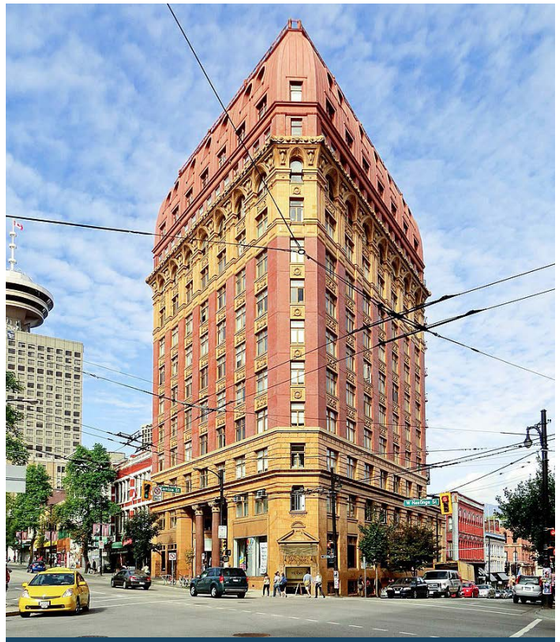
Building forms impact pedestrian experience and wayfinding. People living with dementia benefit from varied building forms, which help them recognize where they are and contribute to a unique sense of place.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

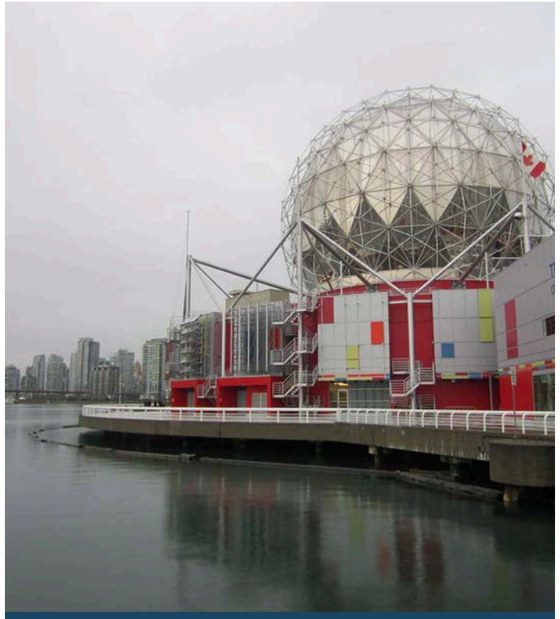
- **Distinct:** *Varied buildings make it easier to navigate and create a sense of place.*
- **Familiar:** *Maintaining heritage buildings and long-established places helps with wayfinding.*

Action 1.3.1.
Retain heritage structures as landmarks

Action 1.3.2.
Create distinctive buildings to serve as landmarks



The Dominion Building in Vancouver, built in 1910. Photo: Xicotencatl / Wikimedia Commons



Science World is a recognizable building along the waterfront in Vancouver. Photo: Another Believer / Wikimedia Commons

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.3. Building form (detailed actions)

Action 1.3.1. *Dementia focus*
Retain heritage structures as landmarks

- Retain heritage structures to serve as familiar, recognizable, and prominent landmarks in people's mental map of the neighbourhood. Heritage structures often include distinctive elements and human-scaled details at the ground-level, which improve the street experience for people living with dementia.

Action 1.3.2. *Dementia focus*
Create distinctive buildings to serve as landmarks

- Highlight important community buildings through distinctive architectural design.
- Include various forms of buildings in new developments so that they are distinct.
- Use local materials, colours, and styles.
- Avoid monotonous glass buildings with no distinguishing features.

Historic buildings and landmarks can help with wayfinding. Photo: Ken Lane / Flickr

"Landmarks are really helpful. I find that in Vancouver the buildings are very similar. Some of the buildings look identical, even ones right next to each other or three blocks from each other. So that can be very confusing."

—Community forum participant

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.4. Transit routes (overview)

Transit routes enable people of all ages and abilities to easily reach destinations without needing a car. People living with dementia benefit from increased autonomy if they can independently navigate transit systems.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Accessible:** *Transit accommodates diverse physical and cognitive needs.*
- **Familiar:** *Established and reliable transportation routes provide clear wayfinding.*

Action 1.4.1.
Ensure transit systems are easy to navigate

Action 1.4.2.
Provide local transit options with frequent stops

Action 1.4.3.
Locate stops at strategic areas near services

This London bus stop offers physical maps to help people navigate. Photo: Sandy Ravaloniaina / Unsplash

In Metro Vancouver, TransLink offers HandyDART, a door-to-door shared ride service for people who need assistance to ride public transit. Photo: Paul Kimo McGregor / Flickr

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.4. Transit routes (detailed actions)

Action 1.4.1. *Dementia focus*
Ensure transit systems are easy to navigate

- Provide consistent information about routes and departure times across neighbourhoods.
- Offer diverse trip planning options for those who do not have a smartphone, such as a website and physical maps.
- Minimize the number of transfers needed along popular transit routes.

Action 1.4.2.
Provide local transit options with frequent stops

- Consider offering both a local transit option that stops at every block and a rapid transit option that gets people to their destination quickly.
- Consider a local, accessible transit service, such as TransLink's HandyDART, which brings riders directly to their destination.

Action 1.4.3.
Locate stops at strategic areas near services

- Locate stops near seniors-focused services, such as community centres.
- Locate stops near hospitals and medical clinics.
- Locate stops near shopping areas, restaurants, and green spaces.

A bus stop across from a pharmacy in Downtown Vancouver. Photo: GoToVan / Wikimedia Commons

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.5. Open spaces (overview)

Diverse open spaces allow people to spend time in nature, which boosts mental and physical health. Older adults and people living with dementia benefit from safe outdoor destinations where they can socialize and feel like they are a part of the community. However, natural areas can be challenging to visit if they are not accessible.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Distinct:** *Open space and nature provide wayfinding cues to help with navigation.*

- **Comfortable:** *Places to stop and rest away from noise and crowds support comfort and wellbeing.*

Action 1.5.1.
Enhance access to natural areas

Action 1.5.2.
Create informal gathering spaces

Action 1.5.3.
Design frequent parklets or small-scale green spaces

Flat walking paths within parks can enhance access to nature within cities. Photo: Arthur Castro / Flickr

An adult exercise park. Photo: Prosperity Horizons / Wikimedia Commons

A former intersection converted into a small, green space in Montreal. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities

A small, informal seating area in a public plaza, surrounded by planter boxes and away from the street edge. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Strategy 1.5. Open spaces (detailed actions)

Action 1.5.1.
Enhance access to natural areas

- Provide accessible pathways or overlooks where people can still interact with the natural area, such as a bench with a view of water.
- Offer access to an accessible public toilet in natural areas.

Action 1.5.2. *Dementia focus*
Create easily accessible small seating areas

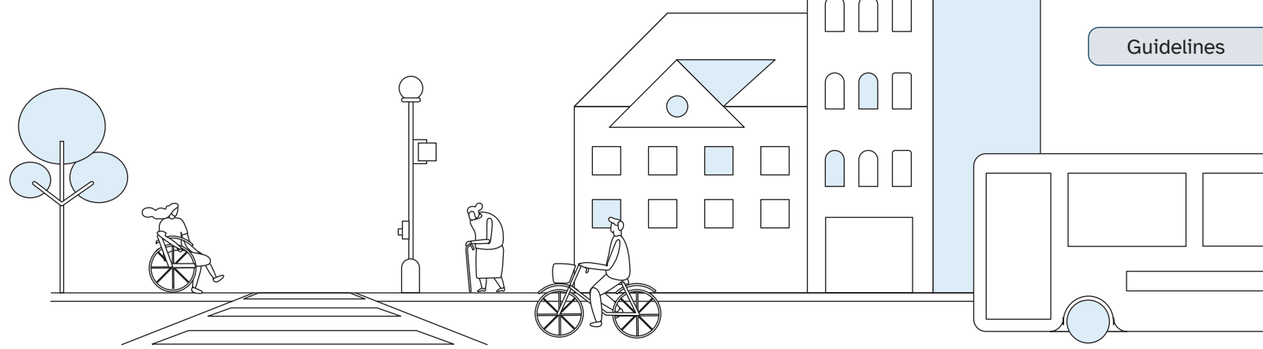
- Create quiet seating areas removed from high-traffic and busy areas.
- Create small-scale seating areas near schools, parks, or shopping areas where people can sit and observe public life.

Action 1.5.3.
Design frequent parklets or small-scale green spaces

- Ensure access to green space within 150 to 300 metres from home.
- Re-purpose street lanes and parking spaces to create parklets.
- Create spaces for physical activity, such as outdoor workout circuits.

Realm 2:

Street scale



Realm 2 provides guidance on the design of neighbourhood blocks. These design strategies consider how streets, pathways, and sidewalks function for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, and how buildings edges meet the public realm. Intentional design decisions at the street scale ensure people can move safely and efficiently around the neighbourhood.

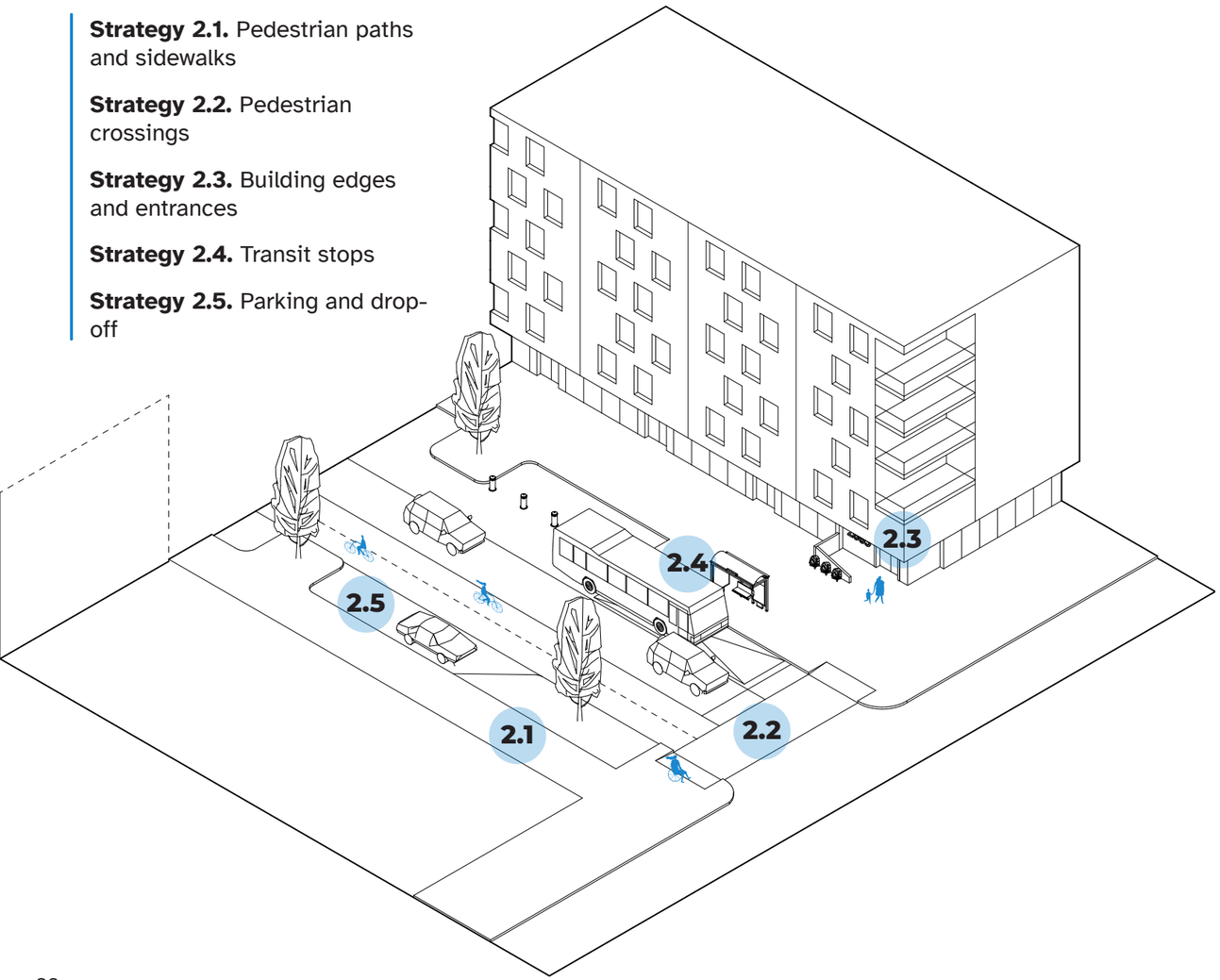
Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths and sidewalks

Strategy 2.2. Pedestrian crossings

Strategy 2.3. Building edges and entrances

Strategy 2.4. Transit stops

Strategy 2.5. Parking and drop-off



The importance of the street

- Going for walks in the neighbourhood helps people living with dementia and older adults maintain physical health and social connection.
- People living with dementia may find it difficult to navigate complex or disconnected street networks.
- Traffic, crowds, and poorly maintained or inaccessible sidewalks disproportionately impact people living with dementia.
- Older adults, and particularly people living with dementia, need ample time and space to cross streets and make decisions. Safe, comfortable pedestrian infrastructure is crucial to ensure walkability.
- Blank and monotonous facades can be confusing for people living with dementia. For example, they may not be able to recognize their home or front door if it is identical to others nearby. Careful design of building edges and entrances can help address this challenge.

When should you consider this realm?

In new developments or existing neighbourhoods, when designing:

- Parks, plazas, and other open spaces
- Community centres and public buildings
- Streets and sidewalks
- Bike infrastructure
- Housing developments
- Commercial destinations such as main streets and shopping centres

What policies can influence this?

- Secondary plans
- Street design guidelines
- Park strategies and plans
- Neighbourhood design guidelines
- Development permit checklists
- Transportation plans

Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths and sidewalks (overview)

Pedestrian paths and sidewalks allow people to navigate the neighbourhood with ease. Well-maintained and accessible sidewalks help older adults and people living with dementia move around the neighbourhood safely and comfortably, such as by reducing the risk of falling or getting lost.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

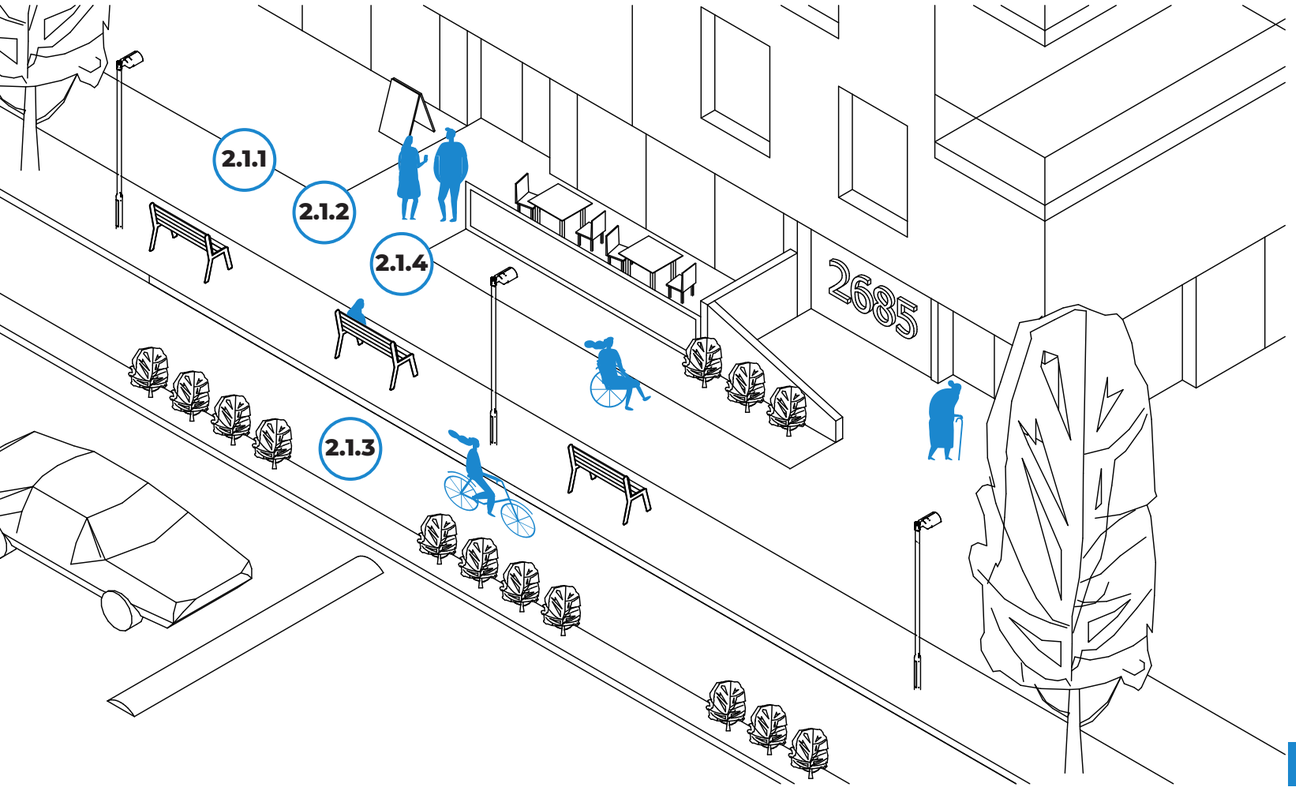
- **Comfortable:** *People can walk or roll at their own pace.*
- **Safe:** *People can walk or roll to and from destinations with minimal risk.*

Action 2.1.1.
Design wide sidewalks

Action 2.1.2.
Create direct and pleasant walking paths

Action 2.1.3.
Separate bike and pedestrian pathways

Action 2.1.4.
Maintain clear sidewalks



Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths and sidewalks (detailed actions)

Action 2.1.1.
Design wide sidewalks

- Design sidewalks with a minimum width of 1.8 metres to allow wheelchair users and another person pass side by side.
- Consider designing wider sidewalks (2-3 metres) to provide greater flexibility and comfort, particularly in busy areas.

Action 2.1.2.
Create direct and pleasant walking paths

- Create direct pedestrian routes between important destinations, following quiet streets.
- Use traffic calming measures to slow down adjacent road traffic, such as curb bump-outs or speed bumps.
- Maintain a clear and direct path of travel without hazards (such as stairs) to access desirable areas and amenities.

Action 2.1.3.
Separate bike and pedestrian pathways

- Ensure that there are dedicated, safe bike paths to discourage cyclists from using sidewalks.
- Use vegetation or level changes to separate uses.
- Provide clear signage to differentiate walking and biking paths.
- Provide designated crossings for pedestrians across bike lanes.

Action 2.1.4. *Dementia focus*
Maintain clear sidewalks

- Minimize sandwich board signs, bollards, and other obstructions on sidewalks that can create confusion or tripping hazards.
- Clear snow, ice, and fallen leaves from sidewalks.
- Reduce tripping hazards, including from roots and cracked pavement.
- Cut back branches and vegetation to ensure good sight lines.

Photo: Andi Weiland / Wikimedia Commons

Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.2. Pedestrian crossings (overview)

Well-designed crossings are crucial to ensure a safe and comfortable pedestrian experience. Older adults and people living with dementia benefit from accessible crossings that provide clarity, ease, and safety and give enough time to cross.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Safe:** *People can walk or roll to and from destinations with minimal risk.*
- **Accessible:** *People can walk or roll to and from destinations without experiencing barriers.*

Action 2.2.1.
Create frequent crossings

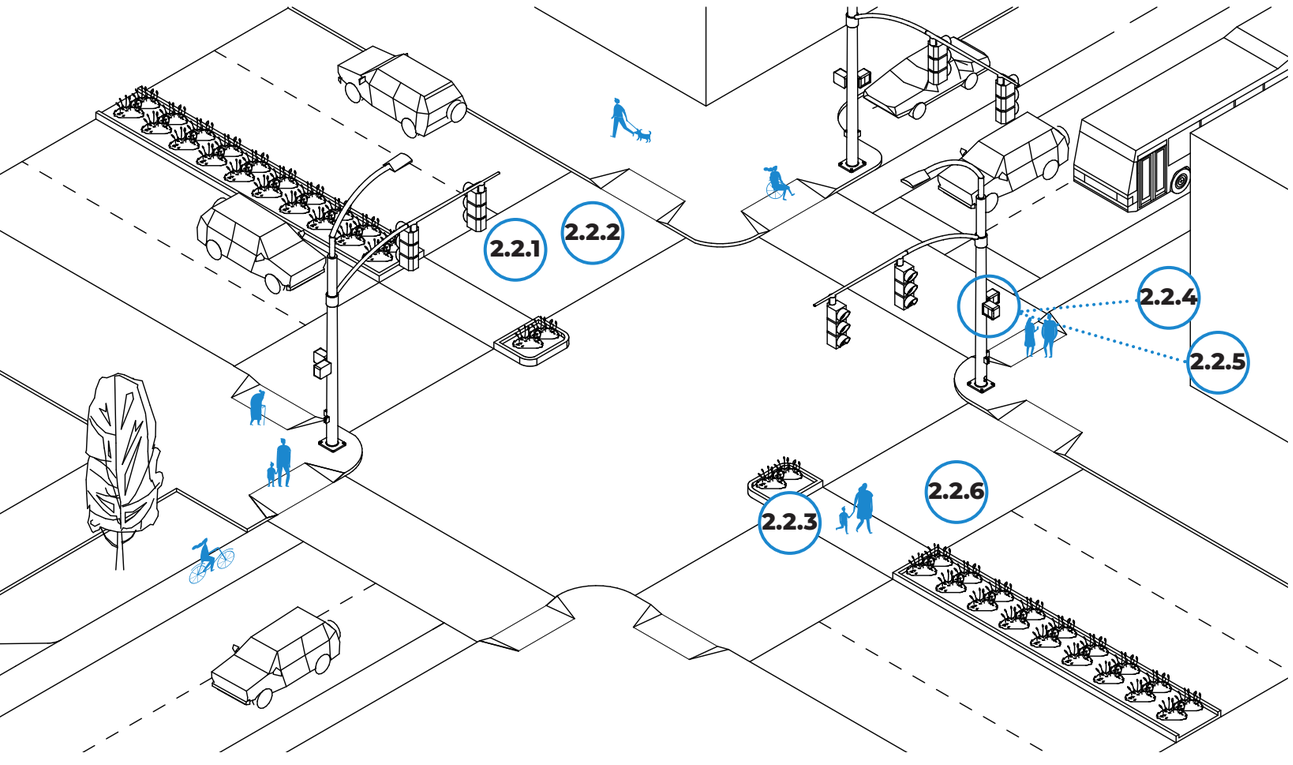
Action 2.2.2.
Create ground-level crossings

Action 2.2.3.
Provide pedestrian islands

Action 2.2.4.
Provide sensory aids

Action 2.2.5.
Give enough time to cross

Action 2.2.6.
Design consistent and clearly marked crossings



Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.2. Pedestrian crossings (detailed actions)

Action 2.2.1.
Create frequent crossings

- Provide safe, accessible pedestrian crossings at every block.
- Install mid-block crossings on long street blocks (over 300 metres) and at key destinations.

Action 2.2.2.
Create ground-level crossings

- Prioritize ground-level crossings rather than elevated crossings. Ground-level crossings are easier to access, and can help remove some anxiety when crossing streets by making the crossing immediately obvious to pedestrians.

Action 2.2.3.
Provide pedestrian islands

- Install pedestrian islands on busy roads, to allow people to pause and cross the street in multiple stages if required.
- Ensure pedestrian islands are at least 1.8 metres wide, with an ideal width of 2.4 to 3 metres and a length of 12 metres.

Action 2.2.4.
Provide sensory aids

- Provide audible cues at crossings, such as voiced countdowns, and consider pitch and timing that suits older adults.
- Include tactile indicators at crossings to provide additional cues on environmental changes.

Action 2.2.5. *Dementia focus*
Give enough time to cross

- Reduce crossing distances by narrowing the street with curb bump-outs.
- Extend crossing signal times to provide ample time to cross.
- Give consistent crossing times at similarly designed streets and intersections across the neighbourhood to increase predictability.
- Consider a tap-card system to give extra crossing time for those who need it.

Action 2.2.6. *Dementia focus*
Design consistent and clearly marked crossings

- Ensure crossing designs are easily recognizable and consistent across and within neighbourhoods.
- Consider solid crosswalks with contrasting colours and textures from the sidewalk and street to ensure safety for people living with dementia.
- Accompany crossings with signage to reduce the potential for confusion.

Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.3. Building edges and entrances (overview)

Building edges and entrances greatly impact the pedestrian experience. For instance, long, blank building facades discourage pedestrian activity and reduce trust among strangers. In contrast, human-scale facades and features can boost trust, social connection, sense of place, and the likelihood of people walking on the street, supporting autonomy and community connections.

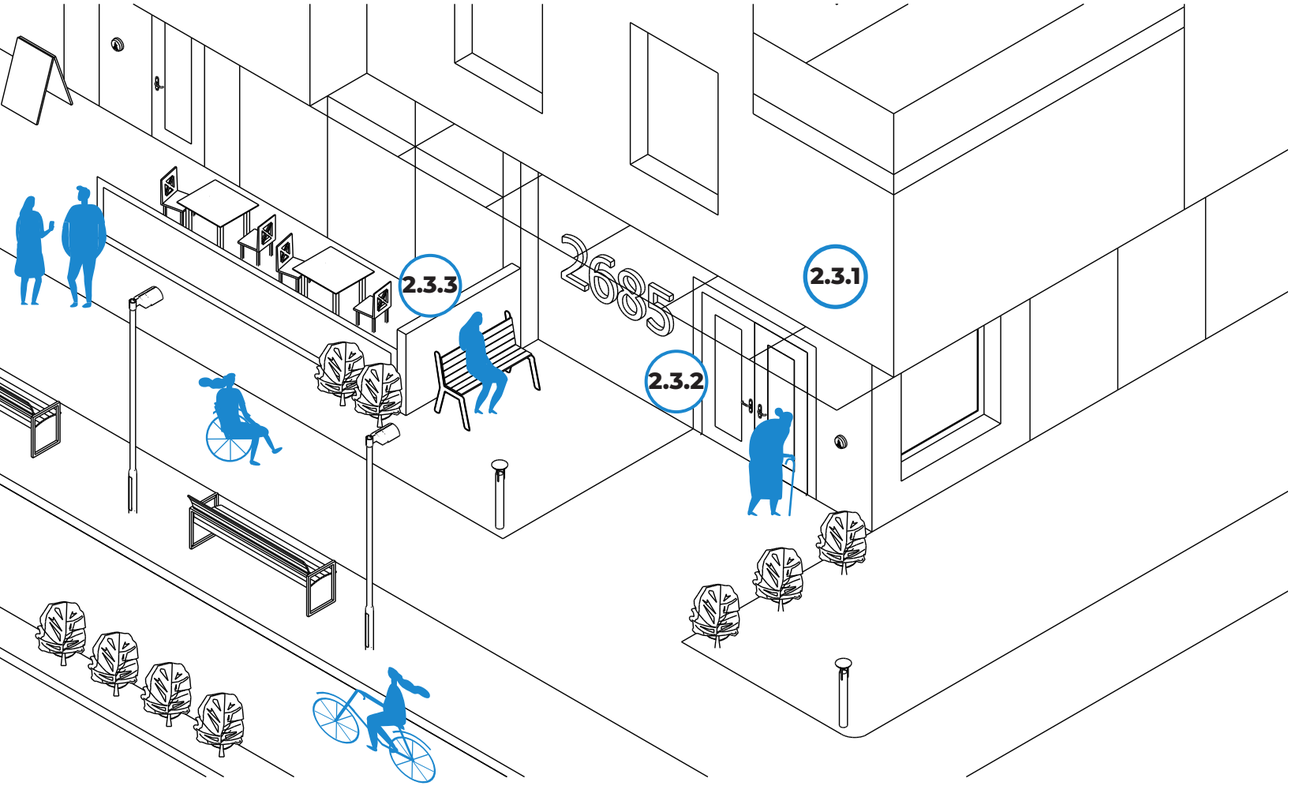
Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Legible:** *People living with dementia can understand the function of different buildings and how to move through them.*
- **Distinct:** *People living with dementia can recognize where they are in the neighbourhood.*

Action 2.3.1.
Design pedestrian-oriented building edges

Action 2.3.2.
Ensure facades and entrances are legible

Action 2.3.3.
Create clear gradients between private and public spaces



Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.3. Building edges and entrances (detailed actions)

Action 2.3.1.
Design pedestrian-oriented building edges

- Include building step-backs for tall buildings (over six storeys) to ensure the street feels human-scaled. These regulations may vary by municipality and neighbourhood.
- Include details such as different materials, regular windows and doors, varied colours, and ornamentation relating to local architectural context.
- Include weather protection elements, such as awnings and overhangs.

Action 2.3.2. *Dementia focus*
Ensure facades and entrances are legible

- Provide views into the building to improve wayfinding and orientation.
- Ensure glass doors are marked to avoid confusion for people living with dementia.
- Distinguish and define entrances through the architectural design of the building by using overhangs, step-backs, or different colours and materials.

Action 2.3.3.
Create clear gradients between private and public spaces

- Create legible gradients between private and public spaces to help reduce confusion as to what is private property and what is the public realm.
- Use architectural elements, such as low fences and vegetation, to create transition areas.
- Pay particular attention to areas that could be hazardous, such as loading bays or parking garage entrances. Mark the transition into these spaces with bollards, tactile paving, or signage.

Photo: David Baker Architects

Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.4. Transit stops (overview)

Comfortable transit stops help encourage transit use. Easy access to public transit is essential as an affordable means of getting around the neighbourhood or city, particularly for those who cannot or do not drive. For older adults and people living with dementia, having a place to sit and be sheltered from the elements while waiting for transit is crucial.

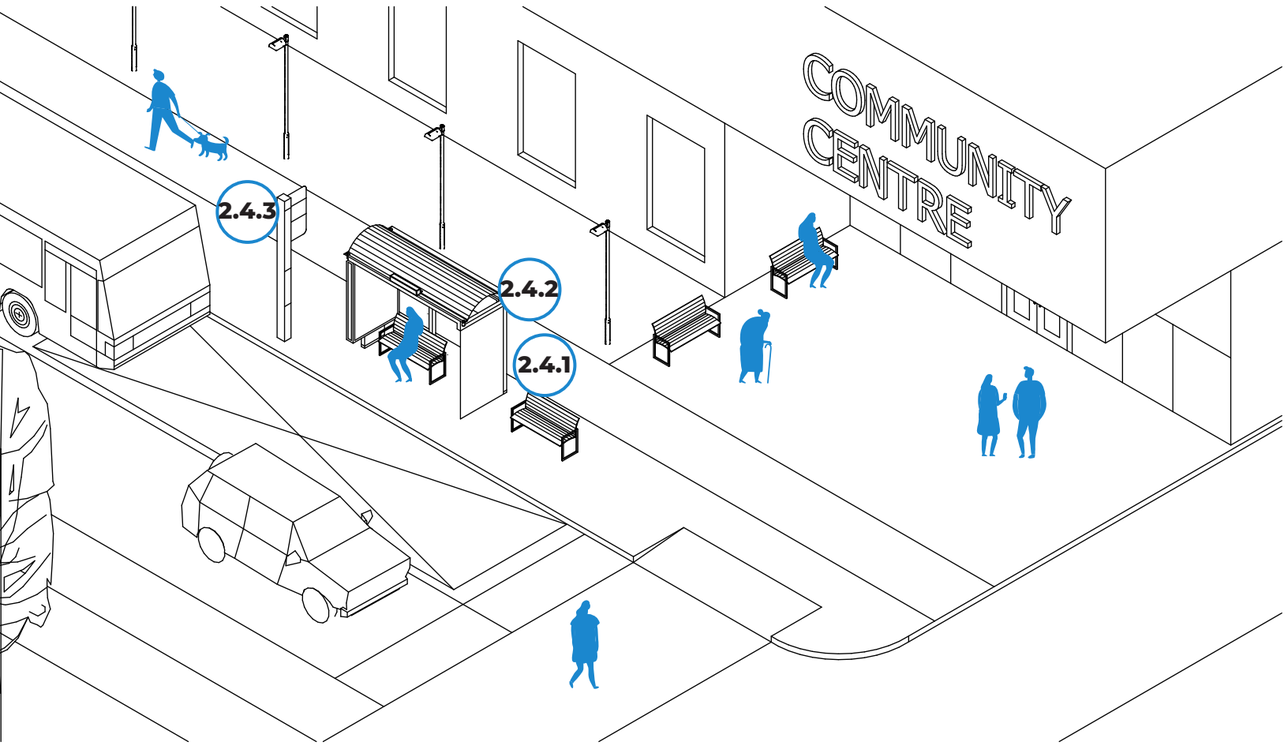
Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Comfortable:** *People can wait for transit in different weather conditions.*
- **Familiar:** *Predictable and easy-to-use transit stops make it easier to navigate the neighbourhood or city.*

Action 2.4.1.
Provide ample seating at transit stops

Action 2.4.2.
Create enclosed and sheltered transit stops

Action 2.4.3.
Include navigational tools at transit stops



Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.4. Transit stops (detailed actions)

Action 2.4.1.
Provide ample seating at transit stops

- Provide additional seating (more than one bench) at high-priority transit stops, such as near seniors centres.
- Ensure seating follows a recognizable and comfortable design.

See strategy 3.1., seating, for more detail.

Action 2.4.2.
Create enclosed and sheltered transit stops

- Create enclosed transit stops that provide shelter from the wind, sun, and rain while people wait for a bus or tram.

Action 2.4.3. *Dementia focus*
Include navigational tools at transit stops

- Provide clear signage and wayfinding.
- Give each transit stop in the network name and number to help with navigation.
- Include a map of the nearby bus routes, to aid with trip planning and navigation.
- Provide live arrival times at transit stops, to help reduce uncertainty.

This Seattle bus stop offers seating, shelter, live arrival times, and physical maps to help people navigate. Photo: Oran Viriyincy / Flickr

Realm 2: Street scale

Strategy 2.5. Parking and drop-off (overview)

People living with dementia and their care partners often rely on private vehicles or taxis to get around due to a lack of other options or accessibility challenges. Easy access to well-planned parking and drop-off can reduce risks and decrease conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.

Action 2.5.1.

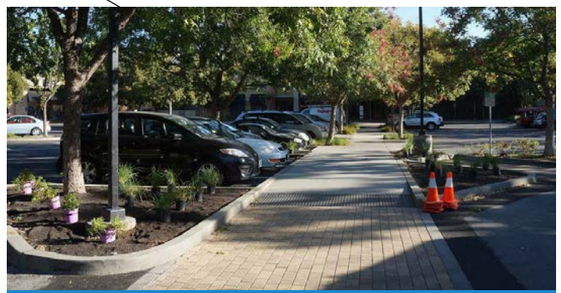
Break up parking areas

Action 2.5.2.

Create drop-off areas for cars at key locations

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Safe:** *A care partner or transportation service provider, such as a taxi or bus service, can complete a safe drop-off.*
- **Accessible:** *People can safely access core services that are not walkable.*



Greenery and walking path through a parking lot. Photo: UC Davis Arboretum and Public Garden / Flickr

Depaved parking lot and rain garden. Photo: Philadelphia Water Department / Flickr

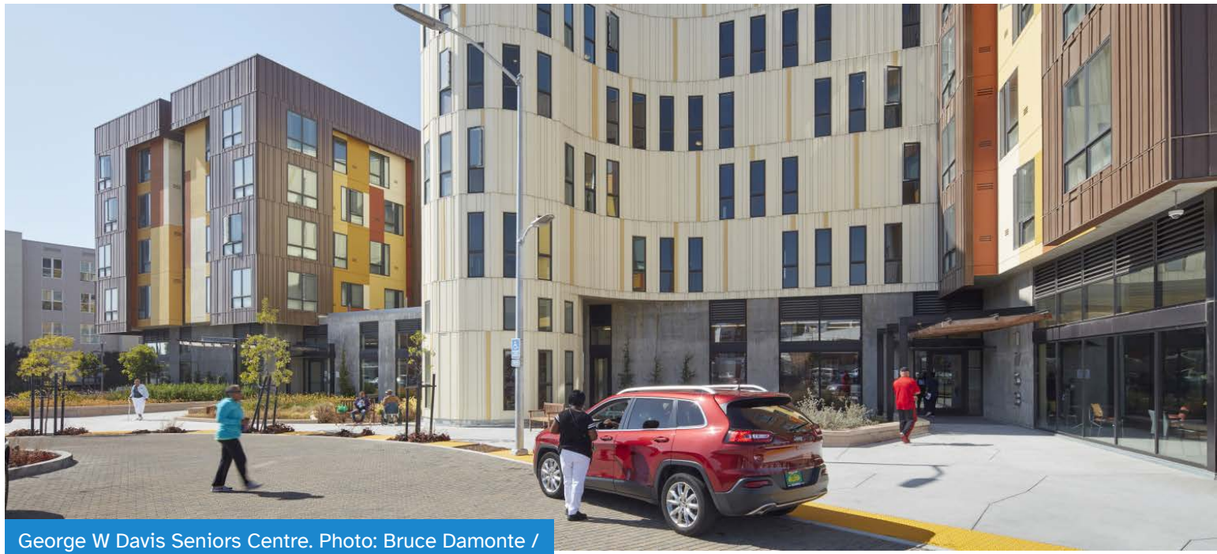
Strategy 2.5. Parking and drop-off (detailed actions)

Action 2.5.1.
Break up parking areas

- Break up large parking areas with greenery, rain gardens, and marked pedestrian pathways.
- Ensure parking areas do not interfere with pedestrian access to the building or public space.
- Create clear pedestrian crossings and paths of travel across parking lots.

Action 2.5.2.
Create drop-off areas for cars at key locations

- Provide accessible drop-off locations at shops, services, and other essential destinations to reduce travel time and frustration for people living with dementia and their care partners.
- Consider drop-off areas at services and destinations that people living with dementia may frequent, such as community centres, clinics, and hospitals.



George W Davis Seniors Centre. Photo: Bruce Damonte / David Baker Architects

Realm 3:

Detailed design scale

Realm 3 focuses on detailed design decisions that determine quality, comfort, and functionality. The strategies and actions in Realm 3 apply to any outdoor space that is open to the public.

These details can transform places into high-quality and desirable destinations that foster a sense of belonging and encourage social connection.

Strategy 3.1. Seating

Strategy 3.2. Public art

Strategy 3.3. Placemaking

Strategy 3.4. Public toilets

Strategy 3.5. Signage

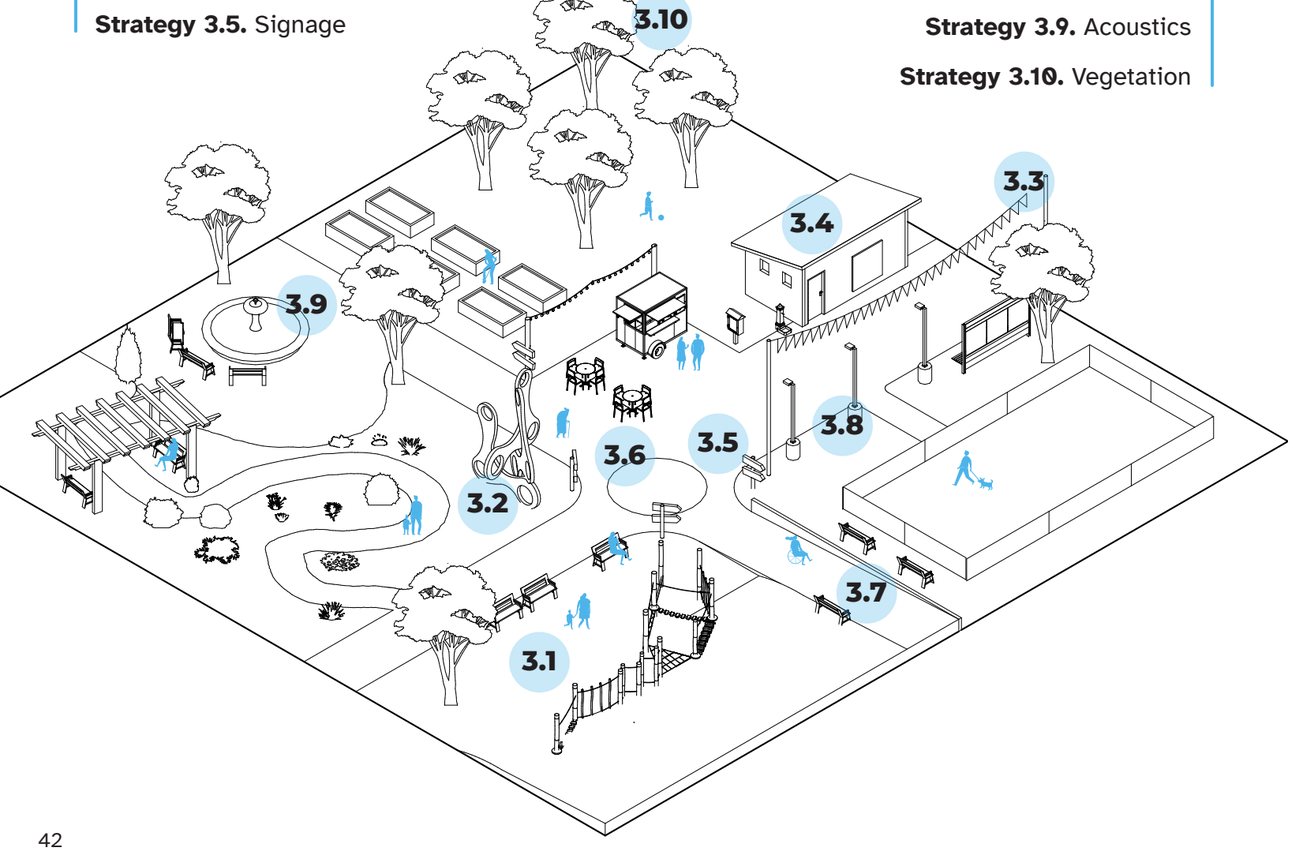
Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments

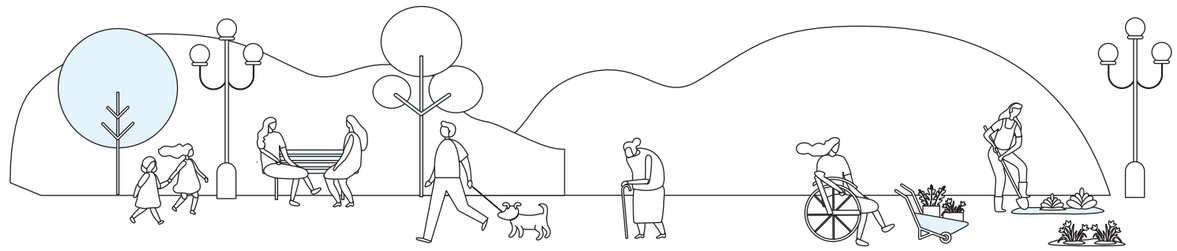
Strategy 3.7. Grade (level) changes

Strategy 3.8. Lighting

Strategy 3.9. Acoustics

Strategy 3.10. Vegetation





The importance of detailed design

- People living with dementia can feel overwhelmed in public spaces. User-oriented design can help reduce feelings of overcrowding and provide areas to pause, rest, and orient.
- Design interventions that increase comfort can help people feel at ease and enjoy staying in a space longer.
- Designers should consider the full spectrum of a user's sensory experience, including visuals, sights, and sounds. For instance, some sounds are positive for people living with dementia, such as kids playing, birds chirping, and running water. Other sounds, such as traffic or large crowds, can be overwhelming.
- Colour is an effective way to distinguish spaces and create visual interest.
- Placemaking and public art provide benefits for older adults and people living with dementia by offering wayfinding cues, destinations, and opportunities to interact with the community.
- Clear and easy-to-read signage is crucial for helping people living with dementia navigate spaces.

When should you consider this realm?

In new developments or existing neighbourhoods, when designing:

- Parks, plazas, or other open spaces that are publicly accessible
- Community centres and public buildings
- Residential developments
- Pedestrian-oriented streets

What policies can influence this?

- Neighbourhood design guidelines
- Development permit requirements
- Detailed design requirements
- Building codes
- Wayfinding and accessibility standards

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.1. Seating (overview)

Seating is crucial for people with limited mobility and others who need to rest frequently. Well-designed seating areas can serve as a destination for older adults and people living with dementia, encouraging physical activity and increasing opportunities for social connection.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Comfortable:** *People can take rests as needed and enjoy a seat to observe public life.*
- **Familiar:** *Seating is predictable, easy to use, and located around appealing destinations.*

Action 3.1.1.
Create accessible seating

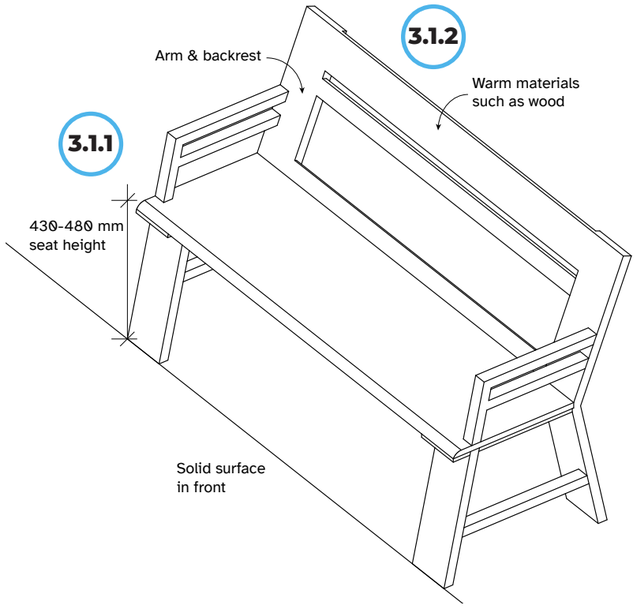
Action 3.1.2.
Provide familiar, usable seating

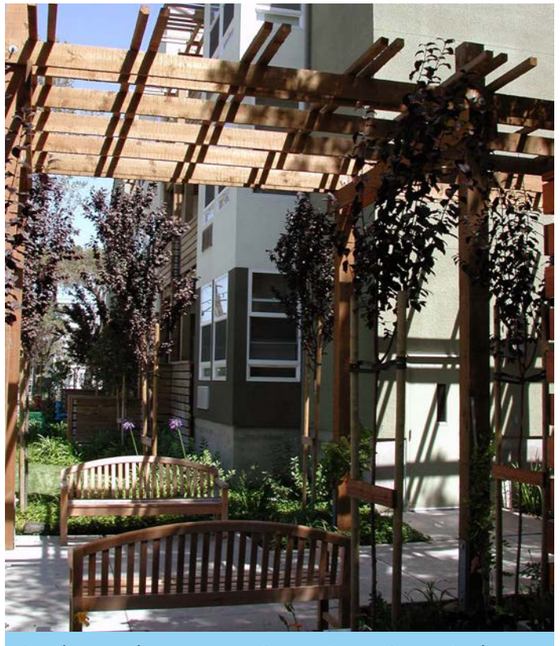
Action 3.1.3.
Place seating frequently and strategically

Action 3.1.4.
Provide shaded and sheltered seating

Action 3.1.5.
Co-locate seating with interesting features

Action 3.1.6.
Ensure that seating is easy to find





Seating outside Mabuhay Court. Photo: Cesar Rubio / David Baker Architects

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.1. Seating (detailed actions)

Action 3.1.1.
Create accessible seating

- Ensure that seat heights are 430 to 480 millimetres above ground level.
- Create a solid surface directly in front of the bench to allow easy access with a mobility device.
- Provide diverse seating options for those with limited mobility or hearing and vision loss (i.e. located away from loud noise sources and at 90-degree angles to another seat for ease of social interaction).

Action 3.1.2. *Dementia focus*
Provide familiar, usable seating

- Include armrests and a backrest.
- Offer seating with a traditional “bench” shape to ensure that people can easily recognize it as a place to rest.
- Design seating using sturdy and warm materials, such as wood.
- Provide opportunities for someone to preview the space before choosing to sit there.

Action 3.1.3. *Dementia focus*
Place seating frequently and strategically

- Place seating every 100 metres at a minimum in public spaces.
- Include seating along uphill paths and decision points (such as junctions) to provide an area for people to rest and orient themselves.

Action 3.1.4. *Dementia focus*
Provide shaded and sheltered seating

- Offer sheltered seating options.
- Use trees or other architectural elements, such as a gazebo or trellis with vines, to provide shelter and enclosure for seating areas.

Action 3.1.5.
Co-locate seating with interesting features

- Provide seating near areas of activity, such as playgrounds, water features, community gardens, and dog parks.
- Provide seating near places to buy food or drinks, such as coffee or ice cream.

Action 3.1.6. *Dementia focus*
Ensure that seating is easy to find

- Ensure that seating is easily visible from walking routes.
- Provide a map or signage showing seating availability in public spaces.

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.2. Public art (overview)

Public art supports a sense of belonging, better wayfinding, and opportunities for people to pause and interact. Distinctive art helps people living with dementia recognize where they are in the neighbourhood and creates destinations to visit, increasing physical activity and opportunities for community interactions.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Distinct:** *Art creates a sense of place and people living with dementia can recognize where they are in the neighbourhood.*
- **Familiar:** *Art triggers memories and familiar sights, and can enable social connections with neighbours.*

Action 3.2.1.
Support a diverse range of public art

Action 3.2.2.
Co-create art with the community

Small-scale public art can include painted street elements along active travel routes. Photo: Happy Cities

A woman paints a community mural with a local artist. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities

Large-scale public art can reflect local history in prominent locations. Photo: Can Pac Swire / Flickr

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.2. Public Art (detailed actions)

Action 3.2.1. *Dementia focus*
Support a diverse range of public art

- Create small-scale and large-scale public art that can help with wayfinding.
- Design public art that can serve as a social gathering area.
- Use large-scale public art to mark important junctions or nodes.
- Consider creating a series of public art installations that can help identify walking routes through the neighbourhood.

Action 3.2.2.
Co-create art with the community

- Provide spaces, funding, and support for community-created art.
- Consider opportunities to invite older adults, people living with dementia, care partners, and other community members to participate in creating public art in a safe and comfortable way.
- Reflect local history and heritage in community-generated art to help celebrate the past and provide memory cues.

"Public art is unique, and can help with wayfinding and placemaking. It also helps people to connect. Often, we can see people gathering around a public art and talk about it. Children are also always stopping. It is a good way to stimulate social connectedness."

—Community forum participant

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.3. Placemaking (overview)

Placemaking supports a sense of belonging, better wayfinding, and opportunities for people to pause and interact. Placemaking helps people living with dementia recognize where they are in the neighbourhood and creates destinations to visit, increasing physical activity and opportunities for community interactions.

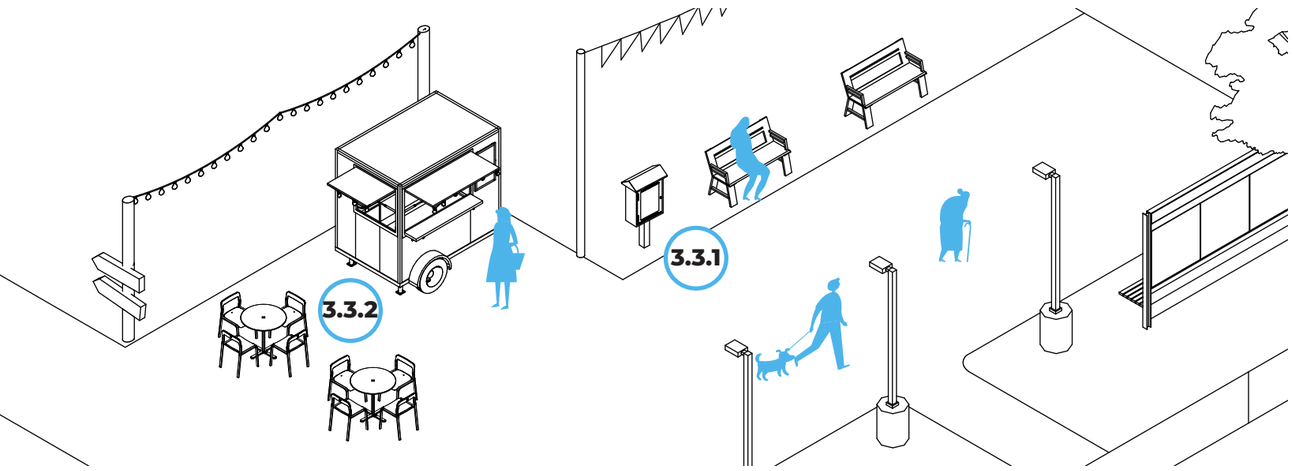
Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Distinct:** *People living with dementia can recognize where they are in the neighbourhood.*
- **Familiar:** *Placemaking triggers memories and familiar sights, and can enable social connections with neighbours.*

Action 3.3.1.
Include small-scale placemaking features

Action 3.3.2.
Design flexible spaces for pop-ups

Action 3.3.3.
Provide pet-friendly green space



Pet-friendly space. Photo: Bruce Damonte / David Baker Architects

A little free library on a neighbourhood street. Photo: Paul Sableman / Flickr

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.3. Placemaking (detailed actions)

Action 3.3.1. *Dementia focus*
Include small-scale placemaking features

- Consider small-scale placemaking features, such as a little book library, a seed library, a rock garden, or colourful bunting and banners.

Action 3.3.2.
Design flexible spaces for pop-ups

- Create flexible spaces with accessible pathways, good lighting, and infrastructure (i.e., running water and electrical connections) to support a wide range of pop-up activities, such as markets or live music.
- Create flexible spaces to play games, such as lawn bowling or beanbag toss.

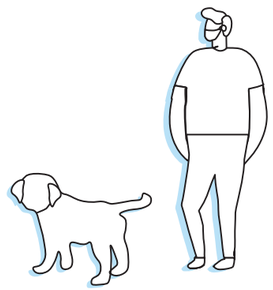
Action 3.3.3.
Provide pet-friendly green space

Pets can boost wellbeing by providing companionship, a reason to get out and exercise, and an opportunity to connect with others in the neighbourhood. People living with dementia may also have service dogs.

- Ensure clear signage and separation between on-leash and off-leash areas to reduce risks of injury and conflict.
- Provide seating near dog parks so that people can safely observe pets.

"Placemaking helps people living with dementia understand unfamiliar places, regardless of if they visited the space before or not, by providing elements that make the space feel more comfortable and safe."

—Community forum participant



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.4. Public toilets (overview)

Access to a toilet is a human right. Lack of access to public toilets can hinder people's ability to venture out into the neighbourhood. People need safe and easy-to-access public toilets in key destinations throughout the neighbourhood, such as at parks, transit stations, shopping areas, and more.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

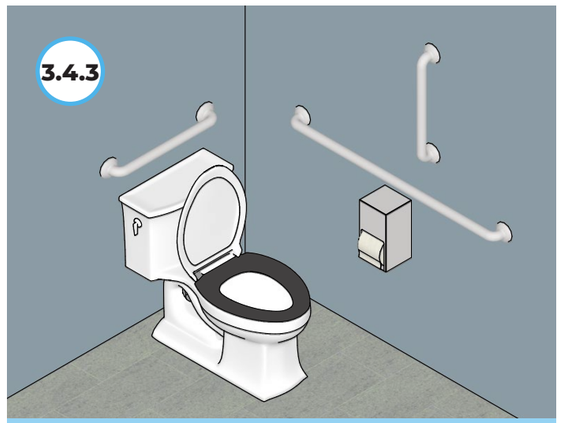
- **Comfortable:** *People can use a public space without fear of not being able to meet their biological needs.*
- **Accessible:** *People living with dementia and other disabilities can access the required facilities.*

Action 3.4.1
Create accessible and easy-to-find public toilets

Action 3.4.2.
Maintain cleanliness and safety

Action 3.4.3.
Design with high-contrast surfaces

The Portland Loo. Photo: Mattsjc / Wikimedia Commons



It's important to ensure contrast between the toilet seat, toilet fixture, walls, and floors. Illustration: Happy Cities

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.4. Public toilets (detailed actions)

Action 3.4.1. *Dementia focus*
Create accessible and easy-to-find public toilets

- Ensure that pathways to and from toilets are easy to navigate and accessible.
- Avoid placing public toilets in areas that require stairs to access them.
- Provide obvious signage to indicate where the public toilet is located (i.e., provide directional signage to communicate that a public toilet is available 200 metres away).
- Provide a unisex family toilet to offer flexibility for families and people who need assistance from care partners.
- Provide seating and a place to rest or wait near the toilet.
- Ensure that toilets are unlocked and free to use.

Action 3.4.2.
Maintain cleanliness and safety

- Consider installing self-cleaning toilets in locations where regular maintenance will be difficult.
- Consider locating public toilets near to other areas of activity, such as a playground or a transit stop, to discourage other uses and vandalism.
- Carefully consider lighting both inside and around the public toilet to ensure visibility, particularly for older adults.

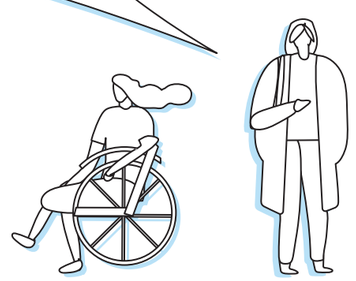
Action 3.4.3. *Dementia focus*
Design with high-contrast surfaces

- Ensure contrast between the toilet seat and the rest of the toilet fixture.
- Ensure contrast between the toilet fixture and the walls and floors of the bathroom.
- Ensure that flooring has a simple or solid pattern, and is not slippery or reflective.

"If toilets are not available in grocery stores, transit stations, or parks, that can prevent people living with dementia from accessing those spaces."

"When I go to the grocery store, if toilets are not available to me, then I can't make the trip."

—Community forum participants



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.5. Signage (overview)

Signage provides critical information to people about how to move through the neighbourhood and find destinations. People living with dementia may not have access to a smartphone and may become more easily disoriented. Well-placed signage and informative signage can transform their experience of the neighbourhood.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

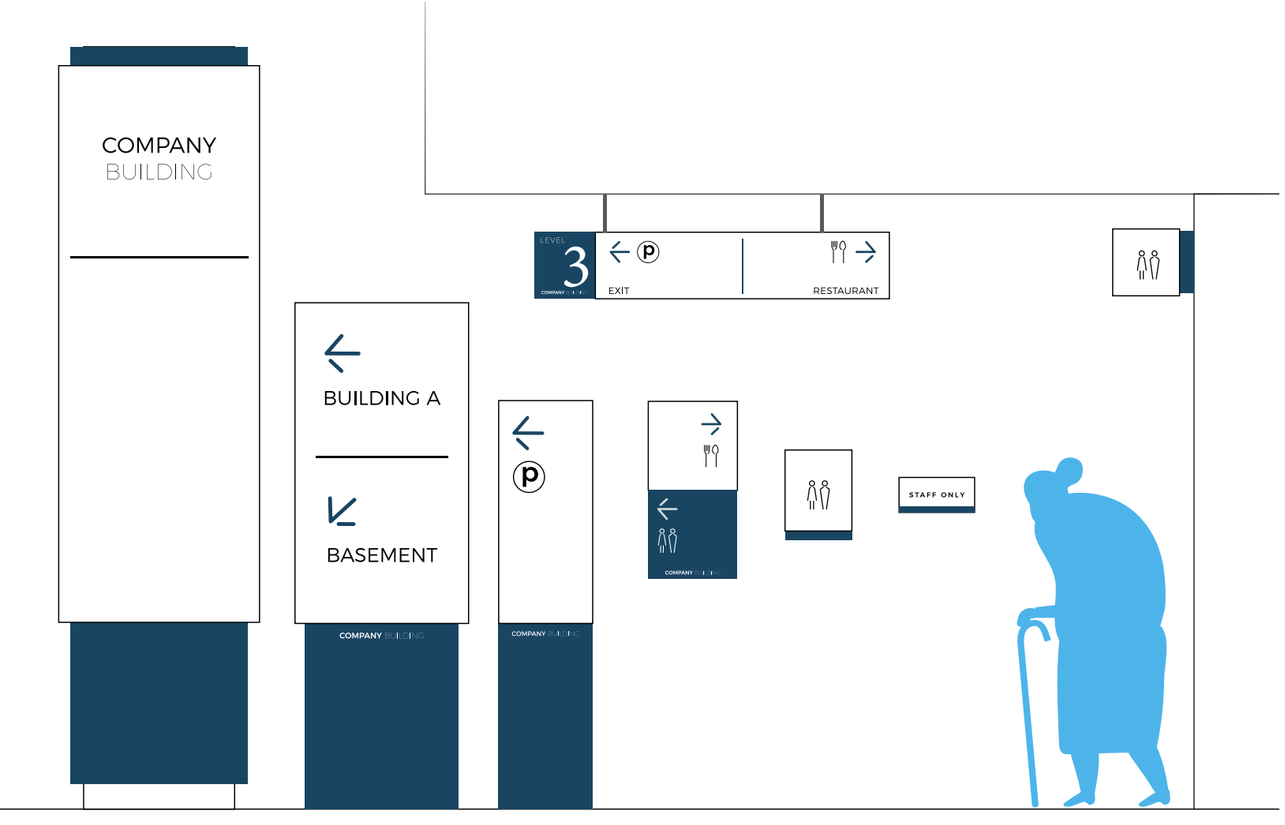
- **Legible:** *Easy-to-understand directions help people know where they are and where they want to go.*
- **Accessible:** *People can easily read and understand signage at critical decision making points.*

Action 3.5.1.
Place signage at decision points and building entrances

Action 3.5.2.
Ensure signage is visible

Action 3.5.3.
Provide informative signage

Action 3.5.4.
Make signage easy to read



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.5. Signage (detailed actions)

Action 3.5.1. *Dementia focus*
Place signage at decision points and building entrances

- Fix signs to the doors they refer to, not to the adjacent surface.
- Place signs at eye level.

Action 3.5.2.
Ensure signage is visible

- Ensure that signage is visible from multiple directions. For example, double-sided signage ensures that people can see the information regardless of which direction they are approaching from.
- Provide lighting to illuminate signage and ensure that it is visible at all times of day, while being careful to minimize glare.

Action 3.5.3.
Provide informative signage

- Provide signage that indicates the location of amenities, particularly areas to buy food or drink, public toilets, and seating.
- Indicate the distance to access amenities, using the number of minutes or steps for clarity.
- Provide easy-to-read maps at critical locations and decision points, such as near transit stops or at an entrance to a park.
- Include voice prompts and announcements where possible.

Action 3.5.4. *Dementia focus*
Make signage easy to understand

- Use clear language and text, including a bold typeface with good contrast between the text and background.
- Use clear and familiar icons alongside text to provide multiple ways to convey information.
- Consider familiar graphics that are well-understood by people living with dementia.

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments (overview)

Ground treatments, such as paving, impact people's ability to navigate the neighbourhood. People living with dementia have an increased risk of falling compared to other older adults. A seamless path of travel can reduce risks and allow them to access the neighbourhood independently.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

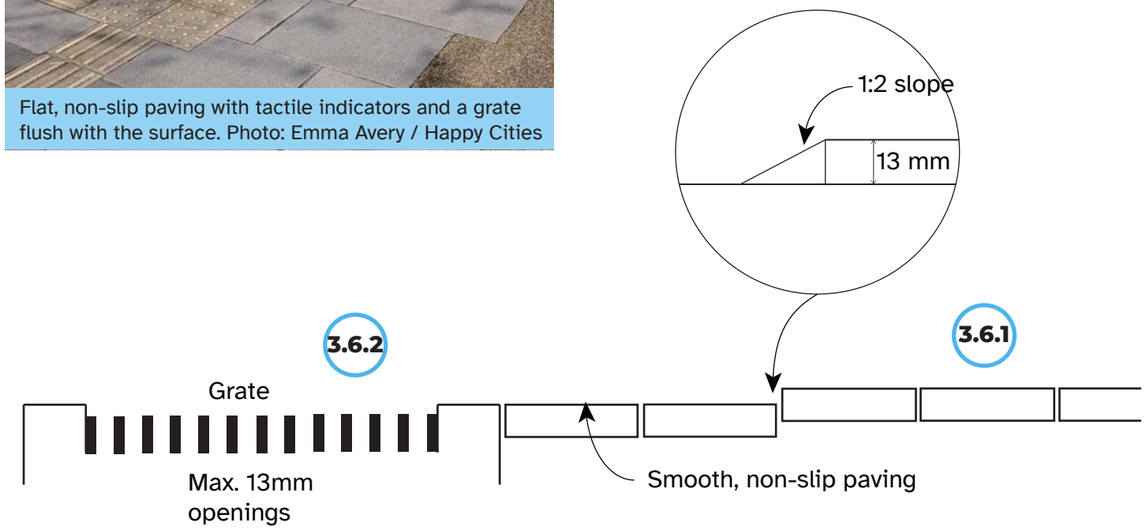
- **Safe:** *People can walk or roll around the neighbourhood with minimal risks.*
- **Accessible:** *People can navigate the environment safely despite differences in cognition or physical ability.*

Action 3.6.1.
Choose flat, smooth, non-slip paving

Action 3.6.2.
Ensure grates and drains are flush with paving

Action 3.6.3.
Avoid strong contrasting patterns

Flat, non-slip paving with tactile indicators and a grate flush with the surface. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments (detailed actions)

Action 3.6.1.
Choose flat, smooth, non-slip paving

- Ensure that joints between paving are less than 6 millimetres wide.
- Install a solid layer underneath brick or unit paving to ensure stability.
- Avoid using shiny materials, which reflect light, or slippery materials, such as tiles.
- Include well-defined edges to show where different surfaces start and stop.

Action 3.6.2.
Ensure grates and drains are flush with paving

- Ensure that there is less than a 2 millimetre difference between surfaces.
- Where elevation changes are between 6 and 13 millimetres, provide a slope of 1:2 over the elevation change.
- Ensure that openings in grates are less than 13 millimetres.

Action 3.6.3. *Dementia focus*
Avoid strong contrasting patterns

- Avoid strong, contrasting patterns on the ground. These can lead to confusion and depth perception challenges for people living with dementia.
- Use patterns and textures intentionally to indicate features or changes in the environment. For instance, a playground could have a different texture than a walkway.

Aberdour Sensory Garden. Photo: William Starkey/ Wikimedia Commons

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.7. Grade and level changes (overview)

Grade changes are inevitable due to natural topography or obstacles, such as stairs and ramps. People living with dementia have an increased risk of falling and can experience depth perception challenges. Safe grade changes help reduce fall risks and increase people's ability to navigate the neighbourhood independently.

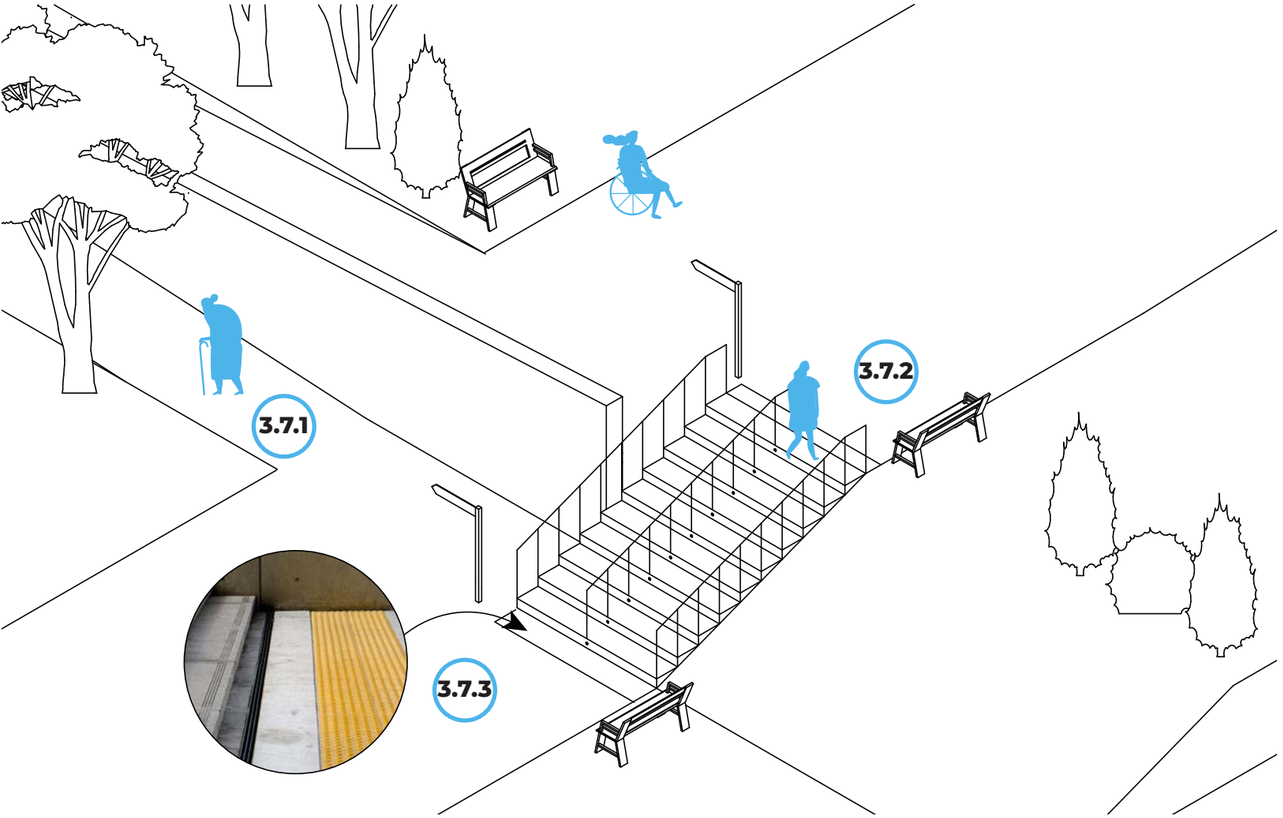
Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Safe:** *People can walk or roll around the neighbourhood with minimal risks.*
- **Accessible:** *People can navigate the environment safely despite differences in cognition or physical ability.*

Action 3.7.1.
Create gentle level changes

Action 3.7.2.
Integrate unavoidable level changes

Action 3.7.3.
Mark level changes clearly



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.7. Grade and level changes (detailed actions)

Action 3.7.1.
Create gentle level changes

- Design a grade of 1:20 where slopes or ramps are required.
- Create flat areas to rest, with seating, where slopes are steeper than 1:20 and longer than 12 metres.

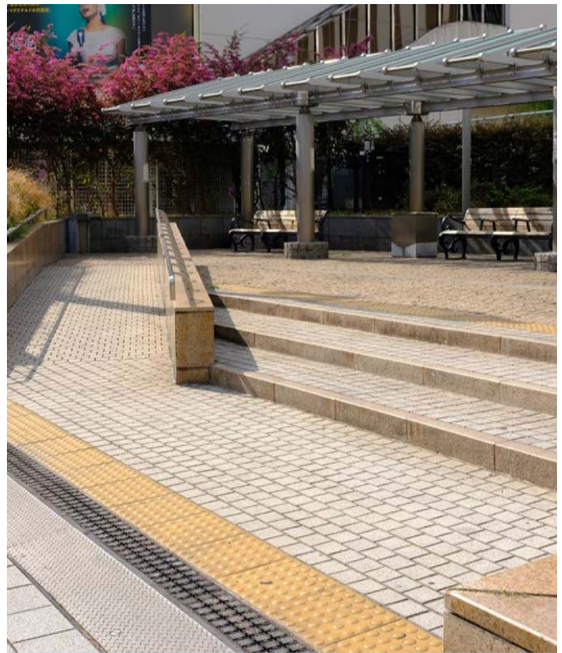
Action 3.7.3.
Mark level changes clearly

- Use contrasting paving to indicate potential hazards or changes in the environment.
- Integrate tactile warning strips and textures into and before stairs or other level changes.

Accessible ramp at Rocky Hill Veterans Housing. Photo: Eric Rorer / David Baker Architects

Action 3.7.2.
Integrate unavoidable level changes

- Design clear pathways to create a more gradual level change (for example, place a ramp next to a staircase).
- Use signage to indicate that a grade change is coming up ahead.
- Provide a rest area with seating at the top and bottom of level changes so that people can stop and re-orient themselves if they need to plan an alternative route.



Sheltered rest area with tactile indicators to mark the level change and accessible ramp. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.8. Lighting (overview)

Lighting is an important safety feature for people of all ages. Older adults take longer to adjust to different light levels, such as when moving from a very bright interior space to a dark exterior space. Older adults also require more lumens to see clearly. People living with dementia can benefit from a variety of lighting features to support the activities that may take place in a given space. Choosing lighting that minimizes glare can also help reduce confusion.

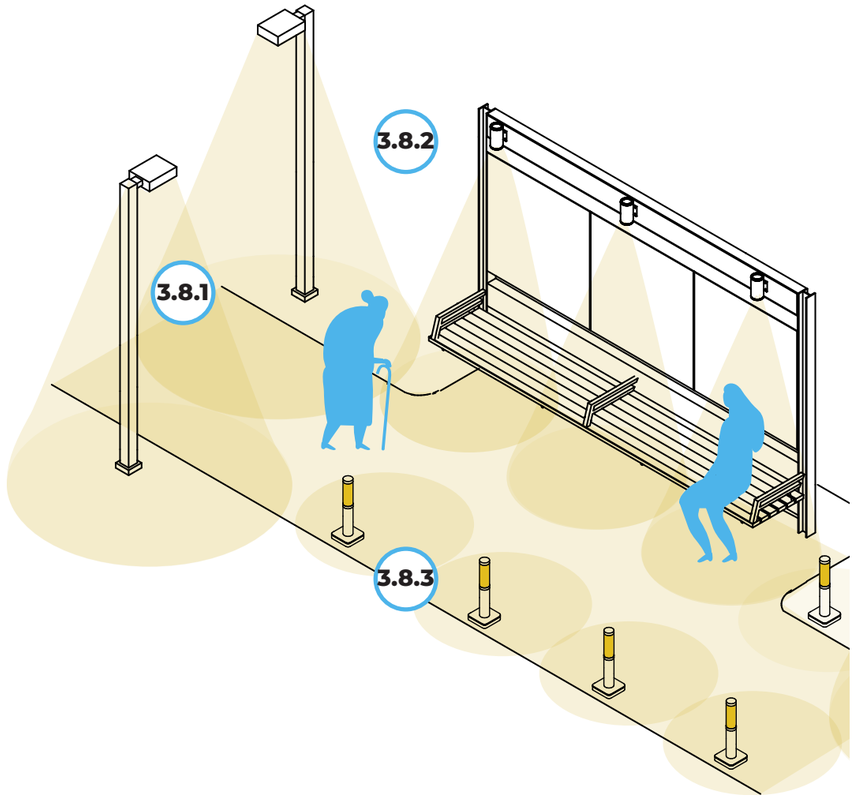
Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Safe:** *Adequate lighting creates a sense of safety and visibility when navigating spaces in low-light conditions*
- **Accessible:** *People can navigate the environment safely despite differences in cognition or physical ability.*

Action 3.8.1.
Provide suitable lighting levels based on anticipated uses

Action 3.8.2.
Use a variety of lighting types

Action 3.8.3.
Minimize glare



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.8. Lighting (detailed actions)

Action 3.8.1.
Provide suitable lighting levels based on anticipated uses

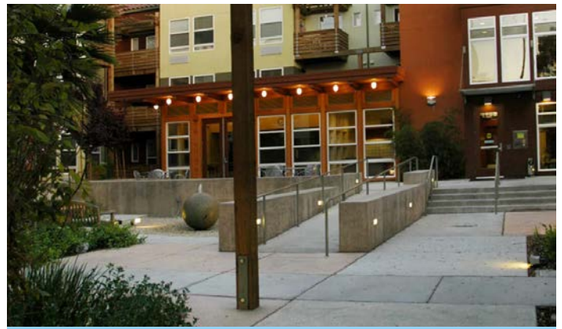
- Ensure adequate levels of lighting for older adults, especially at night. As a rule of thumb, older adults require 50% higher illumination levels due to changes in light perception as people age.
- Consider lighting designed specifically for pedestrians, such as along the edges of pathways and sidewalks.

Action 3.8.3. *Dementia focus*
Minimize glare

- Minimize shadows and glare to reduce confusion and perception challenges for people living with dementia, such as thinking there is an obstacle ahead where none exists.
- Avoid spotlights, which create strong contrast of light and shadow that can confuse people living with dementia.
- Create even lighting levels in areas that people need to navigate at night.

Action 3.8.2.
Use a variety of lighting types

- Consider areas where light levels need to transition between areas with different functions and lighting levels.
- Design uplighting or indirect lighting incorporated into seating and pathways.
- Create playful or distinctive elements that incorporate lighting, such as overhead string lights.



Lighting integrated on buildings and walkways at Mabuhay Court. Photo: Cesar Rubio / David Baker Architects

String lighting at Mason on Mariposa. Photo: Craig Cozart / David Baker Architects

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.9. Acoustics (overview)

Acoustics are critical to consider in outdoor spaces. Environmental sounds can be challenging to anticipate during the design stage. However, providing quiet spaces to pause can help people living with dementia by reducing stress and confusion and improving comfort levels. Sounds from everyday life can also help trigger memories and emotions for people living with dementia.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Comfortable:** *Minimal distractions and potential for sensory overload support attentional capacity.*
- **Familiar:** *Familiar and pleasant sounds act as cues to remind people where they are.*

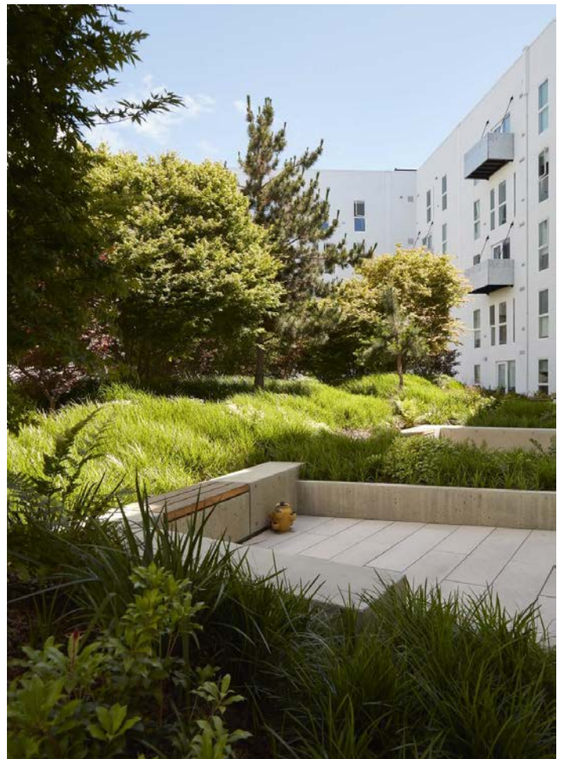
Action 3.9.1.
Mitigate noise through buffers

Action 3.9.2.
Incorporate soothing sounds into the environment

Action 3.9.3.
Include water features

Maude's Garden. Photo: The Memory Hub

Seating facing a fountain and lake in Williamson Park. Photo: Alexander P Kapp / Wikimedia Commons



Seating in a peaceful area at Potrero 1010. Photo: Bruce Damonte / David Baker Architects

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.9. Acoustics (detailed actions)

Action 3.9.1. *Dementia focus*
Mitigate noise through buffers

- Create buffered seating areas away from noisy spaces to provide options to rest and retreat if needed.
- Use vegetation, such as trees and shrubs, to buffer seating areas and pedestrian pathways from roadways.

Action 3.9.2. *Dementia focus*
Incorporate soothing sounds into the environment

- Consider soothing sounds, such as running water, waves, or birdsong. Some people living with dementia also enjoy the sounds of children playing.

Action 3.9.3. *Dementia focus*
Include water features

- Include access to views and sounds of water, which can have a positive sensory impact on people living with dementia.
- Use water features to create landmarks and destinations in the neighbourhood.

"My elderly mother has a mobility issue. She enjoys spending time at the shopping mall nearby, which has a fountain and sitting area, so people naturally sit down, bring dogs, socialize and talk. It is a great place for intergenerational interaction and social engagement."

—Community forum participant

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.10. Vegetation (overview)

Vegetation improves people's sensory experience of the environment, and contact with nature provides wellbeing benefits. People living with dementia can benefit from spaces that use vegetation thoughtfully in all seasons.

Age- and dementia-inclusive principles:

- **Distinctive:** *Vegetation has unique colours, shapes, and textures that can help distinguish the environment*
- **Familiar:** *Familiar plants can help trigger memories and environmental recognition*

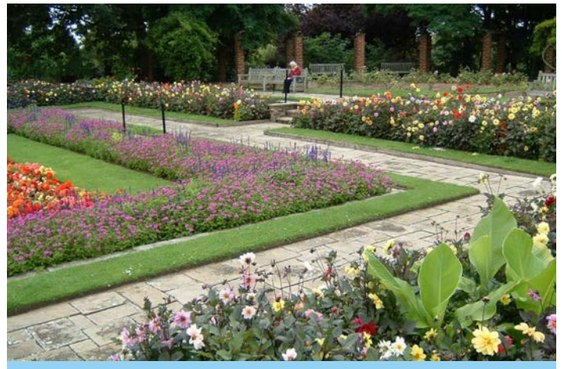
Action 3.10.1.
Use a range of vegetation to show the change in seasons

Action 3.10.2.
Include natural elements outside of green spaces

Action 3.10.3.
Create community and memory gardens

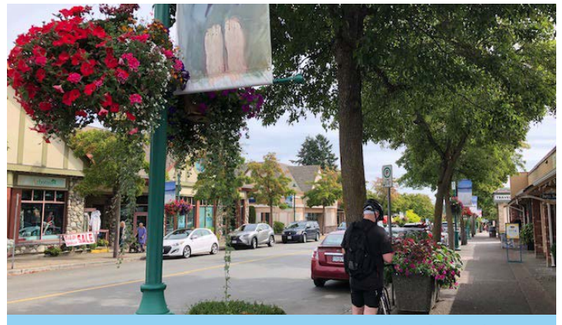
Action 3.10.4.
Incorporate aromatic plants

A shared garden at Lakeside Seniors Apartments. Photo: David Baker Architects



Horniman Museum Garden. Photo: Bongo Vongo / Flickr

Sensory garden at BCA gallery. Photo: Chenzw / Wikimedia Commons



Planter boxes and street trees. Photo: City of Qualicum Beach

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.10. Vegetation (detailed actions)

Action 3.10.1.
Use a range of vegetation to show the change in seasons

- Plant seasonal and changing shrubs, flowers, and trees to help cue memories.
- Grow a variety of plants that change colour with the seasons, flowers that bloom at different times, and evergreen plants that retain foliage in winter.
- Carefully consider maintenance for vegetation near pathways, as fallen leaves can create slipping hazards.

Action 3.10.2.
Include natural elements outside of green spaces

- Include planter boxes, hanging flower boxes, and green walls in urban environments or streetscapes.
- Plant a range of different street trees to help with wayfinding.

Action 3.10.3. *Dementia focus*
Create community and memory gardens

- Create community gardens as social gathering spaces that allow for intergenerational interactions.
- Create memory gardens with signage, vegetation, and other placemaking features to provide a familiar place for people living with dementia to spend time outdoors.

Action 3.10.4. *Dementia focus*
Incorporate aromatic plants

- Use aromatic plants to help stimulate and engage people's senses and provide environmental and directional cues.
- Plant herbs and fragrant flowers in gardens.

"During my walk, I like to appreciate the environment. There are beautiful trees with many colours. We can find greens, purples, a little bit brown. We live in a very beautiful city in Vancouver."

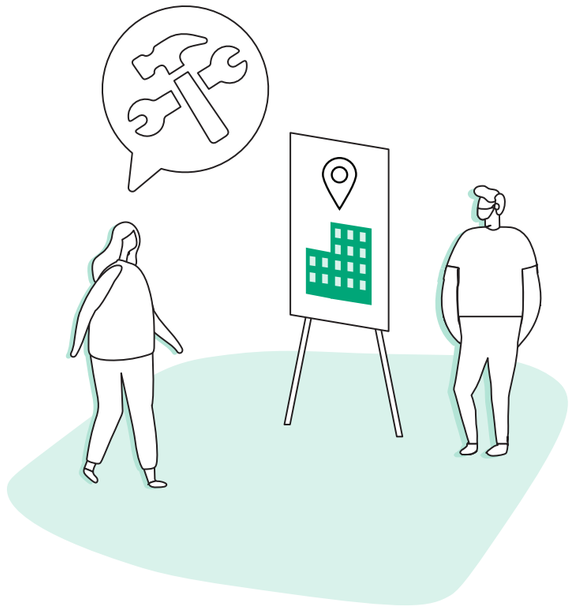
—Walk along interview participant

3

Implementation

Implementation

These guidelines articulate best practices for planning and designing age-friendly, dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods. Access to safe destinations—and ways to get there by walking, rolling, or transit—is crucial for older adults and people living with dementia to continue participating in the community and maintain social ties. By following evidence-based best practices for neighbourhood planning and design, municipalities can make informed decisions around future policy and concentrate resources where they will have the greatest impact.



Considerations

Municipalities can work with local community members, organizations, and professionals to identify which strategies and actions within these guidelines best support their community's unique needs. The strategies and actions in this document can inform municipal and regional policy, such as official community plans or park development standards.

Here are some key steps for implementation:

- Analyze existing neighbourhoods (e.g. streets, open urban areas, plazas, and parks) to identify challenging areas for older adults and people living with dementia that do not meet community needs.
- Work in partnership with community organizations, people with lived experience, and care partners to:
    - Identify high-priority design strategies and actions.
    - Identify community areas or hotspots that would benefit from pilot projects.
- Carry out pilot projects in partnership with the community to see how the proposed design changes impact older adults, people living with dementia, and care partners.
- Consider the potential financial costs to implement age- and dementia-inclusive strategies and actions city-wide.
- Share success stories with other municipalities and organizations to increase awareness and political support.
- Develop new policies to encourage age- and dementia-inclusive neighbourhood design.
    - Consider recognition programs or incentives for organizations and developers to implement new policies.

Implementation (continued)

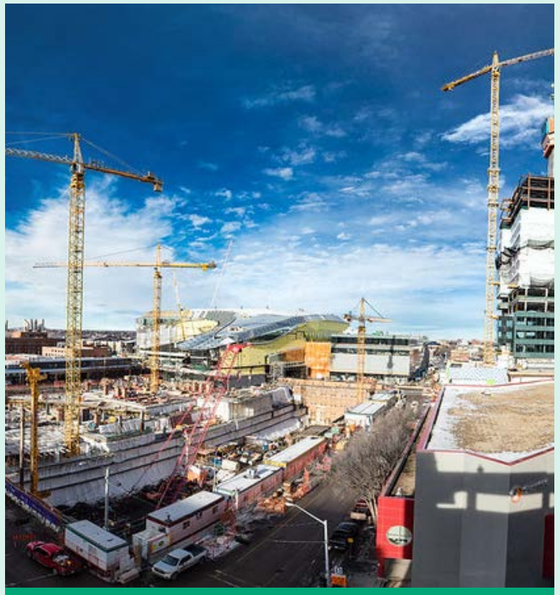
Beyond neighbourhood planning and design, municipalities, developers, and community organizations can improve neighbourhoods for older adults, people living with dementia, and care partners through:

- **Awareness and training:** Train community members and municipal staff to understand how to help and interact with people living with dementia. For example, the City of Burnaby is training its staff to support people living with dementia who are submitting their property taxes.
- **Programming:** Organize programming and activities to bring community members and people living with dementia together to build social connections, increase mutual understanding, and reduce stigma. For example, the Burnaby Dementia Friendly Café operates in a city-owned space.
- **Inclusive city-building processes:** Build inclusive civic processes that invite older adults, people living with dementia and care partners to participate in shaping their community. For example, the City of Richmond engaged older adults and people living with dementia to create its 10-year Seniors Strategy.

Changing urban environments and dementia

Many municipalities across Canada are seeing rapid growth and redevelopment. These changing communities can be particularly challenging to navigate for people living with dementia. The following actions can help mitigate the challenges of rapid redevelopment:

- Create consistent design standards across neighbourhoods to make them easier to navigate.
- Retain heritage structures, landmark buildings, and community gathering spaces to aid wayfinding and familiarity.
- Consider temporary placemaking or public art interventions at construction sites to aid wayfinding, minimize confusion, and maintain safety around the site.
- Engage and inform community members of upcoming changes so that they can plan accordingly.



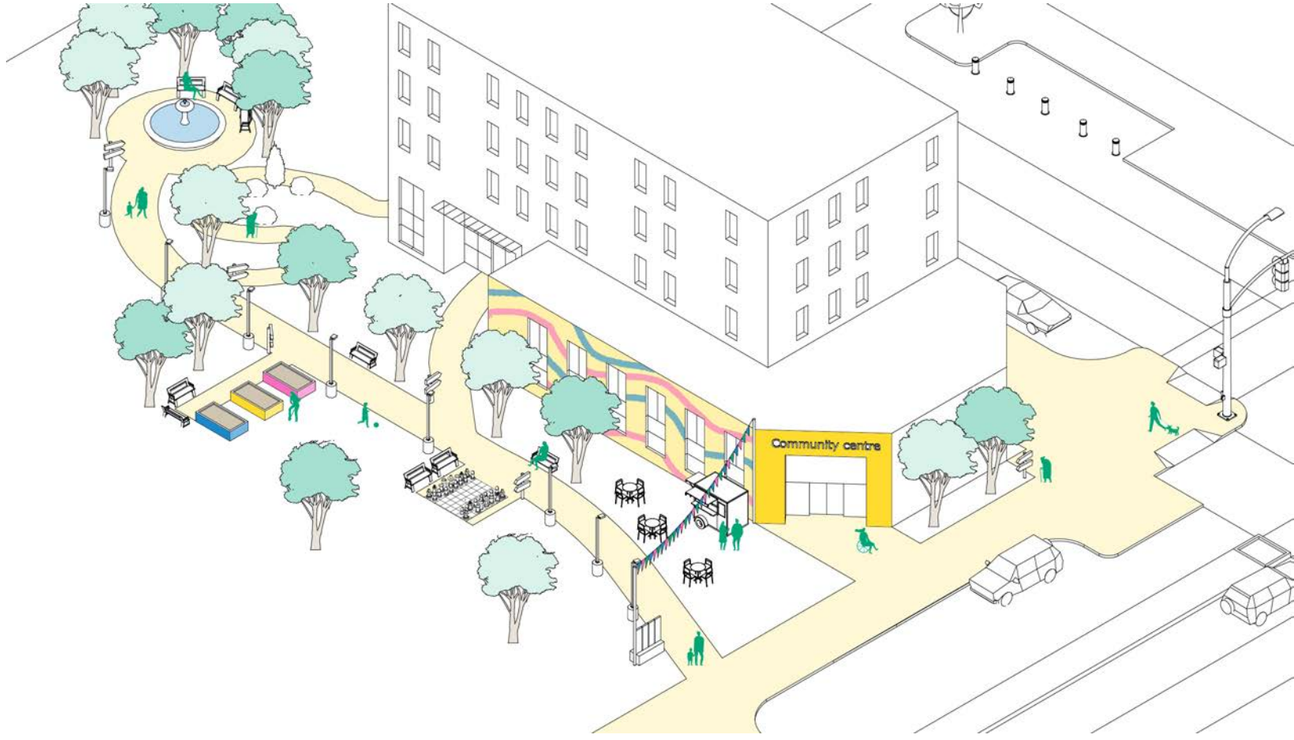
Construction of a new mixed-use development in downtown Edmonton. Photo: Dave Sutherland / Flickr

Pilot project idea: Dementia-inclusive path for walking and rolling

While implementing the guidelines in this document throughout an entire city may take time, municipalities can consider creating a dementia-inclusive path in their community as a pilot project and starting point for age- and dementia-inclusive design. This would involve creating, at minimum, one walking route in each city or neighbourhood that prioritizes the design strategies and actions in this document.

This type of project can allow municipalities to pilot age- and dementia-inclusive design strategies, raise awareness in the community, reduce stigma around dementia, and provide an enjoyable and comfortable walking and rolling route. The path(s) can use creative signage, colours, and branding and integrate with parks, local shopping areas, community centres, and other destinations that people living with dementia may frequent.

This type of safe, comfortable, accessible walking path can be an enjoyable destination and travel route for kids, older adults, people with disabilities, and other community members more broadly.



4

Case studies

Case studies: Age- and dementia-inclusive design in practice

This chapter provides a series of case studies from around the world, illustrating how cities and communities have approached age- and dementia-inclusive planning and design. These projects show a diverse range of strategies to support older adults, people living with dementia, and their care partners.

The case studies are organized by category, including street design, parks, wayfinding, community engagement, and emergency preparedness. The lists below and the following pages indicate which examples focus specifically on the needs of people living with dementia, versus which apply to age-friendly cities and communities more broadly.

Age-friendly case studies:

- Street design toolkit (United States, p. 71)
- Silver zones (Singapore, p. 73)
- Parks and recreation for older adults (Canada, p. 81)
- Guided walking programs (Canada, p. 75)
- Age-friendly city planning (United Kingdom, p. 91)
- Senior advisory council (Canada, p. 92)
- Emergency preparedness guide for older adults (Canada, p. 95)
- Cooling centres (Canada, p. 97)

Dementia-inclusive case studies:

- Transit wayfinding (Singapore, p. 77)
- Wayfinding murals (Singapore, p. 79)
- Memory trails (Ireland & Netherlands, p. 83)
- Walking routes (Denmark, p. 85)
- Dementia-inclusive parks (Canada, p. 86)
- Dementia-inclusive public spaces (Singapore, p. 87)
- Men’s sheds (Australia, p. 89)
- Dementia-inclusive business program (Belgium, p. 93)

Previous page: Dementia-inclusive transit wayfinding at a bus station in Singapore. Photo: Dementia Singapore

Streets and transportation

Many older adults and people living with dementia do not drive, instead relying on walking, rolling, or public transit to get around. However, not all streets feel safe and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities. Some streets lack sidewalks, while others do not have accessible features, such as curb cuts, tactile indicators, audio cues, and safe crossings. In addition to safe sidewalks and paths, traffic calming and slow speeds ensure that people feel comfortable walking, rolling, and biking around the neighbourhood.

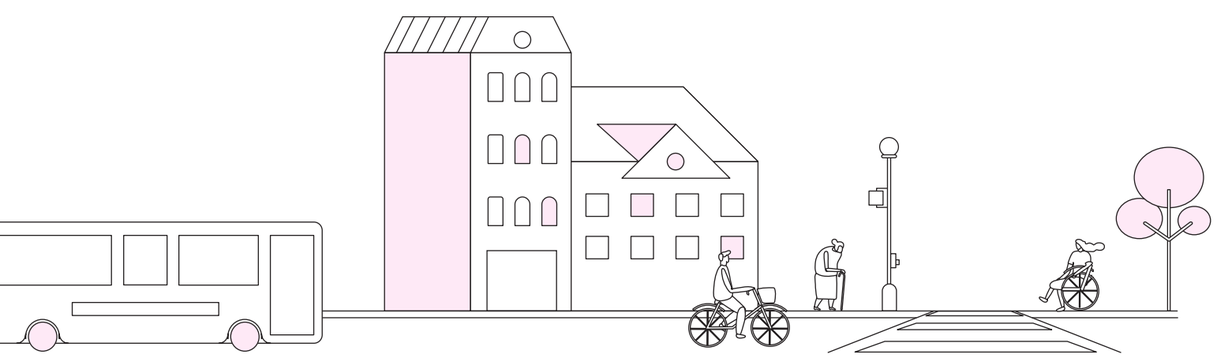
Safe, comfortable streets help build strong social connections in a community. People are more likely to see neighbours and familiar faces when they can easily walk or roll to destinations close to home. Regular social interactions help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, which older adults and people living with dementia may be at risk of. At the detailed design scale, supportive amenities—such as benches, trees, weather protection, lighting, signage, and public art—help create vibrant, familiar streets where people can linger and feel connected to public life, supporting a stronger sense of community and belonging.

Relevance to the guidelines

Strategy 1.2. Street grids
Strategy 1.4. Transit routes

Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths & sidewalks
Strategy 2.2. Pedestrian crossings
Strategy 2.4. Transit stops
Strategy 2.5. Parking and drop-off

Strategy 3.1. Seating
Strategy 3.3. Placemaking
Strategy 3.4. Public toilets
Strategy 3.5. Signage
Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments
Strategy 3.7. Grade (level) changes
Strategy 3.8. Lighting



Age-friendly case study

Street design toolkit

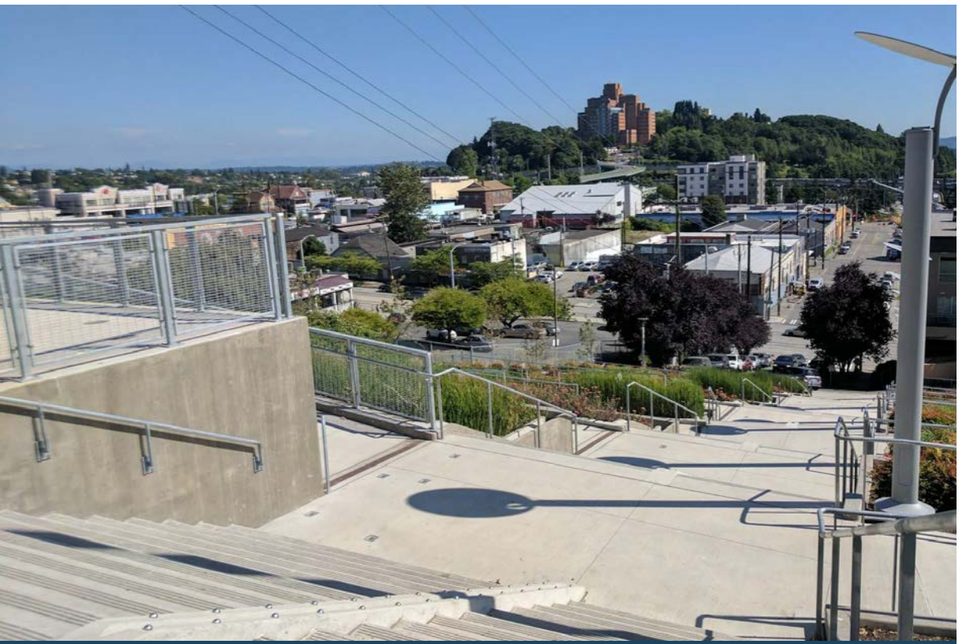
Seattle, USA

Challenge: Seattle has many steep hills, bridges, and waterways. These physical barriers make active transportation difficult, with many people relying on private vehicles to get around. Frequent rainy weather poses added challenges for walking and rolling.

Solution overview: Many older adults rely on walking as their main mode to access basic services. To address this, the City's Department of Transportation (DOT) developed the Seattle Age-Friendly Street Design Toolkit, providing a series of resources and recommendations for age-friendly street design. The toolkit helps residents, developers, and policy makers understand how to make streets inclusive to all ages and abilities.

The recommendations include design standards for street crossings, traffic calming, pedestrian clear zones, weather protection, wayfinding, and street furniture. The DOT also developed two maps—one that shares which areas need to be prioritized for age-friendly street design, and one that helps residents decide on the most accessible route for them, taking into account slopes, construction detours, missing curb ramps, and other obstacles.

Pedestrian clear zones provide a wide walking path clear of any furnishings or obstacles. The path meets the minimum requirements needed for people who walk or roll. Awnings also help make sure that the path remains dry. Photo: Seattle Department of Transportation



Hill climb assists are prominent in Seattle to help access the hilly city. Climb assists include elevators, sloped paths, bicycle wheel tracks, and stairs to help people access areas with steep grades. Photo: Seattle Department of Transportation

An intersection crossing in Singapore with low curbs, tactile warning strips, and reduced traffic speeds. Photo: Singapore Land Transport Authority

Age-friendly case study

Silver zones

Singapore

Challenge: Singapore found that older adults were disproportionately represented in pedestrian traffic incidents, accounting for more than 80% of fatal traffic incidents involving pedestrians in 2020.

Solution overview: Singapore introduced “silver zones” with age-friendly road safety features in areas with a high proportion of car-pedestrian collisions. The silver zones aim to improve safety for older adults and individuals with reduced mobility.

Specific design strategies include narrow or winding roads to slow cars down, large centre medians for pedestrians to pause on if needed, reduced speed limits, and no-barrier bus and taxi stops.

The Singapore Land Transport Authority found that the silver zones initiative reduced road accidents by about 80%.

Placemaking played an important role in this strategy, with an emphasis on creating spaces for resting and connecting at major crossing points. Singapore also developed the “green man plus” program, which provides older residents with a card that they can tap on a card reader at traffic light poles, giving them more time to cross the street.

In Singapore, older adults receive a special card, known as “green man plus” that they can tap to extend crossing times at intersections. Photo: Singapore Land Transport Authority

Age-friendly case study

Guided walking programs

Surrey, Canada

Challenge: Older adults can feel lonely or disconnected from their neighbourhoods.

Solution overview: The City of Surrey introduced the WALKit Activity Program in 2021 with the objectives of supporting older adults in healthy and active mobility, and encouraging older residents to be more connected to their neighbourhoods and wider community.

The WALKit Activity Program connects older adults to Surrey's neighbourhoods, with guided routes designed to provide participants with community information about services and programs that support the City's aging in place model, including where to find the local primary care centre, tips on pedestrian safety, or where to find a local library or activity centre. The walking routes aim to accommodate people of all abilities. In 2025, Surrey is introducing a gentler walking program for individuals who may be new to exercise or experience limited mobility.

The program takes place year-round on a weekly basis, and is offered in English, Punjabi, and Mandarin. An average of 20 to 30 participants join the program on a weekly basis. Since its inception, an estimated 1,400 have participated.

The basis of this program came from the WALKit web map project, where the City created a map of Surrey that shows the walkability and accessibility of streets, including sidewalks (e.g. their condition and material), proposed neighbourhood routes, major bus stops, areas of interest, and trails.

A guided walk organized by the WALKit program. Photo: City of Surrey

Dementia-inclusive case study

Transit wayfinding

Singapore

Challenge: Transit networks and stations can be difficult to navigate for people living with dementia, as they may have trouble remembering transit routes, may feel disoriented, or may find it difficult to communicate where they need to go.

Solution overview: Dementia Singapore collaborates with Singapore transit authorities to help people living with dementia navigate around major bus exchanges and subway stations.

At Toa Payoh Bus Interchange, wayfinding was created through engagement with people living with dementia. Each bus berth has its own colour and painted icon associated with it. The painted icons depict popular childhood games and activities, helping people find where they need to go while triggering memories. Signs are placed on the walls, floors, and overhead for easy navigation.

In Singapore, all 17 bus interchanges and 98 MRT stations are designated as "Go-to Points"—safe places where community members can bring people living with dementia who appear to be lost and need help finding their way home. Staff are trained to help people reunite with caregivers and provide information and resources on dementia.

Painted icons and clear numbers help people find bus routes at a busy transit interchange. Photo: Dementia Singapore

Parks and placemaking

Parks and public spaces support mental and physical health, facilitate social connection, and offer important neighbourhood destinations for everyone, including older adults and people living with dementia. As hubs of neighbourhood activity, they help to build a sense of place, offering familiar, distinct places and opportunities for intercultural and intergenerational connections.

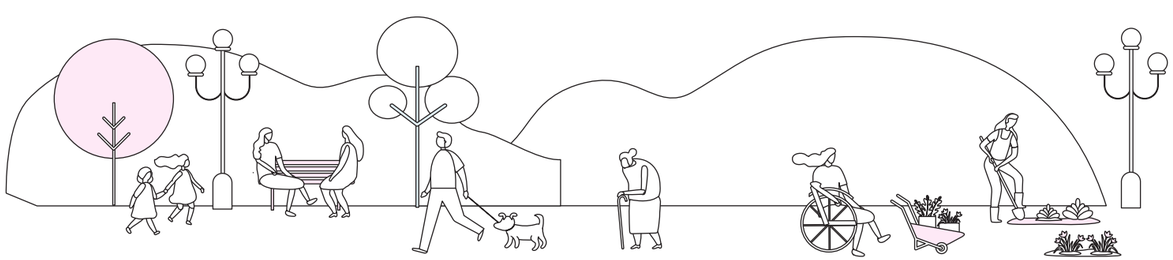
In particular, people living with dementia benefit from safe outdoor destinations where they can socialize and maintain connections to the community. Social activities and programming at parks and other public spaces help animate community gathering places and offer ways for everyone to participate.

Relevance to the guidelines

Strategy 1.5. Open spaces

Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths and sidewalks

Strategy 3.1. Seating
Strategy 3.3. Placemaking
Strategy 3.4. Public toilets
Strategy 3.5. Signage
Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments
Strategy 3.7. Grade (level) changes
Strategy 3.8. Lighting
Strategy 3.10. Vegetation



Age-friendly case study

Parks and recreation for older adults

Saanich, Canada

Challenge: Approximately 25% of Saanich adults over 65 years old live alone. Older residents often lack spaces and opportunities for recreation, and want to stay connected and contribute to their wider community. In particular, the District of Saanich heard from older adults that services were often too expensive or difficult to get to and find, with cost being the primary factor behind why older adults were not using recreational facilities.

Solution overview: The District of Saanich developed a Parks and Recreation Older Adult Strategy, aiming to better meet the needs of older adults and connect them to parks and recreational facilities. Created after an accessibility audit of their facilities, the plan provides wide-ranging strategies, including developing programming for older adults and improving the physical and visual accessibility of facilities.

The District has since made upgrades to the trail network to improve accessibility and has developed small outdoor walking loops in several parks.

Accessible programming is also core to the strategy. The District offers the Leisure Involvement-for Everyone (L.I.F.E.) program, allowing people with low incomes to access recreation in Saanich and the Greater Victoria area at a low cost, with options for free drop-in programs. There are weekly free walking programs and guided group walks for older adults in local parks, as well as a community gardening program.

A looping pathway at Horner Park in Victoria, B.C. The pathway is half a kilometre long, with seating along the way for residents to sit and rest when needed. Photo: District of Saanich

A collaboration with the City of White Rock and the Peace Arch Hospital, the Generations Playground encourages physical activity for all ages and abilities. The playground, complete with fall protection surfacing, has an exercise station, a wheelchair-accessible play area, as well as an area for sensory play. Photo: Peace Arch Hospital Foundation

Dementia-inclusive case study

Memory trails

Challenge: People living with dementia often retain long-term memories better than short-term ones. Memories are tied to places and objects, and can be triggered by the sight of something familiar. But as cities change, physical reminders of the past disappear. Overall, our cities lack safe spaces for people living with dementia to spend time in the community.

Solution overview: Memory trails provide a safe opportunity for people living with dementia and their care partners to spend time in nature, celebrate heritage, and connect with the community.

Cavan, Ireland

The Reminiscence Walking Trail (Bóithrín na Smaointe) is a public walking trail in Cavan, Ireland which places memorabilia in a local park along a one-kilometre walking circuit, and includes outdoor exercise equipment.

Arnem, Netherlands

The Dutch Open Air Museum partnered with Alzheimer Netherlands and other partners to create “House of Remembrance” that brings people back to the 1960s and 70s through music, food, scents, and architecture.

A bench along the Reminiscence Walking Trail. Photo: The Alzheimer Society of Ireland

Dementia-inclusive case study

Walking routes

Denmark

Challenge: People living with dementia can experience difficulties with finding their way around the neighbourhood. Stigma and lack of awareness pose challenges for people living with dementia to stay connected to their communities. Without safe paths and places to visit, people may gradually abandon visiting community spaces, which can negatively impact their health.

Solution overview: Dementia-inclusive walking routes offer safe spaces for people living with dementia and their care partners to spend time and enjoy fresh air. A well-designed solution can also foster community awareness and understanding. Several Danish municipalities have installed bright purple “Forget Me Not” benches to raise awareness about dementia and reduce stigma.

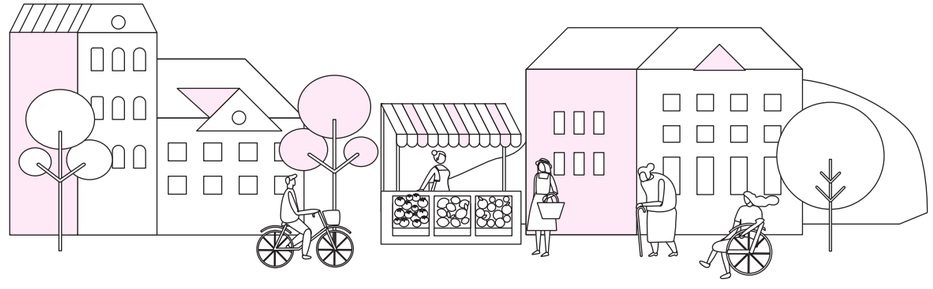
Each bench shares information about dementia, including prevention, signs of dementia, quotes, first-person stories, and more. The benches have QR codes that people can scan to learn more.

The benches are placed along accessible walking and rolling routes, creating a destination and encouraging individuals living with dementia and their caregivers to take leisurely walks, observe others, and appreciate nature.

In Vanløse in Copenhagen, the municipality placed six benches around a neighbourhood park, next to playgrounds, a museum, and a lake. In Aarhus, the walking route travels between benches placed at local destinations and landmarks, including City Hall, local parks, the botanical gardens, and a historic church.

Purple benches along the Aarhus Forget Me Not route. Photos: Aarhus Kommune / Demensvenlig By Aarhus

Purple benches along the Aarhus Forget Me Not route. Photos: Aarhus Kommune / Demensvenlig By Aarhus



Dementia-inclusive case study

Dementia-inclusive parks

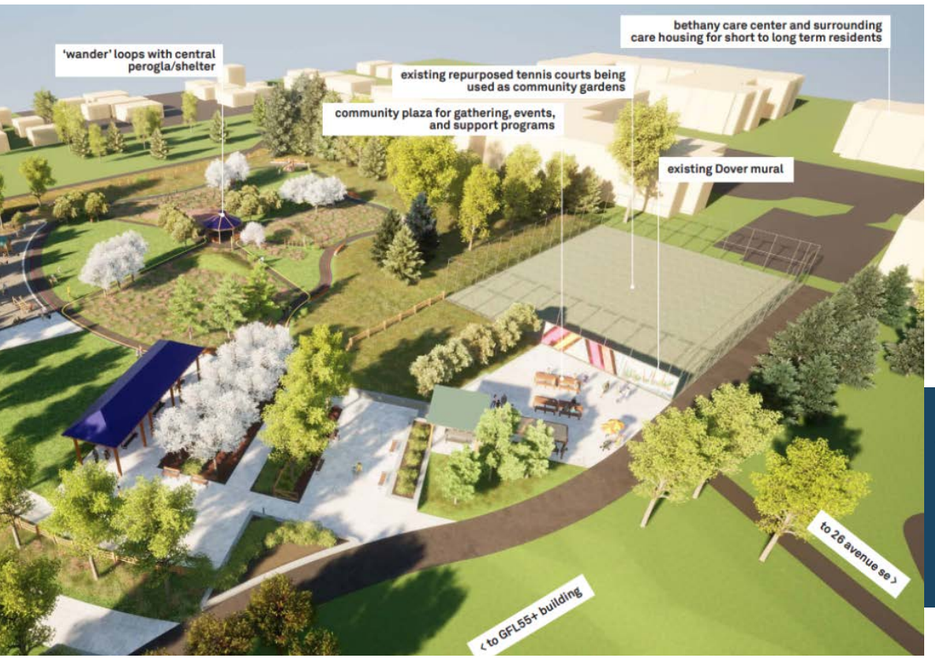
Calgary, Canada

Challenge: Natural areas can be difficult for people living with dementia to visit without features such as accessible pathways, clear signage, seating, toilets, and calm spaces to pause and rest.

Solution overview: The Dementia Network Calgary and Parks Foundation Calgary are proposing to create a new dementia-inclusive park. The project is in the early stages of development, but will include:

- Wide, brightly coloured pathways and maps for good wayfinding
- Hedges to guide people along walking trails
- Placemaking features, including areas for community concerts and games
- Seating areas to listen to nature (e.g. birds)

The project aims to increase access to nature and community for people living with dementia, supporting wellbeing and inclusion. The concept was created through multiple engagement sessions with people living with dementia and their care partners.



Rendering of the proposed dementia-inclusive park. Illustration: Dementia Network Calgary

Dementia-inclusive case study

Dementia-inclusive public spaces

Singapore

Challenge: People with moderate stages of dementia can continue to navigate their daily lives and familiar neighbourhoods independently. It is important to engage people with lived experience to implement design interventions and measure the success of public spaces.

Solution overview: Frequent and informal gathering spaces can serve as destinations close to home and provide opportunities for intergenerational connections. These spaces help people living with dementia maintain connections to their community and can also help people orient themselves in the neighbourhood.

This design and research project engaged the local community in creative ways to understand people's perceptions of public space and to design interventions. The research team selected two pilot sites, both under-utilized hard court public spaces in a neighbourhood with a high percentage of older adults. The resulting projects transformed the public spaces into gathering places with colourful designs and multiple activity corners.

Each court was designed to strengthen mental maps, minimize sensory overload, and integrate people living with dementia with the community. The courts offer opportunities to exercise the body and brain through fun activities, such as mobility games and gardening. The project also includes wayfinding and seating nodes that connect the two courts with the wider community.

The Blue Court includes bright colours, many different games and seating areas, and clear wayfinding. Photos: The Centre for Liveable Cities, Ministry of National Development, Singapore

Dementia-inclusive case study

Wayfinding murals

Singapore

Challenge: Over 80% of older adults (age 65+) in Singapore live in public housing apartments, also known as HDB. However, Singapore's large public housing estates can be difficult to navigate, particularly for people living with dementia. These HDBs often include several apartment blocks of multi-storey housing, many of which look very similar one to the next.

Solution overview: Dementia Singapore led a project to improve wayfinding in several public housing estates, in collaboration with the local community and people with lived experience. At one HDB estate in Ang Mo Kio, the community came together to paint murals of familiar, well-loved food items on each building, next to the building number, to help people living with dementia recognize their building.

The murals are painted strategically at key decision-making points and junctures throughout the site to help with orientation and wayfinding. They include a maximum of three colours to reduce confusion. Dementia Singapore has since expanded the mural program to other HDB estates around the city.

Murals of popular local foods are painted on the walls of each apartment block to help people find their way. Photos: Dementia Singapore

A volunteer painting a mural on the walls of each apartment block to help people find their way. Photos: Dementia Singapore

Community-led neighbourhood planning

Community engagement is crucial to building spaces that are meaningful and appropriate for the people that they serve. Older adults and people living with dementia experience their neighbourhoods in ways that differ from other community members. Learning from their experience is important to creating cities that are inclusive for all ages and abilities.

All the case studies in this chapter include various forms of community engagement, and are guided by the input and experiences of older adults, people living with dementia, and their care partners. The following two case studies provide more in-depth examples of cities that have integrated engagement with older adults in a long-term, systemic manner.

Relevance to the guidelines

Strategy 1.1. Land use designation

Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths & sidewalks
Strategy 2.4. Transit stops

Strategy 3.1. Seating
Strategy 3.3. Placemaking
Strategy 3.4. Public toilets
Strategy 3.5. Signage
Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments
Strategy 3.7. Grade (level) changes

Age-friendly case study

Senior advisory council

Richmond, Canada

Challenge: Richmond has one of the fastest-growing older adult populations in the Greater Vancouver area. The City recognized a need to improve the design of its built environment for an aging population, and wanted to ensure that changes were driven by community feedback.

Strategy overview: Richmond created an ambassador program, known as the Senior Advisory Council, in which community members act as liaisons between older adults and the city. The ambassadors meet regularly in their neighbourhoods with other local residents, and will either go on walking tours of their neighbourhood or meet in local community centres to share their experiences of how they move through their neighbourhoods. Through this program, the City has been able to address specific concerns within the community, such as implementing changes to a busy intersection and making specific sidewalks more walkable.

This program has helped create connections with the community, while providing opportunities for physical activity. Through this program, the City involves older adults in city planning processes, while sharing information about existing programs and services.

Richmond also has an Accessibility Advisory Committee, building on requirements from the Accessible British Columbia Act.

Age-friendly case study

Age-friendly city planning

Manchester, United Kingdom

Challenge: The City of Manchester identified that older adults are disproportionately impacted by inequality and social isolation, with nearly 60% of older adults living in lower-income neighbourhoods with limited resources and infrastructure.

Strategy overview: In 2003, Manchester committed to becoming an age-friendly city, implementing a strategy for building age-inclusive neighbourhoods. The City has a dedicated age-friendly department, which focuses on building age-friendly neighbourhoods, providing age-friendly services, promoting age equality, and integrating older adults in governance and engagement.

One example is the City's community-based infrastructure building program. Older adults are actively engaged with this program and encouraged to work with their communities to address areas where Manchester could improve its public realm and built environment. The City provides small neighbourhood grants for projects that improve accessibility. Over 5,000 people have participated in this program, and roughly $220,000 has been allocated to community-led projects since the program launch. This initiative builds sense of belonging and purpose for older adults, inviting them to participate in solving the problems they see in their community and create positive change.

Additionally, the City has worked with the University of Manchester to implement the Urban Village Model in two neighbourhoods, helping to build social networks through community-based programming. The programs aim to build intergenerational and intercultural collaboration, including an art group, a gardening group, a church group, a choir, and cooking groups.

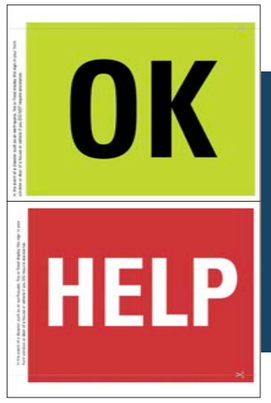
Manchester has since become the first city in the United Kingdom to be a WHO-accredited, age-friendly city.

Community programs and resilience

Community programming plays a crucial role in supporting age- and dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods.

The built environment lays the foundation for inclusive communities, by providing safe, comfortable, accessible, familiar, distinct, and legible spaces. Community programs help activate these spaces and encourage use, inviting older adults, people living with dementia, and others to participate in community life. The built environment provides spaces for these community programs to take place in, and should ensure that people do not face barriers in accessing neighbourhood programs, activities, and services.

Community programs can offer practical services, as well as social or recreational activities and opportunities to learn new skills and hobbies. As extreme weather events become more common, there is also a growing focus on community programs that support emergency preparedness and community resilience.



Excerpts from an emergency preparedness guide, which invites older adults to put these signs on their windows in the event of a natural disaster. Photo: City of Surrey

Age-friendly case study

Emergency preparedness guide for older adults

Surrey, Canada

Challenge: Older adults can face challenges with limited mobility and some experience chronic health conditions. In addition, a high proportion live on their own, which can create vulnerability during extreme weather and other emergencies.

Solution overview: The City of Surrey developed an Emergency Preparedness Guide for older adults prepare and create a clear plan for what to do during an emergency. The guide provides safety tips and template documents that people can fill out with important information, such as emergency contacts, medication lists, and family members. The guide also includes signage for individuals to put on their windows, allowing them to signal if they need help during an emergency.

The City disseminated the guide widely in the community with the help of emergency personnel visiting individuals at their homes.

Age-friendly case study

Extreme-heat neighbourhood resilience program

Vancouver, Canada

Challenge: Older adults are disproportionately at risk during extreme heat events. After a heat dome in 2021, British Columbia's chief coroner reported that the highest number of deaths occurred among older adults who had chronic health conditions or lived on their own.

Solution overview: Launched in 2017, the City of Vancouver's Resilient Neighbourhood Program works with community organizations to develop and support plans for emergency preparedness, climate adaptation, and social connection.

In one initiative, the City developed an extreme heat toolkit, providing guidelines for local organizations to prepare and support residents during extreme heat events.

Neighbourhood houses and local organizations have become important community hubs during extreme heat events.

For example, they help distribute essential supplies, serve as dedicated cooling spaces, and offer games, food, movies, and other activities to draw people in. Some neighbourhood houses also offer land-based cooling programs for Indigenous Elders.

Neighbourhood houses also run peer-support programs, organizing volunteers to conduct heat check-ins on older adults, and offering resources in different languages to explain heat risks and what to do during emergencies. During heat check-ins, volunteers distribute cool kits, fans, coolers, and cold drinks to at-risk residents.

A volunteer distributes a cool kit during a heat wave in Vancouver. Cool kits provide essential items, such as electrolyte powder, n95 masks, sunscreen, baseball hats, thermometers, fans, and guidelines to stay safe. Photo: City of Vancouver

Dementia-inclusive case study

Dementia-inclusive business program

Bruges, Belgium

Challenge: People living with dementia can experience confusion navigating around the neighbourhood and may face challenges when accessing local shops and services. These challenges can be due to a lack of wayfinding, accessibility features, or stigma from other community members.

Solution overview: Local businesses can play a crucial role in supporting people living with dementia to maintain autonomy and dignity—and offering help when needed.

Dementia-inclusive business programs offer training and resources to staff to learn how to better support people living with dementia, increase awareness, and reduce stigma.

Bruges has over 90 shops that are classified as dementia friendly. They display a logo of a red knotted handkerchief, which represents a traditional memory aid. The symbol signifies that staff can offer compassionate assistance to people living with dementia.

Foton, a charity that supports people living with dementia, engaged volunteers to distribute guides and conduct training with local businesses. In addition, the organization collaborated with the police force to build a database of residents who are prone to wandering. The initiatives aims to promote social inclusion and a positive image and understanding of people living with dementia.

A shop in Bruges displays the red knotted handkerchief sticker in a window, indicating that the business has been trained to assist people living with dementia. Photo: dementievriendelijk Brugge / Foton

Dementia-inclusive case study

Community men's sheds

Belrose, Australia

Challenge: Of all Australians aged 65 or older, about one in 10 develop dementia. People living with dementia, particularly men, face high levels of social isolation.

Solution overview: Dementia Australia partnered with the Australian Men's Shed association to provide guidance on making men's sheds inclusive to people living with dementia. The men's sheds provides a woodworking and hobbies workshop facility and drop-in centre for retired and older men, where they can meet and socialize with others while working on creative projects. The sheds offer a space to stay connected while also stimulating the brain.

A group photo of the Men's Shed in Belrose. Photo: The Forest Community Men's Shed

Additional case studies

- Chatty benches — Gothenburg, Sweden
- Walker rally — Gothenburg, Sweden
- Life filming — Gothenburg, Sweden
- Exercise parks for older adults — China
- Age-friendly Portland action plan — Portland, USA
- Memory garden — Portland, USA
- Age-friendly strategy — Revelstoke, Canada

Men's Sheds, such as this one in Kellerberring, Australia, offer important community hubs. The initiative started in Australia in the 1980s to improve the health and social wellbeing of older men. There are over 900 locations in Australia, and many more around the world including Canada, the United States, Finland, Ireland, United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Greece. Photo: Bahnfrend / Wikimedia Commons

Additional resources

Dementia-inclusive resources

- Dementia-inclusive Streets and Community Access, Participation, and Engagement Video — DemSCAPE BC
- Dementia resources — Alzheimer Society of BC
- Age and dementia friendly streetscapes toolkit — Moonee Valley, Australia
- Creating a dementia-friendly neighbourhood — Centre for Liveable Cities, Singapore
- Designing dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods — SFU Community Engaged Research Initiative
- How to design a dementia-inclusive community — Happy Cities
- How street art in Singapore is helping people with dementia get around — Reasons to be Cheerful

Age-friendly resources

- National programmes for age-friendly cities and communities: a guide — World Health Organization
- Age-friendly rural and remote communities: A guide — Government of Canada
- Age-friendly environments in Europe: Indicators, monitoring and assessments — World Health Organization
- Placemaking for an aging population: Guidelines for senior-friendly parks — UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs
- Building social connections toolkit for multi-unit housing: Age-friendly edition — Happy Cities
- What makes an age-friendly home? — Happy Cities
- Cities alive: Designing for ageing communities — Arup
- Engaging seniors in age-friendly planning — City of Richmond, Canada

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