



# **Work, life interrupted: Dementia in the workplace**

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- **Social Drivers**

- **Aging population**
- **Aging Workforce**
- **Dementia Increase**
- **Changing Households**

- **Social Impact**

- **Labor adjustments**
- **Health/social care redesign**
- **Caregiver Impact**
- **Marketplace**

# Dementia in the workplace

## Resources for employers and employees

Dementia in the work force is becoming more common. 14% of the population were seniors in 2009, that number will grow to **25% by 2036**.

- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias are diseases of the brain that affect memory, thinking and behaviour.
- Age is a risk factor for dementia.
- More older Canadians are working than was the case in the past.
- The disease can affect younger people as well.

The Alzheimer Society of Ontario has developed this resource for employers and employees as well as employees serving customers with dementia.



Employers of someone with dementia

What would you do if you thought one of your employees had dementia?

The following offers some advice



Employees who are caregivers for someone with dementia

What would you do if you're torn between responsibilities at work and the demands of supporting someone with dementia?

The following offers some advice



Employees with dementia

If you have been diagnosed with dementia and you're still working, you may be concerned about letting your employer know you have the disease.

The following offers some advice.



Businesses serving customers with dementia

The number of people with dementia in Ontario is growing rapidly. Your business will likely deal with more customers who have dementia.

The following offers some advice

# For employers



Employer of someone with dementia



Employees with dementia



Businesses serving customers with dementia



Employees who are caregivers for someone with dementia



Tools and resources

| [Signs that an employee has dementia](#) | [My employee has dementia](#) | [Ideas about accommodation](#) | [Legal obligations](#) | [Informing coworkers](#) | [Accommodating employed caregivers](#) |

## Signs that an employee may have dementia

Dementia is an umbrella term for a variety of brain disorders. Symptoms include loss of memory, judgment and reasoning and changes in mood and behaviour. Brain function is affected enough to interfere with a person's ability to function at work, in relationships and in everyday activities.

An employee with dementia may:

- Have difficulty with routine tasks
- Repeatedly ask the same questions
- Get lost or confused in familiar environments
- Display poor or decreased judgement
- Struggle to follow directions
- Exhibit changes in mood, behaviour and personality
- Have difficulty with abstract thinking
- Display loss of initiative

## Scenario: How would you respond?

Naresh is a long-standing employee. He has been uncharacteristically abrupt with customers and co-workers several times over the last couple of months. Normally very reliable, he has begun to miss important deadlines. The quality of his work has begun to slip.

There may be a number of underlying reasons for this change in behaviour. One possibility is dementia.

# For employees



**| Employee with dementia | Where to start | Approaching your employer | Legal rights and employer obligations | Asking for accommodations | Informing coworkers | Approaching your employer**

If you have dementia, you may want to tell your employer. Your employer may assume you aren't capable of fulfilling work responsibilities. This might not be the case:

- You may have valuable knowledge and skills.
- You may have applicable rights under the Employment Standards Act, Human Rights Code and Workers' Insurance Act.
- Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, your employer may adjust your role

You can disclose your condition to your employer to:

- Avoid waiting for declining job performance
- Show you have the company's interests at heart
- Avoid future misunderstandings
- Activate health benefits
- Leverage company assistance in planning for retirement

Prepare for a meeting with your employer to help ensure its success. When approaching your boss:

- Be prepared to discuss your capabilities.
- Be prepared to explain your challenges and limitations.
- Bring a list of proposed accommodations.
- You may want to discuss leave of absence options.
- Remind your employer of their legal obligations
- Learn about the disease. Your [local Alzheimer Society](#) can help.
- Consider other positions in the company better suited to your current abilities.

# Employed caregivers



Employers of someone with dementia



Employees with dementia



Businesses serving customers with dementia



Employees who are caregivers for someone with dementia



Tools and resources

| Employees who are caregivers | Approaching your employer | Asking for accommodations | Legal rights and HR policies |

## Approaching your employer

### Why your employer may accommodate your requests

As a caregiver, you may be hesitant to ask for time off work. However, your employer may consider such a request. For example, they may:

- Value your contributions to the company
- Want to demonstrate support for employed caregivers
- Have experience working with employed caregivers and know the benefits of an accommodating schedule
- Have obligations to you under the Employment Standards Act, Human Rights Code and Workers Insurance Act
- Recognise that you need time off work to manage your schedule and stress. High stress levels could lead to health problems that require extended sick leave and other financial liabilities for your employer.
- Recognise that courts are becoming increasingly intolerant of companies who ignore the effects of excessive workplace demands on employee stress levels and mental health
- Have experience with caregiving and sympathize with your situation

### Removing the stigma of dementia

You may be concerned about disclosing to your boss that a family member has dementia due to the attached stigma. But consider the following:

- Employers are becoming more familiar with dementia in the workplace.
- Employers are acquiring a better understanding of the needs of people with dementia and their caregivers.
- Many employers have experienced dementia within their own family.
- Being open about your situation is a step towards ending stigma.

### Going in prepared

Before approaching your boss, speak with your Human Resources department to learn about the company's policies regarding leave and other benefit programs.

# Customer service



| [Businesses serving customers with dementia](#) | [Tips for serving customers with dementia](#) | [Capacity and consent](#) | [How would you respond?](#) |

## Tips for serving customers with dementia

Here are tips for your staff when communicating with someone with dementia:

- Certain behaviours are easier to understand if you suspect the person has dementia.
- Genuine and calm reassurance will potentially bring about better outcomes. Communicate this with your tone of voice and body language.
- Repeated questions may be an indication of increased stress or confusion. Be reassuring and validate their emotions.
- Reminiscence and diversion may assist to calm someone down and establish feelings of security. Ask about their life history or distract with another point of focus.
- Use their name if possible. It reminds them you know who they are and that a connection has been established.
- Try not to react to what the person with dementia is saying. If possible be in the moment and connect with the person through acknowledging the insecurity felt.

Some other ideas to consider:

- Sharing information with others in your staff if you have repeat instances of someone with dementia using your services.
- Impact of the environment on people with dementia. People with dementia work well in familiar and consistent environments and even minor changes to routine can cause anxiety and agitation.
- Maybe designate somebody to learn about dementia so they are able to serve these customers better.



# Surveying employers: initial response

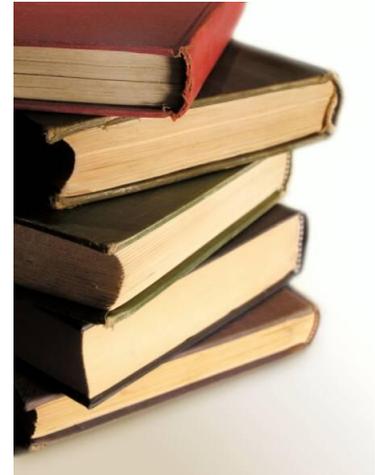
- Employers from a range of sectors
- Aware of growing DITW issue
- Very few had personally experienced it
- Work towards early retirement
- Indecision on how
  - deciding internally on a case by case basis
  - deferring to medical experts
- Interest in learning more





# Literature review

- **Online medical/psychological databases**
- **7924 articles retrieved**
- **Most about nurses/doctors in the dementia field**
- **Very few articles on DITW specifically**
  - **Some related to caregiving and workplace burden**
  - **Some are reviews highlighting dementia increases among employees**
  - **Only one DITW specific article that highlights lacking literature**
- **No appropriate indicators for:**
  - **transition out of the workforce**
  - **how best to do it for mutual benefit**
- **No adequate, academic Canadian-based literature on the subject**





# Case studies

- **False Diagnosis**
  - Ex: employee suspected of drug/alcohol use and sent for testing
- **Learning Difficulties**
  - Ex: employee had trouble learning how to use new software leading to verbal abuse from customers
- **Risk To Others**
  - Ex: an employee in an emergency medical position voluntarily retired for fear of hurting others
- **Maintenance Of Legacy**
  - Ex: employee voluntarily retired in order to avoid damage to reputation during progression
- **Misinformed Help**
  - Ex: employer providing employee with an easier job that requires new training



# Work in other countries



## Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin

- Efforts aimed at assisting employees/employers diagnosed with forms of Early Onset Dementia.
- [www.alzwisc.org](http://www.alzwisc.org)

## ACT On Alzheimer's- Minnesota

- Efforts aimed at local businesses to help them be more dementia friendly/conscious
- [www.ACTonALZ.org](http://www.ACTonALZ.org)

## Employment and dementia- Alzheimer's Society UK

- Efforts aimed at informing the public about the major issues facing dementia in the workplace and the sources for help.
- [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)



## Major issues

- **Stigma – social and personal**
- **Lack of experience**
- **Transition vs. accommodation**
- **Lack of information**



## Next steps

- Engage more of the 4 target groups in a “co-design” project
- Enhance website, resources and marketing
- Develop toolkits and e- learning resources/ opportunities for three themes
- Explore social innovation/entrepreneurship options for dissemination
- Partnership tools – eg. template business cases



**QUESTIONS?**



## **We can help:**

- Public Education Coordinators
- Support groups – individuals and groups
- Online and print resources

**[www.dementiaintheworkplace.ca](http://www.dementiaintheworkplace.ca)**

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