

LEE LI MING
PROGRAMME IN
AGEING URBANISM

The Dementia Friendly Movement in Singapore

Building a dementia-
friendly ecosystem¹

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Dementia is prevalent in 10% of older adults aged 60 years and above in Singapore. With a rapidly ageing population, dementia is an area of concern where numbers of persons living with dementia is expected to rise (Box 1).

In partnership with Dementia Singapore, a new study by Singapore Management University also showed that while a growing majority in Singapore wants to do more to improve the lives of persons living with dementia, more work are needed to stamp out the incidental stigma. In this study, 60 percent of persons with dementia said that they are regarded as less competent than usual.² The findings reinforced the need for persistent education and greater awareness of dementia and its unique challenges. It is imperative that persons with dementia and their caregivers are supported and know that there is support which enable them to live their lives to the fullest.

¹ This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time. We thank AIC for their invaluable inputs and for providing information on the Dementia Friendly Ecosystem initiative in Singapore.

² Dementia Singapore (2023, June 29). New Dementia Study Unveils Shifting Attitudes Towards the Condition—Dementia Singapore. <https://dementia.org.sg/2023/06/29/new-dementia-study-unveils-shifting-attitudes-towards-the-condition/>

Under the Community Mental Health Masterplan, the Ministry of Health has adopted a national multipronged dementia strategy. This includes the establishment of Dementia-Friendly Communities (DFC) across Singapore under the Dementia-Friendly Singapore (DFSG) initiative led by Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) in collaboration with community partners. A DFC is one whereby people know about dementia and mental wellness and persons with dementia as well as their families feel included, involved, and supported in the community.

The next phase of DFSG initiative included a national dementia-friendly Singapore movement. The focus of the movement is the expansion of dementia-friendly initiatives outside of the DFCs and strengthening the established networks for better integration. It strived towards building an inclusive society whereby people know about dementia and mental wellness; people affected by dementia and mental health conditions and their families feel respected, valued and confident in the community.

This article presents key initiatives of the Dementia-Friendly Singapore (DFSG) movement towards building a dementia-friendly and supportive ecosystem for persons living with dementia and their caregivers to live life to the fullest.

Box 1: Challenges of Persons Living with Dementia

A person living with dementia may face various challenges due to cognitive decline affecting their body function:

- Difficulties with speech
- Difficulties with movement coordination
- Poor memory.

As a result, they may require caregiver or community help in their daily activities and when they move about in the neighbourhood.

Source: *Dementia-Friendly Communities*. (n.d.). DementiaHub.SG. Retrieved February 1, 2023, from <https://www.dementiahub.sg/dementia-friendly-communities/>

The Dementia-Friendly SG Movement

The Dementia-Friendly Singapore (DFSG) initiative was announced in 2016 by the Ministry of Health to address dementia needs in Singapore. The inaugural DFSG movement campaign was officially launched by the AIC on 20 November 2022 to rally everyone -- individuals, corporations and community, on ways to support persons living with dementia within local community (Figure 1). The movement was supported by over 80 corporate and community partners and engaged more than 50,000 individuals during the one-month campaign.

Figure 1. DFSG Launch



Source: Provided by AIC

The dementia-friendly movement in Singapore has spawned various approaches:

- Increasing community awareness through events.
- Creating dementia-friendly environments where homes and neighbourhoods are designed to address the needs of persons with dementia.³
- Harnessing digital resources to empower caregivers, e.g., in seeking community support to find missing family members with dementia, digital learning to identify persons with dementia.⁴

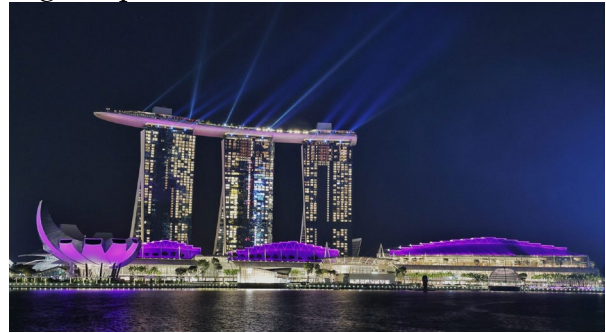
Raising Awareness through Community Events

Annual events are held to raise dementia awareness, facilitate discussions around dementia, and provide channels of support and enablement for persons with dementia and their caregivers. These events are supported by multiple agencies and partners from different sectors. An example is the *Landmarks lit in purple and yellow* initiative on World Alzheimer's Day.

In support of World Alzheimer's Day 2022 on 21 September, and to raise public awareness of dementia, 5 significant landmarks in the city were illuminated in purple and yellow lights. These landmarks include The Esplanade,

Singapore Flyer, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore Sports Hub, and National Gallery Singapore (Figure 2). Purple is the symbolic colour universally associated with dementia, while yellow represents positivity, a contrast to the stigma and negativity that is often associated with dementia.

Figure 2. World Alzheimer's Day 2022 Light Up



Source: Straits Times

Another are Walking Clubs (Box 2) and Enabling Festival. The Enabling Festival is co-founded by two caregivers, Danny Raven Tan and Daniel Lim. Launched in 2018, festival themes centre on the five senses (Box 3). Through exploration of the senses in various thought-provoking, and quirky programmes, the festival seeks to engage the public and start them thinking about how their senses can enable them and caregivers to carry on the journey of caring in fun and meaningful ways.

³ See Notes on Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly Cities Note 8: Dementia-Friendly Communities, Note 20 – Dementia-Friendly Neighbourhoods in Singapore through

Infrastructure Designs and Upgrades and Note 22 – Dementia Friendly Homes in Singapore

⁴ See Notes on Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly Cities Note 14 – Harnessing Digital Resources for Dementia-Friendly Singapore

Box 2: Walking Clubs in Singapore

We walk to our place of work, to school, to our homes every day. This one simple act holds a lot of meaning for the dementia community in Singapore.

Four students from the Nanyang Technological University had wanted to promote walking as a means of raising dementia awareness within the community and to highlight how this simple daily act could reduce the risk of dementia. Their interest led to the formation of a partners' network in Ang Mo Kio town and an annual walkathon: Walk2Remember.

Walk2Remember provides a platform for members of the community to show their support for persons with dementia and bring together the young and old for intergenerational bonding.



Residents in Ang Mo Kio participating in Walk2Remember, September 2021

Various community partners, e.g., AMKFSC Community Services Ltd., AWWA, and TOUCH in Ang Mo Kio have initiated their own weekly walking clubs. These walking clubs are not just for their clients but open to all who are interested to participate.

Source: Connect2Collab E-newsletter, Retrieved from [Library - DementiaHub.SG](https://www.dementiahub.sg/)

Box 3: The Enabling Festival

The Enabling Festival is in its sixth year and has curated programmes involving Sight (2019), Sound (2020), Taste (2021) and Touch (2022). The Enabling Festival 2022 sought to engage visitors in improving social compact, diversity, and cohesiveness, raising awareness about caregiving through a carefully curated series of programme activities including talks, fidget blanket workshops, panel discussions, online classes, arts, dance and cooking.

Source: Enable Asia. (2022). Enabling Festival 2022. Enable Asia. <https://www.enableasia.org/>; Ang, S. (2022, September 23). Enabling Festival about dementia shines spotlight on caregivers. The Straits Times. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/enabling-festival-about-dementia-shines-spotlight-on-caregivers-this-year>

Establishing Dementia Friendly Communities

Establishing Dementia-Friendly Communities (DFCs) involves raising community awareness through education, building support networks and partners, and encouraging volunteerism and befriending.

A DFC is a community where:

- People are aware of dementia and know how to interact and assist persons living with dementia.
- Resources are readily available for early recognition and support of persons living with dementia.
- Persons living with dementia and caregivers feel supported by the community.

- Businesses and services are respectful and helpful towards persons living with dementia.
- Environments are safe and easy to navigate for persons living with dementia.

Creating the Dementia-Friendly Ecosystem

A partnership between Dementia Singapore and AIC has been established to align core strategies to synergise and maximise efforts in capability building, communications, and support for persons with dementia and their caregivers. Concurrently, both organisations will co-develop initiatives and networks by engaging key stakeholders to meet emerging needs. The resulting DFC support ecosystem comprise aspects such as,

- Dementia Go-to-Points (GTP) with wayfinding help and resource support.
- Technology enablers, e.g., CARA Mobile App provides information and services for persons with dementia and caregivers.
- Caregiver Support Network through mental health and dementia care services programmes and CREST community outreach team.

Dementia Go-To-Points

Dementia Go-to-Points (GTPs) are nodes in the community, supported by corporate and community partners, to serve as a safe return point for persons with dementia who may wander and lose their way. Key GTPs comprise mostly public transport

nodes,⁵ supermarkets (Box 4), and some senior-friendly centres.

Box 4: Listing Supermarkets as GTPs

GTPs have been set up in collaboration with private sector such as in major supermarket chains. NTUC Fairprice and Sheng Siong have established over 200 GTP and sent over 1000 staff for dementia awareness training as of July 2022. Conducted by the AIC, the training teaches staff how to spot signs and symptoms of dementia, and assist such customers.

“The training taught us what to look out for, what to do and what to say when we encounter someone in our store who might be living with dementia,” said Mr. Bryan Tan, one of the 1000 staff that have undergone dementia training. “We are then able to spot the symptoms and signs of dementia and use the right approach and care towards the customer.”

Source: Woon, W. (November 20, 2022). More than 200 FairPrice, Sheng Siong outlets designated as dementia Go-To-Points. *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/more-than-200-fairprice-sheng-siong-outlets-designated-as-dementia-go-to-points>

Living and Caring for Dementia – The CARA App

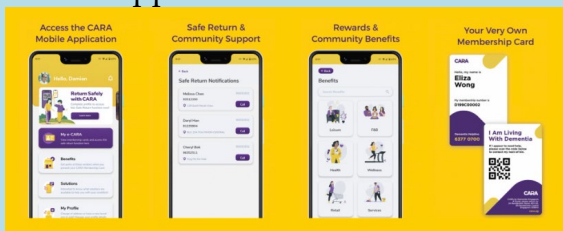
CARA is an acronym for Community, Assurance, Rewards, Acceptance. They represent the four main functions of this app (Box 5). Supported by the National

⁵ See Notes on Mobility Note 9 – Making Public Transport Journeys Dementia-Friendly

Council of Social Service Care and AIC, CARA is a digital lifestyle and community platform, which hosts a dementia membership programme that provides persons with dementia and their caregivers with personalised support across various aspects of living and caring for dementia. It also acts as a unique identifier for persons with dementia, providing digital networking, priority privileges, and a community network to report and identify missing persons with dementia in the community.

Box 5: CARA App Features

CARA App Interface



Source: Dementia Singapore

Safe Return

The CARA app comes with a safe return function. When a person with dementia gets lost, members of the public can scan the QR code on their membership card and submit a missing persons report. Additionally, there is a call function for members of public to call the caregiver directly, thus, facilitating the safe return of the person with dementia. Future development of the app will include a function to notify all members of the public to look out for persons with dementia that have been reported lost.

Connected Care Circle

Multiple family members in the care circle can link their CARA accounts to their loved ones living with dementia and receive Safe Return notifications. With multiple assigned caregivers, this also relieves burden from the primary caregiver.

Tailored Rewards

CARA members can enjoy benefits suited to their care journey such as discounts and priority privileges from our carefully selected partners.

Ecosystem of Solutions

Members access a curated list of solution providers relevant to their needs. They can tap on the community platform for further support and resources throughout their dementia journey.

Source: Dementia Hub SG. (n.d.). CARA: A Pioneering Membership Programme. DementiaHub.SG. Retrieved March 23, 2023, from <https://www.dementiahub.sg/living-well-with-dementia/cara-a-pioneering-membership-programme/>

During the app launch in 2021, the app received 1,000 sign-ups in the first week, demonstrating its effectiveness in reaching out to persons with dementia and their caregivers.⁶ Future development of the app includes membership tiers for professional caregivers, and a function to notify members of the public on the app when persons living with dementia are reported to be lost.

⁶ Shafeeq, S. (2021, November 23). New app for dementia patients offers wellness activities, lets public help those lost to alert caregivers. *The Straits Times*.

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<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/new-app-for-dementia-patients-offers-wellness-activities-lets-public-help-those-lost-to>

Post-Diagnostic Support Community Outreach Team (CREST-PDS)

The Community Resource, Engagement and Support Team (CREST) is an outreach team that works on raising public awareness of mental health conditions and dementia. It provides support to persons with dementia and their caregivers. This is done by promoting early recognition of at-risk individuals, or caregiver-related mental health burdens like depression. CREST-PDS has 68 Teams, and outreached to over 510,000 participants as of December 2021.⁷ Individuals with suspected dementia can also be referred to CREST-PDS by active ageing centres and polyclinics.

Conclusion

This article presents key initiatives of the DFSG movement towards building a caring, dementia-friendly, and supportive ecosystem for persons living with dementia and their caregivers to live life to the fullest. There is a strong need for a holistic, multi-pronged approach to dementia care. It is imperative that different agencies form strategic partnerships to incorporate and influence policies and practices to create an inclusive environment, own and drive initiatives that cater to the community needs and co-create solutions to benefit all people including those with dementia.

Many ongoing efforts have been undertaken to build a caring and dementia-friendly Singapore. It is a continuous journey, an on-going movement that needs to be sustained.

There are areas to work on to meet evolving needs, such as addressing the stigma towards dementia and shaping the narrative that persons living with dementia can live a fulfilling life. Let's all do our part to lend a helping hand and be a dementia friend in Singapore's journey of becoming a dementia-inclusive nation.

Sources:

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⁷ Ministry of Health. (2022). Speech by Ms Rahayu Mahzam, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry

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