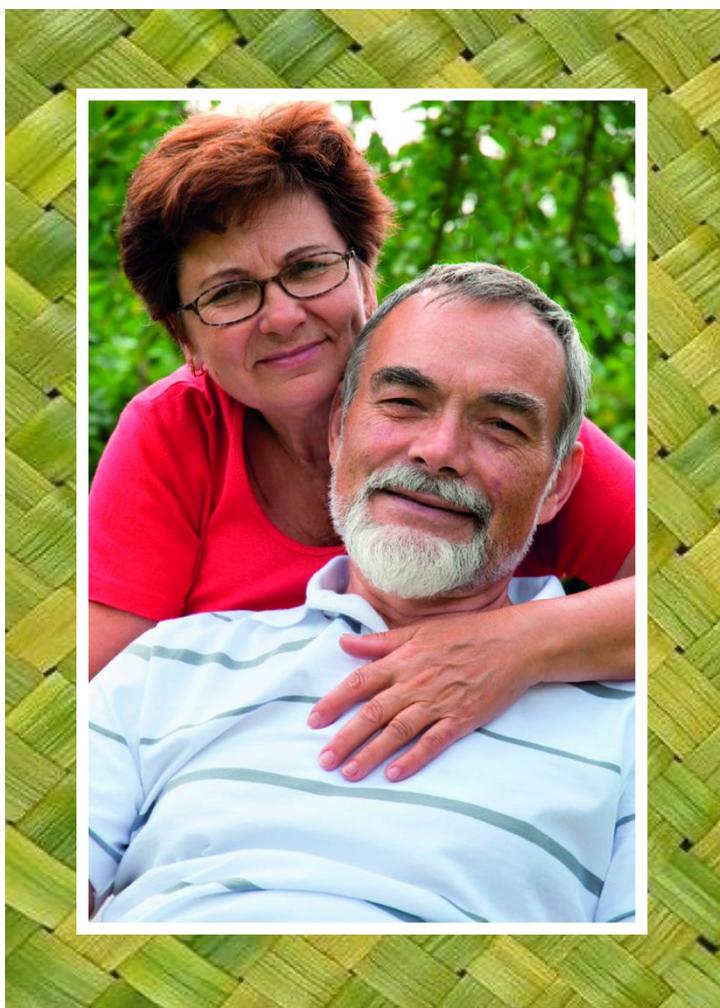




## Understanding and respecting customers with a dementia: A guide for staff

August 2014



This guide is adapted with the kind permission of the original documents creators: Hampshire County Council, Innovations in Dementia and the Local Government Association, UK.

For more information on the full initiative visit: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/adult-services/adultservices-professionals/dementia/dementia-friendly-toolkit.htm>

## How to help customers with memory problems

This help-sheet is designed to help you support customers who might have dementia.

### **What is dementia?**

Dementia currently affects some 50,000 people in New Zealand. This figure is estimated to treble by 2050.

There are many forms of dementia, but they are all diseases of the brain which can cause:

- ❖ Problems with memory
- ❖ Problems with everyday tasks, like handling money.
- ❖ Problems with communication
- ❖ Problems with perception

It is progressive – in that it starts off with very mild symptoms and gets worse over time.

It affects everyone differently. No two people with dementia are the same.

### **Why do I need to know this?**

Lots of your customers may already have dementia.

Certainly, lots more of your customers will be developing dementia, and will want to carry on using your business.

This help-sheet has been written to give you some very basic information that can help you to provide better service to people with dementia.

## What are people with dementia like?

Everyone experiences dementia in different ways, and no two people are the same.

What is a problem for one person, may not be for another, and visa-versa.

The image of a person with dementia you might have in your head is perhaps that of someone who is:

- ❖ Very confused
- ❖ Needs a lot of help
- ❖ Lives in a residential facility
- ❖ Can't communicate
- ❖ Cannot control themselves

If you have this image in your head, it would not be surprising, as that is the way people with dementia are sometimes portrayed.

These images often relate to a person whose illness is quite advanced, but most people with dementia you encounter will not resemble this stereotype at all.

Most people with a dementia in your community are likely to have much less pronounced difficulties, be living independently, getting out and about, using shops and cafés, doing the same kind of things we all do.

...but they just may need a little more help to carry on doing these things as time goes by.

### How can I spot a person with dementia?

You can't.

Most people with dementia are over 65, but some are younger.

Some people with dementia will tell you if they are having problems, and how you can help.

Some people carry a card like this one which explains the problems they have and how you might help:

<p>I have an illness called <b>dementia</b>. I like to be independent but sometimes I need Help. Her's how you can help me</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Be patient and try to understand me</b></li><li>• <b>Ask how you can help me</b></li></ul> <p>If I seem confused or distressed contact Name: _____ Phone: _____ Mobile: _____ <b>Don't</b> show this card to strangers who could take advantage of you.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Due to my illness I sometimes:</p> <table border="0"><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> get confused</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> Need help crossing roads</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> feel lost</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> mistake the time of day</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> forget things</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> can't manage money</td></tr><tr><td><input type="checkbox"/> can't make myself Understood</td><td><input type="checkbox"/> panic</td></tr><tr><td></td><td><input type="checkbox"/> other _____</td></tr></table> <p>(tick any of these that affect you)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>For information call 0800 004 001</b></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> get confused	<input type="checkbox"/> Need help crossing roads	<input type="checkbox"/> feel lost	<input type="checkbox"/> mistake the time of day	<input type="checkbox"/> forget things	<input type="checkbox"/> can't manage money	<input type="checkbox"/> can't make myself Understood	<input type="checkbox"/> panic		<input type="checkbox"/> other _____
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You might also notice customers doing, or saying things which suggest that they are having problems that might be caused by dementia.

These include:

- ❖ Looking, or saying that they are a bit lost or confused.
- ❖ They might appear to be searching for something they can't find.
- ❖ They might be looking like they don't know what to do next.
- ❖ They might appear to have problems handling or understanding their money, or how to use their card.
- ❖ They might be finding self-service facilities hard to understand.
- ❖ Their speech might be hard to understand.

- ❖ They might appear to have problems understanding what you are saying.
- ❖ They might forget to pay for things they have picked up.
- ❖ They might need more time to do things

Of course, there are all sorts of reasons why people might be having these problems that are nothing to do with dementia or memory problems.

*Generally-speaking* - the younger the person appears to be, the less likely it is to be dementia-related. But remember, younger people can have dementia too.

### **What can I do to help?**

If you have good “people skills” and work for a business with a good culture of customer care, you already have much of what you need to provide great service to people with a dementia.

Kindness, common sense, avoiding stress, using good communication skills and a smile go a very long way.

Let’s look at what we can do to help if you see people having these kinds of problems.

### **What can I do if people are:**

- ❖ Looking, or saying that they are a bit lost or confused?
- ❖ Appearing to be searching for something they can’t find?
- ❖ Looking like they don’t know what to do next?

**DO:** approach them in a friendly open manner, and ask “can I help?”

It really is that simple, and for many people with dementia, this will be all they need, and will be able to explain exactly how you can help.

**DON'T:** call to them from a distance.

Some people with a dementia may also have a hearing problem, or might have difficulty locating where the voice is coming from. It is also much less friendly than approaching someone directly.

#### **What can I do if people are:**

- ❖ Appearing to have problems handling or understanding their money, or how to use their card.
- ❖ Appearing to find self-service facilities hard to understand.

Again, simply asking if you can help can go a long way.

Also, **DO:**

- ❖ Encourage them to take their time – there’s no hurry
- ❖ Offer to pick out the right money if someone appears to be struggling to work out the coins or notes in their hand.
- ❖ Offer to run the items through self-service, or show them how to do it.
- ❖ Ask if they would like to sign for their purchase if they can’t remember their PIN.
- ❖ Offer to keep their shopping to one side so that they can come back and collect it when they have remembered their PIN.

**DON'T:**

- ❖ Attempt to hurry them.
- ❖ Let any impatience show, especially in the form of raised eyebrows, “tutting”, or exchanging knowing looks with other customers or staff.
- ❖ Invade their personal space

**What can I do if people are hard to understand?**

Some people with dementia develop problems with their speech, and these can be made worse if they feel stressed or hurried.

**DO:**

- ❖ encourage them to take their time,
- ❖ listen very carefully and make sure that you are communicating through your body language that you are listening and focused on them
- ❖ be conscious of their body language
- ❖ If you still don't understand – then take a best guess and say something along the lines of “I'm finding it hard to understand you – are you saying.....?”
- ❖ If this doesn't work, then ask them to point at what they want
- ❖ Some people are still able to write – so ask them if they can write it down.

### **What can I do if they appear to have problems understanding what I am saying?**

Some people with dementia can develop problems with understanding what is said to them, especially if they feel stressed or hurried, or if there is a lot of background noise and distractions:

#### **DO:**

- ❖ take your time – speak clearly and not too quickly
- ❖ try to make only one point at a time
- ❖ say things more simply if you need to
- ❖ make sure you are at the same level as the person – and use good eye contact
- ❖ say things simply, and if you have to repeat something, use the same words each time
- ❖ use gestures to reinforce what you are saying - that can be a big help.
- ❖ Offer them somewhere quieter/less distracting to go

### **What can I do if someone appears to have forgotten to pay for something?**

This is difficult. While someone may have forgotten to pay, they might equally be engaged in theft, and your safety is the most important thing.

**If you know** the person, and you **know** that they have a dementia, then you can simply ask if you can help, and if they would like to pay. This will often be all you need to do.

Some people with dementia will not understand that they need to pay, or may feel that they shouldn't.

In these cases, it is up to the discretion of the manager. Some businesses, if they know the person and their family supporter, will simply add up the value of goods, and ask the carer to arrange for payment. Many carers will have visited local stores to make this arrangement if it is a pattern with their relative.

**If you do not know the person, then your businesses usual policy on theft should apply.**

#### **What if none of this works and I need help?**

One approach is to ask the person if they would like to take a rest or a sit-down somewhere quiet – so long as you have that facility available. Quite often, after a break, people feel much better and are able to function more effectively.

Ask the person if there is anyone you can contact who might be able to help. If so, then call them.

If none of this works, and the person appears to need help, then you should call for your manager for help.

If you **are** the manager, or are working alone, then depending upon the nature of your business and location you could call:

- ❖ Your community police officer, they may have information about the individual
- ❖ If the person appears to be at risk, then the emergency services as a last resort.

## Where can I get more information?

If you want to find out more about dementia, see the document “What is Dementia” on our website, or to speak to a Community Worker at your local Alzheimers Organisation, phone 0800 004 001

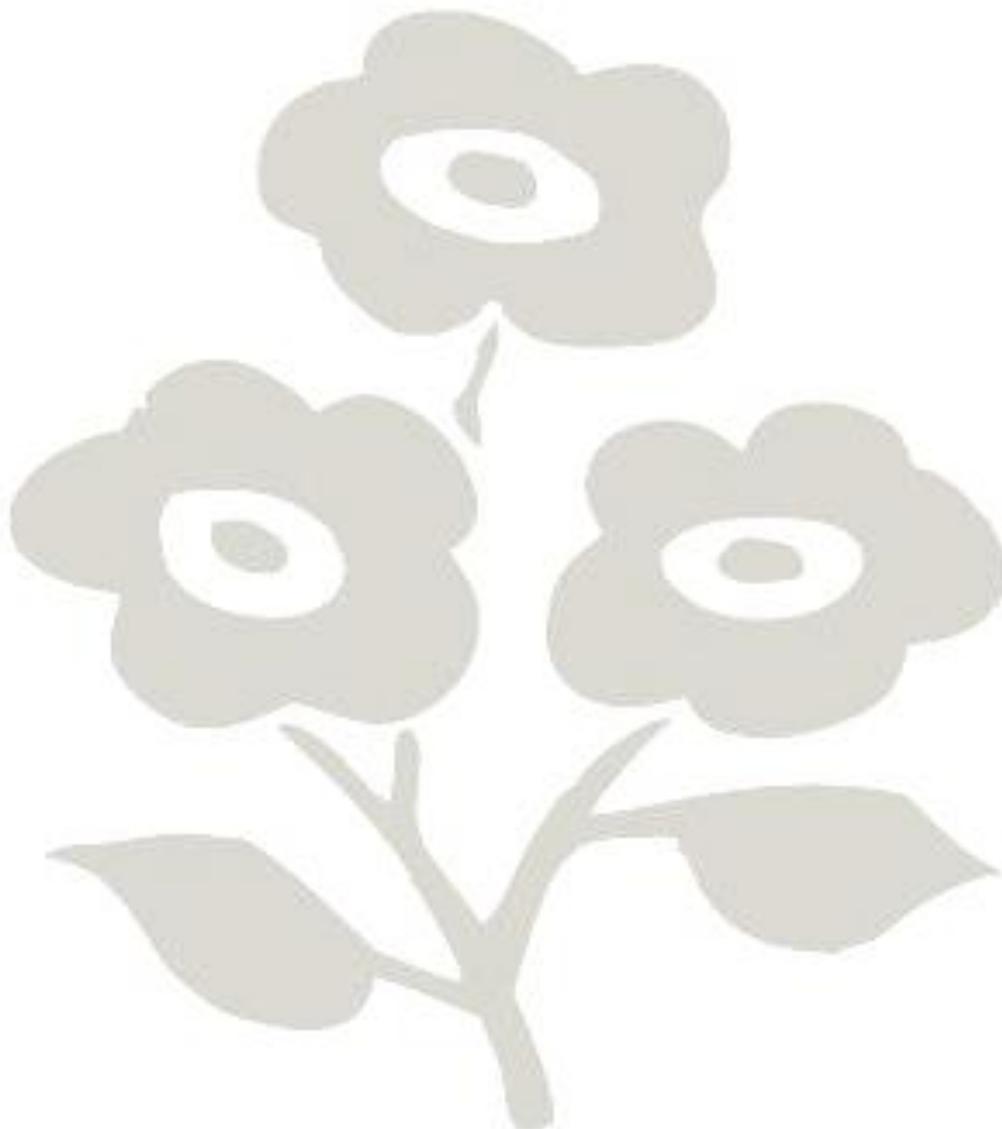
Alzheimers Wellington is an inclusive non-profit organisation dedicated to making life better for all people in the Wellington region affected by dementia.

We provide information, ongoing support, advice, education and personal advocacy for people with dementia, their carers, family and whanau. Anyone can refer people to our service.

If you would like information about our work and services, or are able to support our work, please contact our Manager Nigel Heard, for a discussion

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Charities Commission Registration CC20061



**For assistance launching this guide**

**Alzheimers Wellington wish to thank**

