

***Designing for Dementia* Conference
Summary of Feedback from Evaluation
Focus Group**

**Initiative #4: Planning for Appropriate, Safe and
Secure Environments
Ontario's Strategy for Alzheimer Disease and
Related Dementias**

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Background

In order to obtain some additional information on the *Designing for Dementia* Conference, a group of repeat participants (i.e., individuals who had attended two or more of the *Designing for Dementia* conferences) were invited to participate in an evaluation focus group. The focus group was held at the conference on Friday, May 10 during the breakfast hour.

A total of 17 individuals were invited to participate in the focus group. Of these, 14 indicated that they would attend and 3 indicated that they would try to attend. The majority of those invited to participate were from long-term care facilities (N=10). Others who were invited to participate were from: Alzheimer Chapters (N=4), Psychiatric Hospitals (N=1), and community agencies (N=1). One architect was invited to participate.

The focus group participants were very willing to share their ideas and suggestions on the conference. The following is a summary of the feedback obtained.

Summary of Feedback

- Overall, the focus group participants recognized the amount of time and effort that was put into the organization of the conferences, and wanted the organizing committee to know that this was appreciated.
- During the focus group, there were a number of issues that participants raised, as well as a variety of suggestions to consider for future conference. These issues and suggestions have been summarized according to the following categories: content; design issues; focus; format; and other. Each area is discussed below.

i) Content:

- There was a consensus among the focus group members that they wanted the information presented at the conference to be “practical”. There was some concern about the “shift” that had taken place with the conference from the practical to the theoretical.
 - Specifically, the group suggested that they would like to know more about issues such as: colour; how design affects behaviour; results from pilot projects; information about the demographic characteristics of those involved in pilot projects so the audience can determine the generalizability of results; and suggestions on ways to make the best use of the limited funds that are available in facilities/agencies.
- In addition, many of the participants were interested in learning about what things were happening within their own communities (i.e., within Ontario).
- To assist with this, it was suggested that at each conference opportunities be available for previous participants to share information on their experience with implementing something they had learned about at a previous conference. In other words, have a feedback loop set up so participants could see what things were learned and applied successfully from previous conferences.

ii) Design Issues:

- There was a great deal of discussion related to design issues. Some participants expressed a concern about the fact that many of the presentations dealt with the design of new buildings, which was often not a reality for those in attendance. Instead, many participants were interested in finding out the best ways to improve existing buildings, units, etc.
- A number of participants discussed the importance of involving those from the front-line in the planning process for new buildings. Some were frustrated about not having front-line people involved in planning processes or not having front-line staff listened to when they were involved. However, a few participants indicated that they had been involved in situations where these things did occur. It was suggested that these “successful” situations be examined and best practices/lessons learned identified.
 - One participant suggested that in some situations there may be an “information gap” between the client and architect and, as a result, there is a lack of understanding regarding what the architect has proposed. It was suggested that certain techniques (such as 3-D sequences and using open-space technology) could help to alleviate these issues.
- Another issue that was raised had to do with administrative support. Two specific issues were identified. First, if a facility is to undergo change, those who can *cause* change (i.e., building owners, administrators) need to be involved and on-board (and perhaps at attendance at conferences like these). Many of those who attend the conference are care providers, and often feel they are not able to affect change without the support of administration. Second, when design changes *are* made, administration needs to support these changes. For example, a facility may put in a beautiful garden, but administration needs to help promote the active use of the garden.

iii) Focus:

- Many of the points raised by the focus group participants highlighted the importance of being clear about the theme of the conference. With the reported “shift” in the focus on the conference over time, participants were unclear about the goals of the conference. This lack of clarity resulted in some uncertainty about the conference’s target audience.
- The participants recommended that the organizing committee be clear about the theme/goals of the conference, and that this information should be shared with potential attendees so that the most appropriate audience could attend.

iv) Format:

- A number of comments were made about the format of the conference.
- In terms of the length of the conference, the focus group suggested that one day may be sufficient, perhaps two days depending on the speakers.
- It was suggested that sessions by architects be moved to the concurrent sessions since this type of information is not applicable to all conference participants.

- It was also suggested that the sessions be more interactive, with more opportunity for discussion and questions. Those involved in the focus group were very interested in learning what techniques/ideas were applicable in their own environments and, therefore, wanted opportunities to ask more questions so they could make these determinations.
- As previously discussed, the group wanted to learn about what is happening locally, and how information from previous conferences has been used in local settings.
 - Having a poster session was suggested as one way to share this type of information. It was also suggested as a way to promote networking – which was desired by the group.
- The group also had some suggestions regarding the conference exhibitors. Specifically, they wanted more exhibitors and exhibitors who could share information about products that are available for their settings. They also suggested that book displays/publishers be included as exhibitors.
- The group reported that they liked having the Conference Proceedings because it provided information on all of the sessions from the conference. They suggested that having a delegate list with contact information would also be very helpful.

v) Other Comments:

- Some comments were made about the importance of having the conference seen as being “professional”. For example, it is important to ensure that the speakers are happy, and that AV equipment is available and in good working order. When there are problems in these areas it often leaves a bad impression of the conference.
- There were a few suggestions related to the evaluation. First, at least one participant suggested that the evaluation form provide participants with an opportunity to assess the quality of each speaker. Second, it was suggested that evaluations could be completed at the end of each session, since the information presented in the session would be “fresh” and, therefore, more reflective of the quality and content of the session.

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