

The Fifth Pillar of Dementia Care: Community as Intervention

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Background

Contemporary dementia care frameworks emphasize clinical assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and ongoing support. While these pillars are essential, significant challenges remain, including social isolation, stigma, fragmented service delivery, and limited awareness of available community resources.

Howard Feldman’s Challenge to Canadians (2017) called for compassionate, fully supportive communities for people living with dementia. International work led by Giovanni Frisoni and the University of Geneva, published in The Lancet, has further demonstrated the value of dementia-friendly community development. However, community engagement is rarely conceptualized as a structured intervention within existing dementia care frameworks.

Hypothesis

This conceptual paper proposes that Community as Intervention should be recognized as a Fifth Pillar of Dementia Care.

By intentionally strengthening connections between clinical services, community organizations, families, and citizens, community-based interventions can bridge structural gaps within dementia care systems, reduce stigma and social isolation, improve awareness and access to resources, and accelerate system-wide innovation.

Conceptual Framework

The Fifth Pillar is informed by a regenerative systems framework developed through doctoral research. The framework consists of three interconnected domains:

Inspiration

- International dementia-friendly community initiatives
- Geneva/Lancet dementia frameworks
- Evidence-informed innovation

Social Networks

- Identification of fragmented systems and structural gaps
- Bridging disconnected organizations and community networks
- Creation of new relationships that support collaboration and innovation

Capacity Building

- Iterative “Think – Plan – Do” cycles
- Community engagement
- Continuous learning and adaptation

These three domains interact to generate Regenerative Social Capital – the trust, relationships, shared purpose, and collaborative capacity required to sustain dementia-friendly communities.

Community-Based Intervention

Community as Intervention is operationalized in rural BC through over 20 Memory Cafés delivered across the South Okanagan and Similkameen, alongside related initiatives:

- Memory Cafés (20+ events to date)
- Dementia-Friendly Community development
- Community education
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Partnerships between healthcare organizations, municipalities, community agencies, businesses, volunteers, industry, churches, the arts community and people with lived experience
- Brain Health Clinics

Rather than functioning as peripheral activities, these initiatives become integral components of dementia care.

Implications

Recognizing Community as Intervention as a Fifth Pillar broadens dementia care beyond clinical practice alone. Potential system-level benefits include:

- Reduced stigma
- Reduced social isolation
- Increased awareness of available supports
- Improved navigation of dementia services
- Stronger collaboration across sectors
- Greater community capacity to support people living with dementia
- Intergenerational education and exchange
- The use of arts-based methodologies allows for expression of personal truths and a deeper understanding for people with diverse ways of knowing

Conclusion

The Fifth Pillar provides a conceptual framework for integrating community-based interventions into dementia care.

By bridging structural gaps between clinical and community systems, Community as Intervention has the potential to strengthen regenerative social capital and improve outcomes for people living with dementia, their families, and the communities in which they live.

References

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"I think there should always be a creative element to this difficult conversation around dementia. It makes the information a bit more palatable."
– Summerland

"More events and opportunities to share like this is needed to keep the conversation going – with the whole community involved!" – Grand Forks

"We have a supportive community; they just need more education like this."
– Revelstoke