

# Be a stigma buster

The number of Canadians with dementia will double to 1.4 million in just two short decades. People with the illness often feel excluded or treated differently by others because of stereotypes or misinformation. But people with dementia are still people who want to continue to take part in their communities and live life to the fullest.

Stigma not only hurts people with the disease but also discourages their families from confiding in others or getting the support they need.

You can help reduce stigma.

## Here are six easy ways you can make a difference:

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- **Learn the facts.** Share your knowledge about dementia with others, including family and friends, especially if you hear something that isn't true. Talking about dementia lessens our fear and increases understanding.
- **Don't make assumptions.** Dementia is a progressive disease and affects each person differently. A diagnosis doesn't mean the person will have to stop his daily routine or give up working right away.
- **Watch your language.** Do you use statements like "she's losing her marbles," or "he has old-timer's disease?" Don't make light of dementia. We don't tolerate racial jokes, yet dementia jokes are common.
- **Treat people with dementia with respect and dignity.** A person's ability to do things we take for granted will change as the disease progresses. But no matter what stage of the disease, she's still the person she always was, with unique abilities and needs. Appreciate who she is. Don't talk around her or avoid her at family and social gatherings.
- **Be a friend.** People with dementia don't want to lose their friends nor do they want to stop doing activities they enjoy. Be supportive. Stay in touch and connected. Social activity helps slow the progression of the disease and lets people with dementia know you care.
- **Speak up!** Don't stand for media stereotypes that perpetuate stigma and myths. Call or write your local radio or television station or newspaper. Media is a powerful force in affecting how we act and think.

Learn more at [www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)

