



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Dementia Friendly Survey Analysis

SPOKANE AREA DEMENTIA FRIENDLY COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

The Spokane Area Dementia Friendly Community (DFC) is an official member of the Dementia Friendly America (DFA) network. Aging & Long Term Care partnered with the Washington State Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association and Providence Health & Services (including Providence Adult Day Health, Providence Holy Family Hospital, and Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center) to become a member. Additional community partners and family care partners supporting people living with dementia strengthen this community-based effort.

A dementia friendly community is a town, city, or county that is respectful toward and informed about individuals with the disease, their families, and their caregivers, and offers support that fosters quality of life. Joining DFA means a community is engaging in a process to become more dementia friendly. As it is predicted that the number of Washingtonians living with Alzheimer's disease will continue to increase, our community needs to collaborate to make Spokane County a better place for people living with dementia.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Spokane Area DFC conducted a Dementia Community Needs Assessment survey last autumn. The goal of this survey was to analyze Spokane County's needs when it comes to improving the lives of people living with dementia (PLWD) and their care partners, determine the issues stakeholders are motivated to act on, then set community goals. In this summary, we discuss high-level takeaways and overarching themes. Education and awareness about dementia and related resources, family and caregiver support, and training for those who interact with PLWD were just some of the more notable themes discovered through the analysis. These concepts are discussed in more detail throughout the sections of the survey analysis.

Within the survey, we asked about respondents' experience with dementia and their community sector. We targeted 7 sectors within this survey (community-based services and supports, hospitals/acute care settings, communities of faith, local government/agencies, residential care, family care partners, and community members living with dementia), and were successful in doing so as these made up 86.45% of our respondents. Within all sectors, the majority of individuals had professional or personal experience with dementia, while fewer had no experience with dementia or have dementia themselves. While only a small subset of our respondents (4.8%) have dementia, this is a larger group than other similar surveys have received as this demographic is hard to reach.

Through this survey, we were able to determine our communities top two priorities when becoming more dementia friendly. These were "increase community member's knowledge about the warning signs of dementia" and "increase the community's awareness of resources and organizations that can help support PLWD and their families." One thing to note was that even though these were our community's overall priorities, when looking at individual sectors this slightly shifted. "Increase dementia-related resources tailored to our diverse and under-served populations" was actually the highest priority for the hospitals and acute care sector, and individuals living with dementia. In addition, "increase community

members' skills for interacting with PLWD" was the highest priority for family care partners and the second highest priority for PLWD.

While we discovered there was a significant population within our community who are familiar with the 10 warning signs of dementia, there was also a substantial demographic that was not. The community sectors with low recognition were the community-based services and supports sector, communities of faith sector, are retired, or are at home due to the pandemic. Our respondents believe there is a high priority to continue increasing our community's knowledge of the warning signs, even though there is currently high activity levels and growing recognition. This is a location where the Spokane Area DFC could potentially continue to build on community strengths, and show early success.

One of the most notable themes throughout the survey was in regards to lack of training, education, and awareness. There were many sentiments shared that caregivers and family members of PLWD need more training when it comes to interacting with PLWD, and better knowledge of PLWD is needed in the general public. Several other individuals noted that education and awareness are significant gaps within our community that have great opportunity for development. "Families do not have a clear understanding of resources available. Physicians, who are often the only resource for them, often do not either," said one respondent. This sentiment was solidified as we received a significant amount of individuals who were completely unaware of local resources.

Another theme that arose was that caregivers and family members of PLWD need as much, if not more support than PLWD. Many of the comments about support groups were actually geared towards finding support for family members and caregivers. One respondent mentioned that they "feel those with dementia need support groups; however, often they do not realize they are suffering from dementia. The family members... are the ones that really need these resources."

An additional concern for the Spokane Area DFC was in regards to our community's top strengths and weaknesses with being dementia friendly currently. Interestingly enough, community-based services and supports, support groups, and clinical services were listed as both our community's top three strengths and weaknesses. This pattern continued when these were also the top referrals made by respondents. This leads us to believe that while these supports may be a source of strength in our community, they are still in need of improvement. Some of the specific gaps mentioned were in regards to available care facilities, access to services (such as transportation), resources, and specialists. These are sentiments repeated at great length by our respondents. One individual explained further; "while our community does have some support groups, community-based services, transportation services, and clinical services, I believe many of these services take too long to initiate or have too little availability. Especially when the individual in need is of a lower socio-economic status and does not have access to private insurance or can pay for services with private funds. Additionally I believe education regarding disease progression and prognosis is lacking... there is insufficient education/understanding even among professionals." This is another location where there the Spokane Area DFC may show early success by building on current strengths.

One of the most common referrals for PLWD was to seek advice from their medical provider. In particular, these responses referred PLWD to find resources and gain education about dementia from talking with



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Dementia Friendly Survey Analysis

their primary physician. However, medical providers were often called out for not doing a satisfactory job referring PLWD to the help they need. For example, one respondent shared her experience. “My mother passed from Lewy Body Dementia- her PCP did not recognize any of her signs and symptoms. It took us years to get her into a specialist. (There are not enough specialists in our area accepting new patients). We learned from this experience that not all dementias should be treated the same.” This was often mentioned alongside the need for family doctors and physicians to be more proactive in treating and finding resources for PLWD.

Overall, the survey brought great insight into what our community believes our current needs and gaps are when creating a DFC. As mentioned previously, Education and awareness about dementia and related resources, family and caregiver support, and training for those who interact with PLWD were just some of the more notable themes discovered through the analysis.