

Accessing Services

Throughout the different stages of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, a variety of different services within the formal health care system, private companies and community agencies are available for people with dementia and caregivers. However, navigating your way through these services, and accessing them when the time is right, can feel overwhelming. In addition, many people wait until they are in crisis before looking for help. Often this is because they feel that they should be able to manage on their own or are unaware of services that may help. This issue of In Touch provides information on some of the services available in British Columbia that you may benefit from, and tips for how to ensure that you are able to use these services when the time is right for you and the person with dementia. We hope that this issue encourages you to reach out for the help that is available to make your life as a caregiver more manageable.

First Link[®]

Connecting to Learning, Services and Support



First Link[®] is the newest program to be offered by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. It is an early intervention service designed to connect individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia with services and support as soon as possible after receiving a diagnosis. Physicians and other health care providers can now send a referral to Alzheimer Society of B.C. staff who will then connect with individuals and families and help them receive the support they need.

For those newly diagnosed, there is a waiting period of three to four weeks before someone from the Alzheimer Society calls to allow time to adjust to the diagnosis; others are contacted as soon as possible. Individuals and their families receive an information package, connection to Alzheimer Society education programs and support groups, and referrals to other community and health care services. Follow up contact every three to six months ensures that families receive information about planning for the future, tips for day-to-day living and services when needed. A monthly bulletin from First Link[®] keeps everyone informed about upcoming education and support programs available in the community.

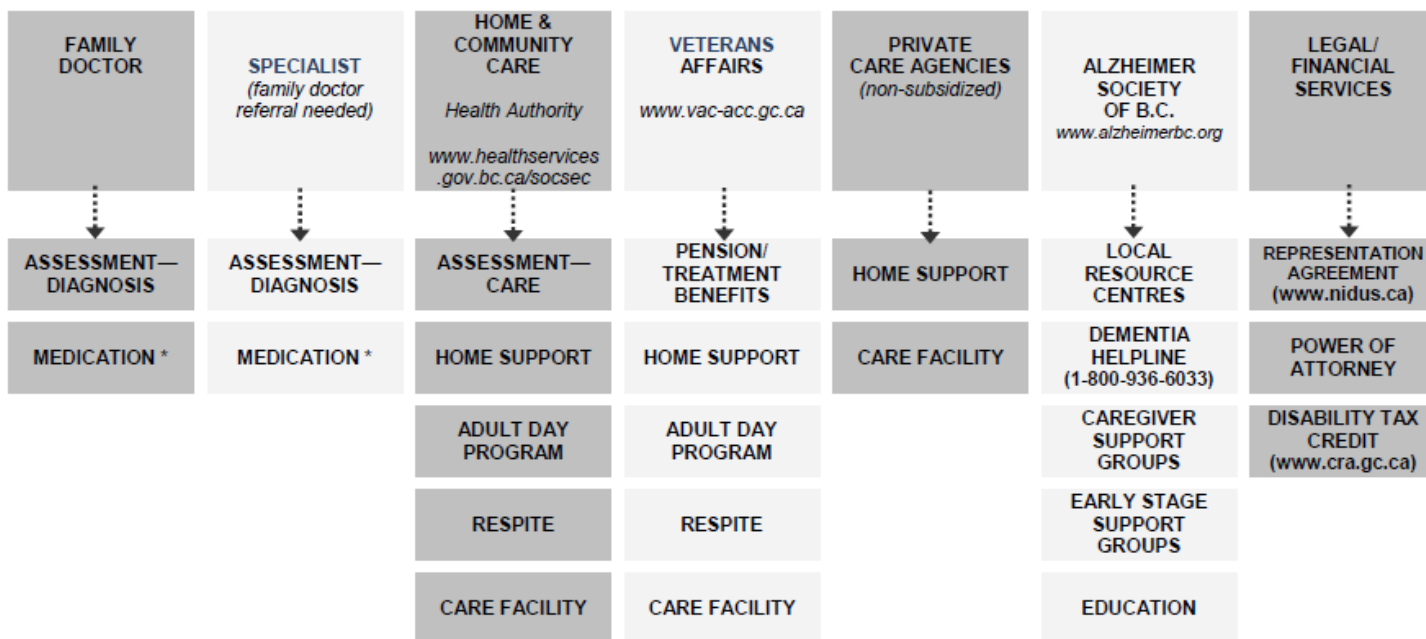
Thanks to generous funding from the BC Ministry of Health Services, we are excited to announce that the First Link[®] program is now available in 6 regions across B.C.: North Fraser, Greater Victoria, North and Central Okanagan, North and Central Vancouver Island, Northern Interior and Skeena, and Richmond/South Delta.

For more information about the First Link[®] program, and how the Alzheimer Society can help you access services and programs to help you throughout your journey with dementia, contact your local resource centre or email firstlink@alzheimerbc.org.

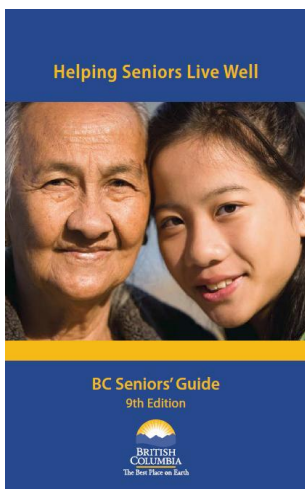
Navigating the System – Flowchart

There are a variety of ways in which services for caregivers and people with dementia can be accessed. It will often depend on the type of service required, and the stage of the disease that the person you are caring for is currently experiencing.

Here is a summary of who and where you can turn to in order to get the different kinds of support and information that you need.



**Note: Some dementia medications are covered under the Alzheimer’s Drug Therapy Initiative. Speak to your family doctor for details and eligibility requirements.*



B.C. Seniors' Guide

This resource provides information about the many programs and services available to seniors throughout British Columbia. Available in English, French, Chinese and Punjabi, it is a good starting point when learning about what is offered in your community, and a great resource for helpful phone numbers and websites.

To get a copy of the Seniors' Guide:

- Call 1-800-663-7867
- or visit www.seniorsbc.ca

Working with Health Care Providers

Throughout the different stages of dementia, you and the person you are caring for are likely to work with a variety of different health care providers. Your family doctor, specialists, nurses, occupational and physical therapists, pharmacists, home care providers and others are all important sources of support. Working successfully with these professionals can help ensure that you and the person with dementia receive the information, support and services that you need.

The following tips can help you get the most out of your interactions with health care providers:



- Sometimes visits to a doctor's office can feel rushed. You may need more time in order to express all of your concerns and discuss them with your doctor. When making your appointment, ask office staff if they can book you a longer appointment, or book two appointments in a row.
- Before any meetings or appointments, make a list of all of your questions or concerns in order of importance. Bring the list to your appointment and refer to it throughout.
- Take notes during the meeting or appointment. For some people it may be difficult to listen and take notes at the same time. You may want to consider having someone come with you to take notes and to act as your support person. Some people bring a hand-held tape recorder (provided that you have received permission to record the conversation) or make notes immediately after the appointment.
- Be open with health care providers about what you expect to accomplish during each interaction. This will avoid any confusion and will allow for a discussion as to whether your expectations can be met.
- As a caregiver, it is important that you let your doctor, case manager or other health professional know if you are experiencing any feelings, such as anger, depression or anxiety, which are overwhelming to the point that they are affecting your day-to-day life. Both caregivers and people with dementia need support in order to live well while coping with the disease.
- If you are unhappy with any of the care or services you or the person with dementia is receiving, it is important that you express your concerns by talking honestly and diplomatically about the problem. However, if this is not effective, you have the right to seek help and support elsewhere.

Sources: *Working Together – Developing a relationship with your doctor*, Alzheimer Society of Canada; *Dementia Journey website*

Accessing Services: Questions & Answers

Throughout the province, Alzheimer Society of B.C. staff and volunteers help families affected by dementia learn about and access services and programs that will benefit them throughout their journey with the disease. We surveyed our staff members and asked them a series of questions about accessing services. Below is a summary of their responses.

Question: *What do you recommend that caregivers do to learn about specific services available in their communities?*

Answers:

- Attend the Alzheimer Society's "Navigating the Health Care System" workshop.
- Join a local support group.
- Call your local health authority's Home and Community Care office and ask for a home assessment.
- Speak with your doctor or your region's assessment team (i.e. Geriatric Outpatient/ Ambulatory Clinic).
- If available in your community, become part of the Alzheimer Society's First Link[®] program. First Link[®] Coordinators can suggest programs (which may include those which are not specific to dementia) that are directly relevant to the individual circumstances of your family. Also, the First Link[®] Bulletin summarizes events, education and programs available in your community (see article on page 1).



Question: *Can you share some tips for what to consider when looking into different services?*

Answers:

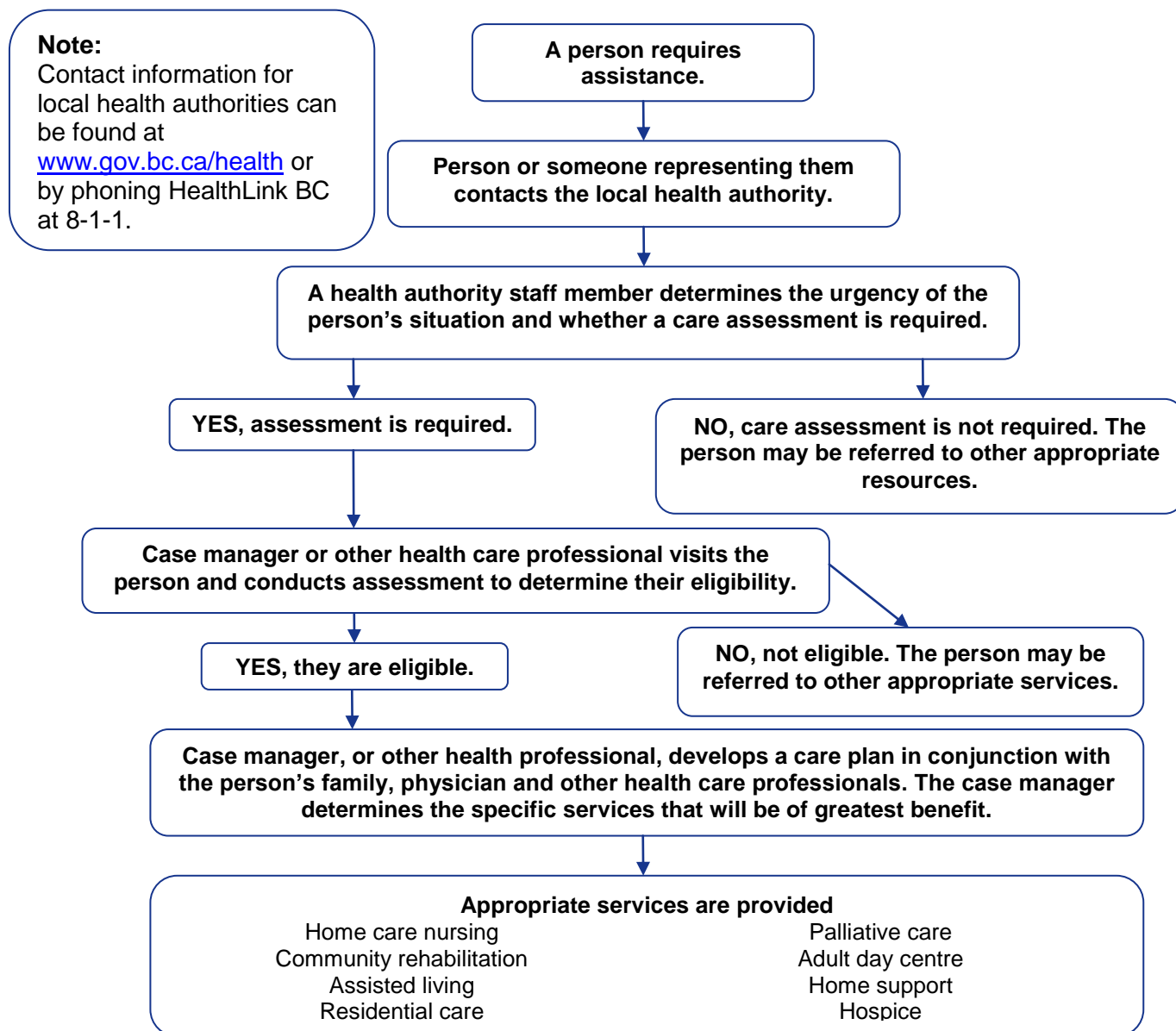
- Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions!
- Ask if you can observe the program before 'signing on.' This can help you make the decision as to whether it is appropriate for you or the person with dementia. It can also reduce stress, as you will know more about what to expect from the program or service.
- Make sure the staff and volunteers are educated about dementia. Don't enroll them in just any program – make sure it meets the specific needs of the person with dementia.
- If the person with dementia is hesitant to participate in a program (such as an adult day centre), ask if he/she can visit to see if they enjoy it. Caregivers have had success easing a family member into a program by having them attend as a volunteer or helper to start.
- Home and Community Care will only perform an assessment if a need is demonstrated. As caregivers, we sometimes downplay our need for help to protect the dignity of the person with dementia. Be honest about the degree of support and direction the person with dementia needs to complete daily tasks. For example, let the staff member from Home and Community Care know if the person needs step-by-step instructions from you in order to bathe or dress, or if they cannot perform specific parts of the task independently and safely (e.g. turning the bath faucet to the right temperature). Providing realistic information on the person's abilities will help you qualify for an assessment and obtain the help that you need.

Home and Community Care in B.C.

Home and Community Care services are offered to residents of British Columbia by our province's Ministry of Health Services. Here are some examples of what Home and Community Care provides:

- Support individuals to remain independent and in their own homes for as long as possible;
- Provide services at home to people who would otherwise require admission to hospital or would stay longer in hospital;
- Provide assisted living and residential care services to people who can no longer be supported in their homes; and
- Provide services that support people who are nearing the end of their life, and their families, at home, in assisted living, in residential care or in a hospice.

Below is a chart outlining what to expect when accessing services provided by Home and Community Care:



Source: Home and Community Care – A Guide to Your Care (Ministry of Health Services, 2007)

Did you know?.....

The role of case managers

Case managers can be a source of support and information, and a way to access helpful services and programs throughout the dementia journey. If you haven't worked with a case manager before, here is some basic information about their role.

- Case managers are assigned to the person with dementia by your health authority.
- They act as coordinators to help you obtain services.
- A case manager or other health care professional will visit you to discuss your situation and determine the person with dementia's health care needs and eligibility.
- They determine the nature, intensity and duration of services that would best meet the person's needs and arrange these services. They will then work with you to develop a care plan.
- The case manager will stay in touch with you to arrange care services and make any adjustments necessary in the event care needs change.
- If there is a major change in a person's health or situation, or if you feel that the services being used are no longer appropriate, you can ask the case manager for a review.

For more information contact the Home and Community Care office of your local health authority.



Travel assistance available through health authorities

The Travel Assistance Program ("TAP") is a medical travel assistance program available to residents of B.C. For those who are eligible, the program helps alleviate some transportation costs for individuals who must travel within the province for non-emergency medical specialist services not available in their area.

Eligibility requirements include:

- You must be a B.C. resident and be enrolled in the Medical Services Plan.
- You must have a physician's referral for medical services which are not available locally.
- Your travel expenses must not be covered by third party insurance, such as an employer plan, extended medical plan, Insurance Corporation of BC, WorkSafeBC or federal government program (e.g. Veterans' Affairs).

For a full list of eligibility requirements, and to apply for this service, phone 1-800-661-2668 or visit www.health.gov.bc.ca/tapbc/

Source: Ministry of Health Services

Adult Day Programs

Adult day centres help seniors and adults with disabilities to continue to live in the community by providing supportive group programs. For people with dementia, these types of programs are usually suitable in the middle to later stages of the disease.

Services vary and may include:

- Therapeutic recreation
- Social activities
- Personal care services, such as grooming and medication administration
- Meals and transportation

Why should I consider an adult day program for the person I am caring for?

- To provide stimulation and social interaction for the person with dementia.
- To give opportunities for the person with dementia to engage in physical activity suitable to their abilities.
- To provide a sense of normalcy for the person with dementia as they interact with other participants.
- To allow caregivers a few hours of respite in order to attend to their personal needs or take a much-deserved break.

What are some examples of activities that may be offered at adult day centres?

- Exercise sessions (e.g. stretching and gentle aerobics)
- Group outings to local attractions
- Musical entertainment, sing-alongs
- Arts and crafts
- Holiday and birthday celebrations
- Most programs include a hot lunch

How are these programs accessed?

Adult day programs are accessed through Home and Community Care and may require an assessment. Contact your local office for more information. Eligibility requirements may vary between programs.

Are there costs associated with adult day programs?

Government subsidies mean that there is usually only a nominal fee for programs offered in our province.

What are some things to consider when choosing an adult day program?

- Is the centre in a location that is easy for the person and yourself to get to?
- Does it offer transportation to and from the person's home?
- What is the staff-to-participant ratio?
- Are staff specifically trained to provide services to people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias?

How do I encourage a person with dementia to attend a day program?

- Some caregivers have had success by inviting the person to attend the program as a "helper" or "volunteer" to start. This gives them an opportunity to adjust more gradually.
- Men often respond positively to the idea of a "social club" rather than a day program.
- Use your knowledge of the person's history and preferences to determine the best approach to making them feel comfortable with the program.



Notes and Events

DEMENTIA HELPLINE

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA

1-800-936-6033
(Lower Mainland 604-681-8651)

Helping people with dementia, their friends, and their family members to build the confidence to maintain quality of life when facing dementia.



Our Vision

Our ultimate vision is to create a world without Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Our Mission

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. exists to alleviate the personal and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, to promote public awareness and to search for the causes and the cures.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. relies on the generosity of individuals and the community to ensure families have access to the knowledge, skills and tools they need to live well with dementia. Your donation will help make the journey easier for families impacted by Alzheimer's disease or related dementias.

Free Telephone Workshops



Thursday, December 16th
12 noon

Understanding Communication

This workshop for caregivers offers insights about effective communication strategies and ways of providing care that focus on the needs of the person with the disease.

To see a list of the upcoming workshops or to register, go to www.alzheimerbc.org and click on **We Can Help**.

You can also register toll-free at 1-866-396-2433 (Mon-Fri, 6am to 2pm P.S.T.)

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