



Massachusetts Department of
Developmental Services (DDS)



Massachusetts Councils
on Aging (MCOA)



Center for Developmental Disabilities
Evaluation and Research

AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS

Massachusetts DDS is committed to providing supports that promote participation and inclusion in all aspects of community life—and this doesn't stop after a diagnosis of dementia. The guiding principle in DDS care planning is Person Centered Care. This means that individuals being served will be involved in their care plans, including end of life planning, as much as they are able.

Caregivers are encouraged to use a dementia-friendly approach to all care, providing a safe, structured, welcoming, and predictable daily routine that allows an individual to age in place. Individuals with dementia are strongly encouraged to



engage in activities that are familiar and mentally stimulating, with the overall goal of maximizing quality of life and an enjoyable and meaningful daily experience.

Caregivers will need to make specific modifications in a number of areas, for example:

Communication

- Use visual cues.
- Simplify directions, but maintain respectful tone.
- Don't correct the individual if they forget something.
- Put the most important part of a sentence last: instead of "Get in the car, we are going work." Say: "We are going to work, get in the car."

Behavior

- Time events and activities for earlier in the day.
- Calmly redirect when the individual gets agitated.
- Limit noise and distractions.
- Create a life story to engage memories and promote meaningful interactions.

Safety

- Provide a clutter free, well-lit environment.
- Lock hazardous chemicals and medications.
- Monitor and protect against wandering.
- Use environmental modifications such as color contrasts to enhance vision perception or impede elopement.

Health

- Reduce choking risk, for example by having a swallow assessment.
- Maintain optimum nutrition, which may require frequent small food options throughout the day.
- Monitor for secondary conditions.

TAKE ACTION:

- The diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease should trigger a meeting of the Individual Service Plan (ISP) team to evaluate new needs and modify the service plan accordingly. Contact your **Service Coordinator** through the local [Area Office](#).
- Be sure family members and guardians are included in team meetings.
- Evaluate the residence for safety concerns. The [Mass/NH Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association](#) (800.272.8900) has resources on making safety adaptations, as well as other information to help you understand the disease. You can also contact the [Mass. Rehabilitation Commission](#) (617.204.3600/Voice TDD 800.245.6543) for assistance with adaptations for the home and assistive technology for the individual or DDS Assistive Tech Centers.
- Evaluate the staffing and training needs within the residence and day program.
- Modify day program routines and physical environment.
- Contact your **Area Office Nurse** for guidance on specific health and safety concerns.
- If wandering is a concern, and you need to restrict access to exits or to parts of the home, consult with the Area Office Nurse, who can contact the **Human Rights Committee** especially if the restrictions could impact others. If you are comfortable, contact the [Office for Human Rights](#) directly (617.624.7782).
- Keep logs of changes in behavior, health, and functioning and communicate concerns with all providers, as well as family members.
- If the individual is able, now may be a good time to discuss end of life wishes. Ask the Service Coordinator or Area Office Nurse about [Five Wishes](#).
- Learn as much as you can about dementia. The series of webinars on [Aging with Intellectual and Developmental Disability](#) from DDS and CDDER has useful information.
- The [Massachusetts DDS](#) website has several links or call 617.717.5608 or TTY 617.727.9842 if you need assistance obtaining service or support including assistive technology.