

LEE LI MING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

Japan Dementia Friendly Community

Overcoming Prejudices About Dementia¹

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In 2012, 4.6 million people aged at least 65 years were estimated to live with dementia in Japan, and the number would increase to 7 million by 2025 as the country's postwar baby boomers grow older (Fukawa, 2018). To tackle this alarming statistic, in 2019, the government set a numerical goal for the first time to reduce the number of people with dementia by 6 percent over the next six years, especially among people in their 70s. ² In January 2015, the Japanese government announced a new plan, the "New Orange Plan" that would be enacted from 2017 – 2025. Being outlined through country-wide surveys on people with dementia and their families, the centrepiece of the new plan will be the prevention of dementia and the creation of dementia-friendly communities (Box 1).

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

² Government wants to reduce dementia patient ratio by 6% among people in their 70s by 2025. Retrieved from <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20190515/p2a/00m/0na/004000c>. Accessed on 27 August 2020.

Box 1: Dementia-friendly community

A dementia-friendly community is a place where people with dementia are well respected and supported. Here, people have a good understanding of dementia and the need of those with dementia so that the latter can continue to live in the way they want to.



Source: “What is a dementia-friendly community?”. *Alzheimer’s Society*. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friendly-communities/whatdementia-friendly-community>. Accessed on 25 August 2020.

Japan’s Evolved Approach

Japan’s Dementia Policy goes as far back as the Long-term Care Insurance Act³ in 2000. Initially, there was a societal expectation that elderly caregiving should be provided within the household (Raymo et al., 2008). A shortage of caregivers – due to increased women participation in the workforce and declining numbers of multi-generation households – has led to

greater calls for socialised care and emphasis on elderly independence and rights (Peng, 2002). Several notable aspects of Japan’s approach are highlighted below.

Combating the stigma of dementia

A study conducted in people aged 40 years or over in Nagoya found that the local community showed that the community has a negative stigma towards dementia; 39.1% of people aged 40-64 and 53.2% of aged 65+ feel that dementia is a “shameful disease” (Umegaki et al., 2009). In addition to promoting social fragmentation, stigma is an important issue to tackle because it deters those in need to seek help from others (Link and Phelan, 2001). As the first gesture of combating dementia stigma, Japanese policymakers have changed how they referenced dementia in their policies including the very word for “dementia”.

Earlier, the Japanese term for “dementia” was *chiho*, meaning “stupidity”. In 2004, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) formed a committee to examine the issues revolving around the term “*chiho*”. In consequence, the government changed the word for ‘dementia’, from *chiho* to *ninchisho*, meaning “cognitive disorder” and started to create dementia-friendly communities.

“After the change of the name, the knowledge and acceptance of dementia has spread widely all over this country”, according to a psycho-geriatrician who was a member of the renaming committee (Yang, 2015).

³ Japan’s Long-term Care Insurance System.

Retrieved from <http://japanhpn.org/ja/longtermcare-1/>. Accessed on 25 August 2020.

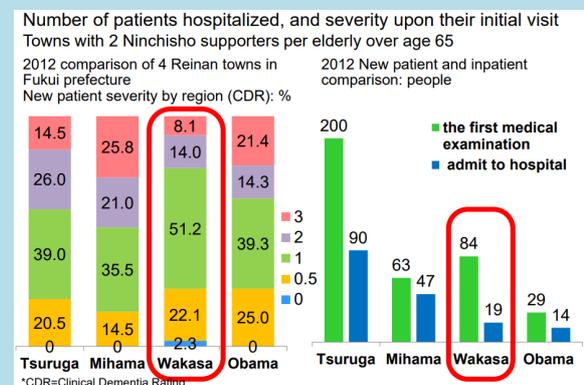
Ninchisho Supporters Programme

Raising public awareness is critical towards normalising dementia. In 2005, the Ninchisho Supporters training included a specialised 90-minute seminar for the public and community groups across the country. During the seminar, attendees would learn more about dementia, the adverse impacts on the elderly's livelihood and the necessary knowledge in order to effectively support these people. The training outcome is to "provide attendees with a good understanding of dementia, clarify any prejudice they may have, and encourage them to become supporters and advocates for people with dementia in their everyday lives". The programme has evolved across the years and is the groundwork of the dementia-friendly approach in Japan⁴.

By September 2014, the programme has trained a total of 5.5 million people, creating a support structure for people with dementia and their families. This resulted in an improvement of early detection and treatment of dementia. For instance, Wakasa in Fukui prefecture is one of the towns, which has experienced the positive impact of Ninchisho Supporters Programme (Box 2).⁵

Box 2: Positive impact of Ninchisho Supporters Programme

One noticeable positive impact of the programme is on dementia's early detection and treatment. As seen in the following figure, the town of Wakasa has significantly greater proportion of new patients with lower severity as compared to other towns. Further reinforced by statistics on new patient and inpatient comparison, people in Wakasa show the ability to identify early signs of dementia better.



Source:

<https://www.ncgg.go.jp/topics/dementia/documents/Topic4-4HirokoSugawara.pdf>. Accessed on 16 September 2020.

Dementia-Friendly Japan Initiative

Japan's approach to creating dementia-friendly communities puts heavy emphasis on involving people with dementia in decision-making processes. Its person-centred approach had inspired many projects and initiatives including the

⁴ Dementia Friends. <https://www.alz.co.uk/dementia-friendly-communities/dementia-friends>. Accessed on 25 August 2020.

⁵ More information about the statistics can be found at <https://www.ncgg.go.jp/topics/dementia/documents/Topic4-4HirokoSugawara.pdf>

Dementia-Friendly Japan Initiative (DFJI). This initiative, launched in 2013, was a collaboration between the Centre for Global Communications at the International University of Japan, Fujitsu Laboratories Ltd. and Dementia Friendship Club.

DFJI is led by people with dementia and caregivers in partnership with local government, private enterprises, academia, and non-profit organisations (Alzheimer's Disease International, n.d.). DFJI serves as a platform for these parties to come together and promote dementia-friendly communities in Japan. This partnership has resulted in a few projects such as HistoryPin (Box 3) and Run Tomorrow (Box 4).

Box 3: HistoryPin

Also known as “Bridging Communities: Sharing Our Memories”, in the winter of 2014, a group of high school students organized an interactive event involving local senior citizens in Fujinomiya. Through exploring past and recent photos of familiar places, the project aims to promote inter-generational exchanges including senior citizens with dementia. Ultimately, by sharing their own thoughts and memories, mutual understanding can be deepened.



⁶ The new Orange Plan is set to be effective from 2017 to 2025. The first 5-year Orange Plan covered 2013 to 2017.

Source: <http://www.dementia-friendly-japan.jp/en/2014/02/16/bridging-communities-sharing-our-memories-fujinomiya-project/>. Accessed on 21 September 2020.

Box 4: Run Tomorrow

Through involving people with dementia, their families as well as the general public in a short distance run and passing on sashes onto the next person, Run Tomorrow aims to create a place where everyone can live and interact comfortably with people with dementia. Since its creation, Run Tomorrow has received numerous positive feedbacks from the society and now has expanded into a huge project involving 8,000 people, running a total distance of 3,000 km from Hokkaido to Kyushu.



Source: <http://runtomo.org/>. Accessed on 21 September 2020.

The New Orange Plan

In 2015, the New Orange Plan⁶ was unveiled after a nation-wide survey was conducted on people with dementia and their families to find out about their stories and hardships.

Consisting of seven pillars and integrated community care systems, the plan emphasizes the perspectives of people with dementia and their families, and aims to promote the development of dementia-friendly communities and to improve the living environments of people with dementia by enabling them to continue living in familiar spaces and environments for as long as possible (Japan Health Policy Now, n.d.). The 7 pillars are:

- Increase public awareness and promote understanding of dementia, e.g. expand dementia supporters training programme to train 12 million dementia supporters by 2020;
- Provide healthcare and long-term care services through all stages of dementia, e.g. train 10,000 dementia support doctors by 2020;
- Reinforce measures for early-onset dementia, e.g. publish and distribute guidebooks on early-onset dementia;
- Support dementia caregivers, e.g. hold Alzheimer café-based events across the country to provide opportunities for people with dementia and their families to meet the community;
- Build elderly-friendly communities, including those with dementia, e.g. establish systems to provide support for daily living and participation in society and economy;
- Promote research and development of dementia-related cures, diagnosis, prevention, etc., e.g. develop evidence-based care and rehabilitation models;
- Prioritise the perspectives of people with dementia and their families, e.g. hold conferences where people

with dementia speak and discuss experiences.

Conclusion

While there might be various approaches to building a dementia-friendly community, Japan's approach is centred around the social inclusion of people with dementia. A DFJI survey has found that active participation of people with dementia had resulted in communities to be more passionately engaged in creating a dementia friendly environment (Dementia Friendly Japan Initiative, n.d.). The survey also found that many communities struggled to sustain dementia-related initiatives without the participation of people with dementia.

Community participation is another critical success factor. While the community may feel to contribute initially, being unable to see what their contribution has achieved, affected the sustainability of dementia-friendly initiatives adversely. By enabling the community to better understand those with dementia, they are more likely to participate in the initiatives.

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