

Transportation Sector: Dementia-Friendly Community Tips

With almost 20,000 Manitobans living with dementia and 61% of that population still living at home, there is a high likelihood that transit sectors are unknowingly encountering people living with dementia accessing these services.

People living with dementia experiences changes in their:

- Ability to remember
- Ability to communicate
- Ability to think, plan, and carry out activities
- Ability to recognize familiar places and objects
- Ability to perceive depth

Ways to help:

- Be kind
- Have patience
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect

Here are some helpful tips for communication and understanding behaviour that can make interactions easier.

1. Ability to Remember

- Be understanding if the person cannot remember where they are going or whether they have paid their fare.
- In conversation, restate an action you witnessed the individual do or restate where you are taking the person:
 - Public transportation: “You have already paid your fare – thank you for checking! You can sit down now.”
 - Private transportation: “I am taking you to the Winnipeg Art Gallery”
 - Public transportation: “This bus is the #24. It goes down Ness Avenue, all the way to _____, and then starts the route again.”

If this does not help prompt the individual to where they are going, you can support them by assessing if they have anything on them – are they holding skates, grocery bags, a list, etc. – and asking, “I see that list in your hand – do you mind if I look at this with you to see if it says where you are going?” This may immediately help the individual recall what they set out to do.

- If the person cannot remember where they are going, public transit can call for support to assist this person off the bus to reduce delays.
 - Check to see if the individual has a phone number for an emergency contact on paper or in a cell phone. Call that emergency contact and calmly explain that the individual is safe with you, but they cannot recall where they are going.

2. Ability to Communicate

A person living with dementia can have difficulty speaking and using the correct words, so their message may be unclear or might not make sense to you. They may say phrases that don't fit in the conversation.

- Listen carefully
- Ask the person to repeat what they said
- If the person is “stuck” and you think you know what they might be trying to tell you, speak the idea you believe the person is trying to say: “Are you trying to tell me that you are afraid of falling as you step down?”
- Speak slowly and use short sentences
- Give the individual time to process your sentence and respond
- Stay away from yes or no questions – be direct and ask questions that include the answer: “Do you have a ticket or cash fare today?”
- Whenever possible, use eye contact when speaking
- Decrease background noise when possible
- If a person says something that seem disrespectful it is more likely due to the changes in the brain caused by their dementia versus intent to be unkind

3. Ability to Plan and Carry Out Activities

The change in ability to plan and carry out activities may cause a person living with dementia to be fearful.

- Use positive language to let the person know that you will help them get to their destination safely

4. Ability to Recognize Places and Objects

- Private transportation: “Mr. Smith, we have arrived at your apartment building.”
- Public transportation: If you notice confusion or are asked about the next stop, calmly state, “The last stop was at the corner of ____ and _____. Our next stop will be the Safeway on Ness Avenue.”

If the individual had difficulty remembering their purpose when getting on the bus but you were able to confirm their destination, it would be helpful to stop at that location and announce the stop (even if the person living with dementia did not request a stop by pushing a button or pulling the wire).

5. Change in Depth Perception

Difficulty recognizing changes in depth are normal – related to uneven surfaces, curbs, or perceiving a threat. For example, black mats, shadows and puddles can be seen as black holes. This can induce paralyzing fear, without the ability to verbalize the concern.

- Assist the person to move between the transit vehicle and their destination
- If there is fear of the black floor or curb, remind the individual what the object is and offer assistance stepping over