

Dementia Dynamics: Learning the Story

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

INSPIRED BY THE ABCD PILOT PROJECT
STURGEON COUNTY, ALBERTA

APRIL 2023



Financial contribution from

Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



All rights reserved. All materials in this document is, unless otherwise stated, the property of The Rural Development Network. Copyright and other intellectual property laws protect these materials. Reproduction or retransmission of the materials, in whole or in part, in any manner, without the prior written consent of the copyright holder, is a violation of copyright law.

The Rural Development Network (RDN) sincerely acknowledges that our physical office is located on the Traditional Territories of Treaty 6 and home to Métis Nation Region 4.

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people that call this land home and who have gathered on these lands for centuries.

We do this to reaffirm our commitment and responsibility to improving relationships between nations and to improve our own understanding of local Indigenous peoples and their cultures.

We are all Treaty People.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUTHORS

- Mary McGuire
- Ruth Kieser
- Gwen Price

MANAGING EDITOR

- Mary McGuire

EDITORS

- Mary McGuire
- Ruth Kieser
- Emika Peterson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The implementation of this initiative was made possible by the meaningful work and dedication of the Sturgeon County Family and Community Support Services (FCSS).

The valuable feedback and support throughout the project from the ABCD Advisory Committee and Alzheimer's Society of Alberta and Northwest Territories further facilitated the success of the overall ABCD project.



*For more information about the ABCD project, please contact:
info@ruraldevelopment.ca*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The Rural Development Network (RDN) collaborates with rural communities across Canada to identify and bring focus to rural issues, build local capacity, and find innovative, rural-based solutions to unique issues. A key aspect of that work is to support rural communities in the implementation of the proposed solutions by providing capacity. RDN's initiatives include:

- addressing rural homelessness;
- building affordable housing;
- addressing substance misuse;
- age-friendly rural communities;
- rural immigration;
- rural access to services including transportation, broadband, and justice;
- agri-food initiatives; and
- rural revitalization.

ABOUT ABCD INITIATIVE

In 2021, RDN developed the Awareness Builds Connection in Dementia Friendly Communities (ABCD) initiative. This project aims to support rural communities in Alberta to become more dementia-inclusive and dementia-friendly. An environmental scan was carried out to determine the best practices, challenges, and lessons regarding dementia-inclusive initiatives. Through learning from examples in existing programming, the ABCD team improved their understanding of effective dementia-inclusive programs and created a catalogue based on their findings, selecting initiatives adaptable to rural settings.

Through a call for interest, five rural communities were chosen to pilot the project, those being Taber, Sturgeon County, Spirit River, Strathmore and Drumheller. Sturgeon County's initiative will be the focus of this guide.

ABOUT STURGEON COUNTY, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) refers to services under a partnership between the Alberta Government and a participating municipality that benefit the social well-being of individuals and groups in communities. Sturgeon County's FCSS was the group that initially requested funding for more dementia-friendly services and supports for the Sturgeon Region.

LIVING WITH DEMENTIA IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Additional challenges exist for people living with dementia and their caregivers in rural communities. These challenges are unique from the experiences of those living in an urban setting. Rural-specific challenges include the lack of transportation, difficulties accessing support and care services, failure of proper diagnoses, and privacy concerns.

Like everyone, people living with dementia and their care partners want to feel like a valued part of their community. However, in rural communities, dementia-related resources providing education, diagnosis and support can be scarce, directly impacting:

- early diagnosis;
- access to diagnosis;
- community education and understanding of dementia; and
- support for care in the home/community when living with and supporting someone with dementia.

PURPOSE OF STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Informed by research and the experiences of the ABCD pilot community in Sturgeon County, this guide has been developed to support rural communities that are looking to improve the lives of those living with dementia by becoming more dementia-friendly. Understanding that each community is unique with its own strengths and perspectives, this guide is meant to be flexible and adaptable based on community needs and resources available.

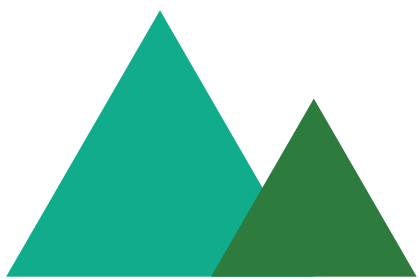


Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
Sturgeon County	1
Dementia Dynamics – Learning the Story	1
Summary	1
Goals of Dementia Dynamics – Learning the Story	2
DEMENTIA DYNAMICS: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE	3
STEP 1: Development of Budget, Work Plan, and Timeline	3
Budget Considerations	3
Workplan	3
Timeline	4
STEP 2: Community Engagement & Communication	4
Community Partnerships	4
Communications	5
STEP 3: Measuring Progress and Outcomes	5
Data Collection	5
Seniors Conference	5
Findings	6
Successes	6
Challenges	6
SUSTAINABILITY	6
REFERENCES	7

INTRODUCTION

STURGEON COUNTY

Sturgeon County is a rural municipal district, directly north of Edmonton. It surrounds five other urban municipalities (Morinville, Bon Accord, Gibbons, Legal, and Redwater) within its borders as well as the Edmonton Garrison. Sturgeon County is on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional homelands of Alexander First Nation and Michel First Nation, and the Métis Nation of Alberta's Region 4 (Sturgeon County, 2022). As of 2021, the population of Sturgeon County was 20,061, with approximately 32% of the population aged 55 and up. With that in mind, Sturgeon County is actively working towards creating an inclusive environment for residents to age in place (Statistics Canada, 2023).

DEMENTIA DYNAMICS – LEARNING THE STORY

Summary

Taking into consideration the aging population, current caseloads, and other service providers' data, Sturgeon County's Family and Community Support Services (or FCSS) chose to focus on ways to further engage the community in dementia-inclusivity by connecting with local seniors' groups and engaging with folks participating in their Dementia Peer Support Group. Notably, Sturgeon County FCSS heard from all 9 senior centers in the region that dementia is something they wanted to learn more about. Named Dementia Dynamics – Learning the Story, the idea of their project was to build upon some of their existing initiatives and activities and incorporate dementia-inclusive awareness messaging and tools within them.

As a part of Sturgeon County's Senior Conference, FCSS handed out "Brain Kits" to all 110 participants. The Brain Kits contained information promoting dementia awareness as well as activities that people could do to keep their brains healthy. The brain kits were developed to support brain health through a variety of activities designed to maintain reasoning skills and speed of cognition. FCSS also had a speaker from Alzheimer's Society attend the conference specifically presenting on dementia and what it is.

To work on making spaces within the region more physically accessible for those living with dementia, Sturgeon County FCSS conducted an audit on the programming space in their office. They made changes such as providing labelling and way-finding throughout their space and ensuring that furniture and additional areas (kitchen, bathroom) are accessible and

easy to perceive and use. They followed “Tips for Dementia-Friendly Spaces” from Dementia Friendly Canada and “Making a Dementia-Inclusive Resource Centre” from the Alzheimer Society. They used these same resources to complete audits on all nine of the senior’s centers within the Sturgeon Region as well – providing needed supplies as well as resources and information on dementia to share with their members.

To further work on spreading information about dementia and having items available for those with a diagnosis, Sturgeon County FCSS also worked with a local high school and with a local knitting group to make twiddle muffs and activity mats that can be picked up from local FCSS offices in the region by people with a family member with a diagnosis. Staff provided information about dementia and some supplies that could be used to make the items. Continuing with the promotion of ongoing awareness about dementia, Sturgeon County’s FCSS team invited a speaker to present to working professionals and volunteers in the region. The presentation shared information on signs and symptoms of dementia, how to effectively relate with those living with dementia, and provided ideas on practical changes that can be made to allow for spaces to be dementia-inclusive.

Goals of Dementia Dynamics – Learning the Story

The Dementia Dynamics initiative is a combination of ideas and activities rolled into one overarching goal to increase awareness and support for people living with dementia in the Sturgeon County area. By engaging community members where they are through existing events and opportunities for professional development, Sturgeon County FCSS also focused their goals on reducing dementia-related stigma through education.

DEMENTIA DYNAMICS: STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

In March 2022, Sturgeon County FCSS submitted an application requesting funding from the Rural Development Network's ABCD initiative for Dementia Dynamics-Learning the Story. They were successful in receiving the \$5000 seed funding and the planning for their initiative began in April 2022.

STEP 1: DEVELOPMENT OF BUDGET, WORK PLAN, AND TIMELINE

Budget Considerations

The amount of seed funding provided by RDN's ABCD Project was \$5000. The intention of the seed funding was to support the initial startup costs for the selected ABCD pilot community initiatives. Sturgeon County FCSS spent the majority of the ABCD seed funding on the following items:

- Brain kit supplies:
 - Puzzle books (crosswords, sudokus, etc.)
 - Stress balls (for muscle strength)
 - Printing of resource materials
 - Bags
- Refreshments at events
- Speaker costs
- Supplies for twiddle-muffs, activity mats

Workplan

Sturgeon County FCSS moved into the planning phase of its project initiative a couple of months after receiving funding. Initial planning included the development of a project guide, planning of the senior's conference, and research into what to include in the brain kits. Leading up to Sturgeon County's Annual Senior's Conference, the work plan included obtaining the items needed for the brain kits and putting the kits together, securing speakers, and advertising the event. In the months following the senior's conference, work was done on visiting all the senior's centers, auditing their spaces, and purchasing and delivering the needed supplies. They also met with the volunteer groups who were working on making twiddle-muffs and activity mats. To wrap up the grant-funding period, they worked on getting a speaker's corner together to teach working professionals in the region better ways to relate to those clients and customers they might encounter with a diagnosis.

Sturgeon County worked with one of their regional partners, the Town of Morinville, to bring out a speaker to present on "Dementia Fundamentals" which includes information on what dementia looks like, what to watch for,

how to relate to someone who has dementia effectively, and small changes you can make in your own space to be more dementia inclusive.

Timeline

This timeline is based on the project implementation experiences of the Sturgeon County FCSS team.

TIMELINE	ACTIVITY
MONTH 1 - MONTH 2	Project kick-off
MONTH 3	Development of project guide
MONTH 4	Auditing FCSS space
MONTH 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Senior's Conference planning• Booking speaker• Research on Brain Kits
MONTH 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purchasing supplies for Brain Kits• Assembly of kits
MONTH 7	Seniors Conference
MONTH 8 - MONTH 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Auditing seniors centers• Purchasing supplies• Planning speaker's corner<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Booking facilitator◦ Booking space
MONTH 11 - MONTH 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering supplies to seniors centers• Final presentation speaker's corner

STEP 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

Community Partnerships

Sturgeon County worked with the Senior Citizen's Advisory Network to plan the speakers and topics for the Senior's Conference and with the Town of Morinville to bring the final speaker's corner to the region to wrap up the initiative and invited regional partners from all over to attend. Sturgeon County FCSS partnered with all nine of the senior's centers in the Sturgeon Region to audit their spaces and make them more dementia inclusive.

Communications

Marketing of the senior's conference occurred through Sturgeon County's FCSS Fall 2022 Program Guide as well as through their social media channels and newspaper ads. They approached the senior's centers regarding auditing their spaces by attending the Seniors Citizen's Advisory Network meeting and following up by phone and email communications, and by visiting each in person to conduct the audit and drop off the supplies. Communication regarding the twiddle muffs and activity blankets was done through email and by visiting the two volunteer groups in person. Communication regarding the final speaker's corner occurred over email to all the regional partners.

STEP 3: MEASURING PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

Data Collection

Seniors Conference

For the senior's conference, Sturgeon County FCSS utilized its own evaluation questions. The evaluation used a 1 to 5 rating scale for the following:

- Overall Satisfaction (Cost of Program, Food/Refreshments, Facility)
- Satisfaction with Sessions

Using a Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree), Sturgeon County FCSS gauged success at meeting expected outcomes. The statements measured were:

- I enjoyed myself at the seniors workshop.
- Attending this workshop has provided me an opportunity to socialize and connect with seniors in my community.
- Sessions at this workshop have provided me information that I will use to support my well-being.
- I would attend this workshop again next year and/or recommend it to others.

There was also space for attendees to include comments, feedback, and suggestions in each category.

Findings

Successes

Sturgeon County FCSS's Seniors Conference was very successful and was able to reach a large audience (110 participants) and teach them more about dementia, provide additional resources, and teach them ways to promote brain health.

Having all the seniors' centers participate in an audit of their space was also a huge success. Teaching them ways to be more inclusive provides awareness and space necessary to keep those living with dementia accessing social supports and resources further into their diagnosis. Additionally, Sturgeon County FCSS now has programming space that is more friendly for those with a diagnosis. It will prove very impactful once their Dementia Peer Support Group starts up again.

Challenges

It was observed that there is still a lack of awareness, and possibly denial, about dementia in the community, however, through further awareness involving information campaigns and presentations, Sturgeon County FCSS is hopeful to continue making change.

SUSTAINABILITY

The activities involved in *Dementia Dynamics - Learning the Story* will remain sustainable once the funding ends as the educational resources and programming have already been designed. The plan is to implement the activities annually which will increase the community's knowledge of this issue and therefore further reduce dementia-related stigma. Moreover, the initial implementation of this initiative built connections and an overall sense of community for those who participated. Sturgeon County launched its strategic plan for 2022-2025 and speaks to the commitment to "healthy and resilient" communities that are "safe, welcoming, and diverse". Sturgeon County FCSS are confident they are in a better position to advocate and ensure the community is dementia-friendly and inclusive as a result of this initiative.

REFERENCES

Statistics Canada. (2023). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released February 8, 2023. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

Sturgeon County. (2022). Truth and Reconciliation. Sturgeon County. <https://www.sturgeoncounty.ca/sturgeon-county-administration/truth-and-reconciliation/>