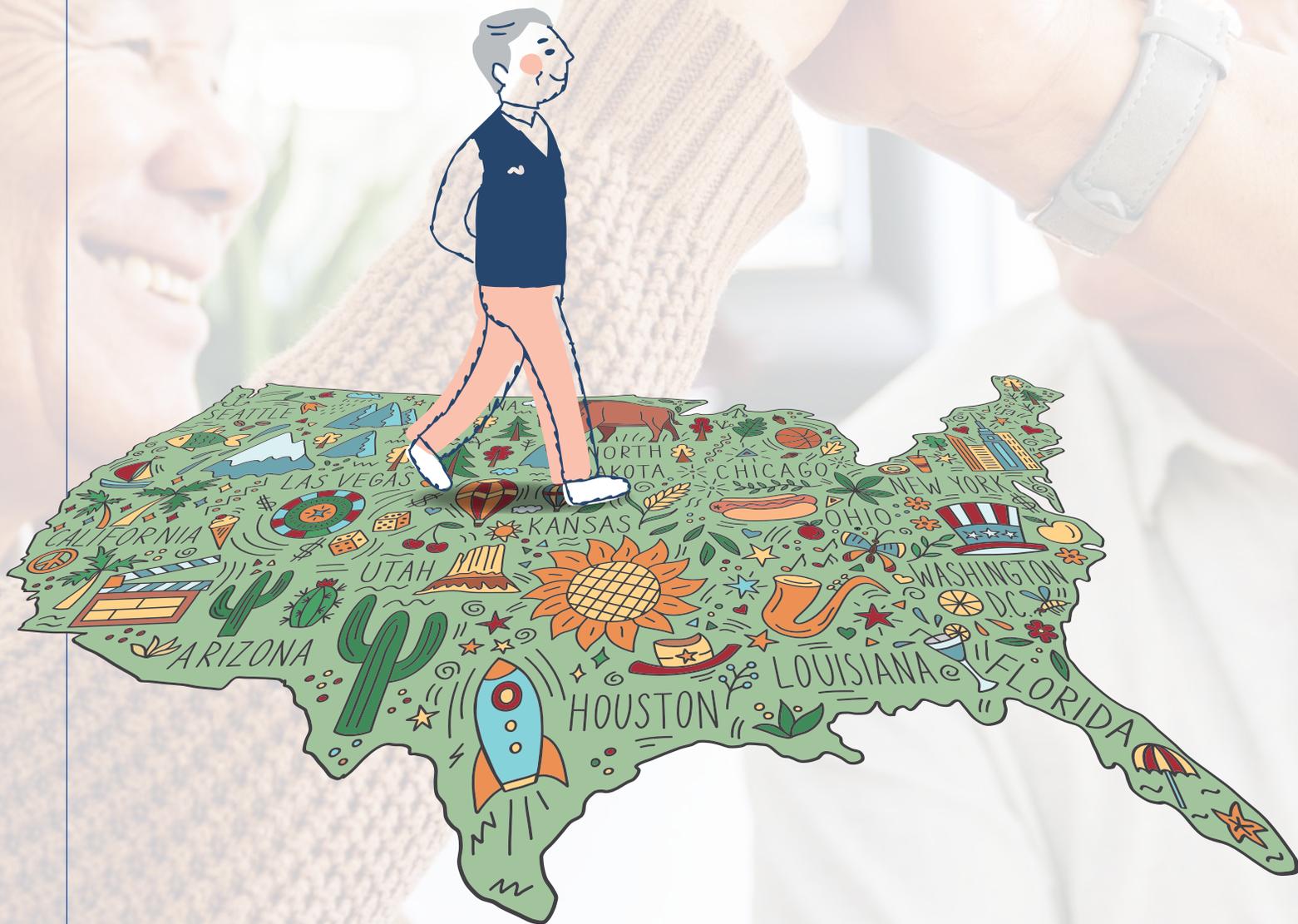


Creating a Dementia Friendly America

A call to action for Certified
Senior Advisors (CSAs)[®]
to join the movement.
BY ANNE DELORENZO, CSA





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As dementia becomes a more common part of the conversation between CSAs and their clients, it will be critical to stay abreast of the many complexities associated with the disease. This includes important initiatives designed to support those who have been diagnosed with some type of dementia, and their care partners, in our communities. Dementia Friendly America is one that is particularly noteworthy.

There are over one hundred different types of dementia, Alzheimer's being the most common (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.). According to the Alzheimer's Association, more than 7 million Americans are living with the disease. By 2050, the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's is expected to reach 13 million (Alzheimer's Association, 2024). For further perspective on the magnitude of the issue, every 3 seconds someone in the world develops dementia (Alzheimer's Disease International, n.d.).

That sobering prognosis is driven by baby boomers—a remarkably large generational cohort that's living longer and aging faster than any previous demographic. As the population ages, the need for all types of support services for older adults will all increase, such as healthcare, affordable housing, long term care services, transportation, and opportunities for continued employment and social engagement. The need for services specifically for those diagnosed with dementia and their care partners will increase dramatically. The

crisis becomes particularly clear when you consider that people with dementia can live from 8 to 10 years post diagnosis and sometimes more than twenty years, with symptoms and speed of cognitive decline varying greatly (Alzheimer's Association, 2024).

The cost of caring for those with Alzheimer's and other dementias is estimated to total \$360 billion in 2024, increasing to nearly \$1 trillion (in today's dollars) by mid-century (Alzheimer's Association, 2024). The question becomes how do we keep people living with dementia and their families engaged in our communities? These are potential clients for CSAs and important members of the older adult community.

Education and Advocacy Through DFA

First, it is important to understand age friendly versus dementia friendly, and how they are both similar and different. While both age friendly and dementia friendly designations aim to create inclusive environments for older adults, a key difference is that age friendly focuses on accommodating general needs of aging individuals, while dementia friendly specifically addresses the unique challenges faced by people living with dementia, including cognitive impairments and difficulties with navigation and communication. In short, a dementia-friendly environment goes beyond general age-friendly features to provide extra support and adaptations for those with dementia. Both can successfully partner and co-exist in the same communities.

WHO/AARP Age Friendly

The World Health Organization (WHO) and AARP work together to promote age-friendly communities in the United States. The AARP's affiliate network in the United States is part of the WHO's Global Network of age-friendly cities and communities. Communities that join the AARP network are automatically (but optionally) included in the WHO network.

AARP and the WHO developed a survey to help communities assess their needs and establish a baseline for how well older adults can age in place. The survey covers eight areas that influence the quality of life for older adults, including:

- Outdoor spaces and buildings
- Housing
- Transportation
- Social participation
- Respect and social inclusion
- Civic participation and employment
- Communication and information
- Community and health services

The AARP program typically takes five years with continuous optimization and improvement, as illustrated below (WHO & AARP, n.d.).

Dementia Friendly America (DFA)

DFA is a national network of communities, organizations, and individuals seeking to ensure that communities across the U.S. are equipped to support people living with dementia and their care partners. DFA envisions an America where individuals living with dementia can live, engage and thrive in the community no matter where they live.

The DFA movement began in September 2015 following the White House Conference on Aging when USAging became the administrator, spearheading the effort. The DFA model is based upon Minnesota's successful statewide initiative, ACT on Alzheimer's. DFA launched with 6 pilot communities and has expanded

a network of more than 400 communities that spans forty-three states.

DFA provides resources that support a multi-sector approach to becoming dementia friendly. There are opportunities for every sector and every individual to engage in dementia friendly efforts. DFA's community toolkit, sector guides and Dementia Friends sessions, interactive sessions for participants to learn more about dementia, have been integral resources for its network communities as they carry out their dementia-friendly action plans. "The interest in and passion for this work is there," says Mary Ek, Director of DFA. "We know that to act, individuals and communities need to be properly equipped. Our resources do just that."

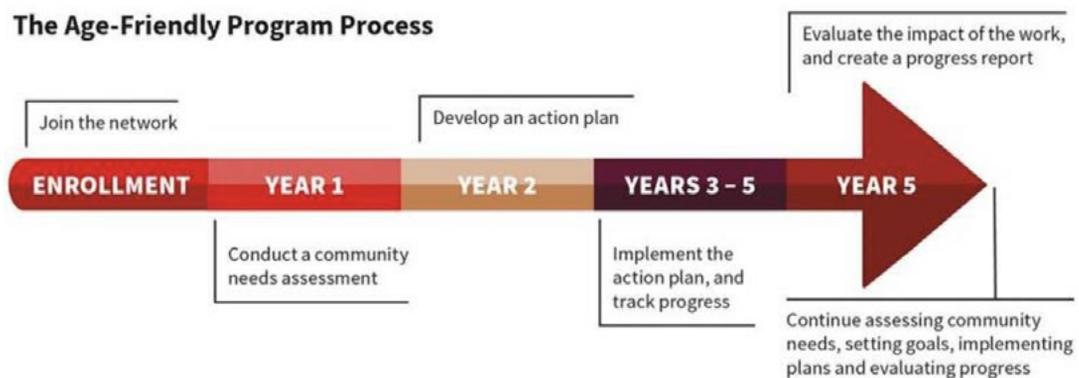
Subscribe to the DFA newsletter to learn more about DFA and what they offer to the dementia community. Go to: <https://dfamerica.org/newsletter-sign-up-form/>

DFA in Action: Greenwich, CT Becomes Dementia Friendly (+ Age Friendly)

The Town of Greenwich was the first in Connecticut to be designated as both age and dementia friendly by AARP, the WHO and DFA. Their Commission on Aging started with Age Friendly in 2017 and later integrated DFA in 2018.

Lori Contadino, Director and Municipal Agent for the Elderly for the town, was a key driver behind this major achievement. When asked about her motivation behind this work, she said, "We are all but temporarily able." This is a powerful and poignant reminder that DFA's mission will ultimately touch each of us and our families.

The vision is for a Greenwich that recognizes the specific needs of residents living with dementia, their family members, and their caregivers, creating a supportive community for those who are affected by the disease.



The Age and Dementia Friendly Action Plan has been developed based on a town-wide research survey and includes, but is not limited, to the following combination of current and future initiatives:

- Creating a variety of dementia-friendly environments that are welcoming to individuals with dementia, their families and their caregivers.
- Working on heightening awareness about dementia throughout the community to reduce stigma, increase understanding, and promote the interests and needs of individuals with dementia and their caregivers.
- Creating and promoting dementia caregiver support groups and classes.
- Offering Dementia Friends training sessions for a variety of community sectors.
- Working with health care providers to understand the importance of a proper and timely diagnosis.
- Working with all sub-committees of the Age-Friendly Advisory Board to make sure that all action items across all domains incorporate a dementia friendly lens.
- Encouraging age- and dementia-friendly businesses and organizations.
- Encouraging age- and dementia-friendly public spaces.
- Enhancing and further promoting the existing dementia programs and networks.

- Encouraging, promoting, and supporting new family and caregiver support initiatives.

To date, the Greenwich program has proven comprehensive and successful, and the work is ongoing. See the References section for how to access actual survey research results and Action Plan details.

DFA and Memory Cafes

Another community-based resource for those suffering with dementia and their caregivers are Memory Cafes. A Memory Cafe is a social gathering designed for individuals experiencing memory loss, along with their caregivers or loved ones, to connect, socialize, and build support networks in a safe and welcoming environment. They can be held in a variety of places like senior centers, libraries, small cafes or restaurants, or assisted living facilities. Typically, they are in places that do not have too much activity to distract the group. Memory cafes provide a mini respite for the caregivers, who can openly chat with others in the same situation while engaged in an activity with their loved one. During the pandemic, Memory Cafes had to be virtual and really lost their impact. Fortunately, they are now back to the original intention of in-person gatherings.

As of October of last year, a new national directory of Memory Cafes is now hosted by DFA. If you have a Memory Cafe you would like to list, you will need to



create a free account to register in the new directory. Go to: <http://www.MemoryCafedirectory.com>

The Voice of Someone Living with Dementia

Michael Ellenbogen is an International Dementia Advocate for those living with dementia. He is the author of *From the Corner Office to Alzheimer's* (2013), and he has been on the National Council for DFA since 2016. He has twenty-six thousand followers on LinkedIn and calls himself a disrupter. And, he has early onset Alzheimer's. His symptoms started at the age of thirty-nine and he had no diagnosis until 10 years later, despite ongoing medical evaluations and testing. It's very likely that the impact of dementia cost him his job, and just as significantly, his disability benefits.

Despite these and other challenges, Michael is dedicated to helping others living with dementia and specifically Alzheimer's. He has made many significant strides. When asked about what frustrates him most, his answer was society's tendency to focus on the "low hanging fruit" versus tackling things that will impact people living with dementia in the most meaningful ways. Michael's focus is most definitely the latter, what he refers to as the "high hanging fruit." An example is working to ensure that hospital personnel are trained and certified in caring for patients with dementia, not unlike what is already mandated for staff in assisted living facilities. There are studies that show the benefits of this type of training. Improving the hospital experience for patients with dementia aligns with the DFA mission to help them thrive in all types of community settings. He has written about this issue in detail for the *Mathews Journal of Neurology*.

Michael includes an inspiring message to the readers of his book: "Never give up your dreams and drive forward until the end. You can still make a difference. Try to advocate for the ones who cannot, because we will be them one day."

The Call to Action for CSAs

So why a call to action for CSAs to join the DFA movement? As Sandy Markwood, CEO of USAging and Chair of DFA puts it, "We want people to walk toward people living with dementia." Everyone has a role in creating dementia friendly communities. CSAs uniquely work with all different types of aging industry professionals, older adults and their caregivers. Their perspective is deep, and their circle of influence is wide. One suggestion is to start by becoming a Dementia Friend. The training is quick, easy, and provides practical ways to help those with dementia

in your community. Encourage your peers, colleagues, and clients to do the same. And know this: No matter the size of your first step, you'll be making a big difference. (Go to <https://dementiafriendsusa.org/become-a-dementia-friend>) •CSA

RESOURCES

DFA Newsletter: <https://dfamerica.org/newsletter-sign-up-form/>
From the Corner Office to Alzheimer's By Michael Ellenbogen
<https://www.amazon.com/Corner-Office-Alzheimers-Michael-Ellenbogen/dp/1493761900>

AgePros.Net, the only community bringing together every type of aging industry professional

<https://agepros.net>

US Against Alzheimer's

<https://www.usagainstalzheimers.org>

USAging

<https://www.usaging.org>



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