



# DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY HOMES DESIGN GUIDE

*Improving the health, wellbeing, and quality  
of life for people living with dementia*

## ABOUT THE DEMENTIA & HOUSING WORKING GROUP

The Dementia & Housing Working Group aims to promote and influence the contribution of the housing sector in improving the health, wellbeing and quality of life of people living with dementia.

As the only national group focused on housing and dementia, we are not a talking shop. The group brings together a wide range of volunteer stakeholders with an action-oriented ethos and a track record of delivering tangible outcomes.

This design guide has been developed in response to Recommendation 34 of the All Party Parliamentary Group report 'Housing for people with dementia – are we ready?'

It advises: *"We recommend that providers of housing for older people, in the private and social sectors, should consider the design and adaptability of their homes to meet the needs of those living with dementia."*

*"This should cover both 'hard design' - wider doorways, accessible kitchens and bathrooms that enable independence - and 'soft design' - covering the auditory impact of surfaces, the use of tactile and visual cues as reminders, signposting, labelling."*

This guide is aimed at anyone involved in dementia-friendly housing, including people living with dementia and their family and friends, but in particular, housing providers, architects, designers, builders, commissioning organisations and regulators.

It gives a high-level perspective of the dementia-friendly design issues that need to be addressed, including practical suggestions for adaptations that can be made in the home to improve the quality of life of those with dementia.

**Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes,**  
**Housing 21, Chair of Group**

[www.housinglin.org.uk/housing-networks/dementia-and-housing-working-group](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/housing-networks/dementia-and-housing-working-group)



## HOW THE RIGHT HOME ENVIRONMENT CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT SOMEONE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

Working to understand how dementia affects people living at home and making changes to their environment to reflect this can bring about real positive outcomes.

Adapting surroundings to meet changing needs can help the person living with dementia to retain their independence and to manage behaviours that can be challenging for them and their loved ones.

People with dementia can experience loss and change in several areas, including:

- ♥ Their memory
- ♥ Their behaviour
- ♥ How they hear, see, smell and touch
- ♥ How they see objects
- ♥ How they manage and organise everyday life
- ♥ How they manage and organise everyday living

## ADAPTING THE HOME

Adapting a person's home to help manage these changes can help to reduce frustration and anxiety, in turn boosting the quality of life.

Any changes to the environment should be carefully considered to ensure they are carried out whilst also preserving memories, experiences, interests and habits that are unique to that person. Carefully consider any changes you make, especially to colour, as this can have a marked impact on a person's familiarity with their home, and their visual orientation.



## ADAPTING YOUR HOME BATHROOM

Making changes in the bathroom can make every-day care routines less challenging, promoting dignity and wellbeing.

Along with the adaptations shown in the photograph you could also consider:

- ♥ Changing any grab rails to a more prominent colour to help them stand out.
- ♥ Installing a flood detector to alert to accidents and prevent damage and upset.
- ♥ Consider the pressure of the shower-head to ensure the water flow isn't too powerful.
- ♥ Label any drawers highlighting what is inside.
- ♥ Place a sign on the door with both words and graphics to help people easily recognise it is a bathroom.

### EXAMPLES OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGY

- ♥ Smart toilet incorporating wash and dry functions to aid personal hygiene.
- ♥ Flood detector.
- ♥ Pull cord.
- ♥ Movement sensor.
- ♥ Water usage.

Avoid dark bath mat – it may look like a pool of water, as well as being a trip hazard.



Change the colour of the toilet seat to a more prominent colour to provide a good contrast.



Lever taps which are easy to read and clearly show hot and cold.



Does the mirror cause confusion or disorientation? Can it be easily removed or covered?



Contrast behind the toilet to show where the pan and seat are. Lever flush that is easy to grip and doesn't trap fingers.

## ADAPTING YOUR HOME KITCHEN

Changes in the kitchen can make every-day tasks more straight-forward, boosting independence and choice.

Along with the adaptations shown in the photograph you could also consider:

- ♥ Installing extra lighting to make it easier for people to identify what they are looking at in cupboards, drawers and fridge/freezers. For example, adding strip lights under cabinets or an additional light in the fridge.
- ♥ Hang a sign on the door with both words and graphics to help people easily recognise it is a kitchen.

### EXAMPLES OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGY

- ♥ Temperature monitoring sensor
- ♥ Carbon monoxide sensor
- ♥ Flood detector
- ♥ Movement sensor
- ♥ Water usage sensor
- ♥ Electric usage sensor



Place switches against a contrasting colour or draw a line around a switch to make it easier to spot.



Glass fronted cupboards to aid understanding.



Lever taps which are easy to read and clearly show hot and cold.



Label drawers and cupboards.



Easy to grip handles against contrasting doors.

Contrasting colour between worktops and units. Non-reflective worktop preferred. A matt finish is best.

## ADAPTING YOUR HOME LIVING ROOM

Creating an environment here that is meaningful, engaging and recognisable can help to aid wellbeing and preserve someone's sense of identity and personality.

Along with the adaptations shown in the photograph you could also consider:

- ♥ Installing a large whiteboard with reminders to help support someone through the day.
- ♥ Setting up an Alexa to remind someone of key events.
- ♥ Having user-friendly technology like radios and remote controls available to help promote independence and choice.
- ♥ Familiar friendly photographs, paintings and murals can spark happy memories and offer reassurance, consider some designs from yesteryear if appropriate.

Good lighting can support independence and understanding. Avoid anything which creates shadows, this can be confusing for people with dementia.

Large clock that highlights the day and night well.

When redecorating try to stick with calm colour palates that are familiar.

Remember, mirrors may cause confusion or disorientation. Can it be easily removed or covered?

Steer clear of wall coverings which look like objects, such as the spines of a book. People living with dementia may believe they are real and try to take away - causing confusion and upset.

Rugs and mats can create potential tripping hazards and can cause confusion so avoid using them.

## EXAMPLES OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGY

### LIVING SPACE

- ♥ **Sensors** - for monitoring, initiating alarms and data collection eg bed/chair occupancy, enuresis alarm, activity monitoring, access control.
- ♥ **Signage** - use clear unambiguous graphics that are easily understood.
- ♥ **Electronics** - use big button simplified remote controls for ease of use.
- ♥ **Radios** - consider simple devices with no unnecessary settings – retro-style often look and work well.
- ♥ **Clocks** - dual display easy read clocks that show if it is morning, afternoon or night can help with time disorientation.
- ♥ **Smart Speakers** - like Amazon Alexa, have voice activation to aid with a range of tasks and entertainment.



## ADAPTING YOUR HOME BEDROOM

Creating the right bedroom environment can aid rest, relaxation and sleep, whilst helping to organise and separate time into day and night.

Along with the adaptations shown in the photograph you could also consider:

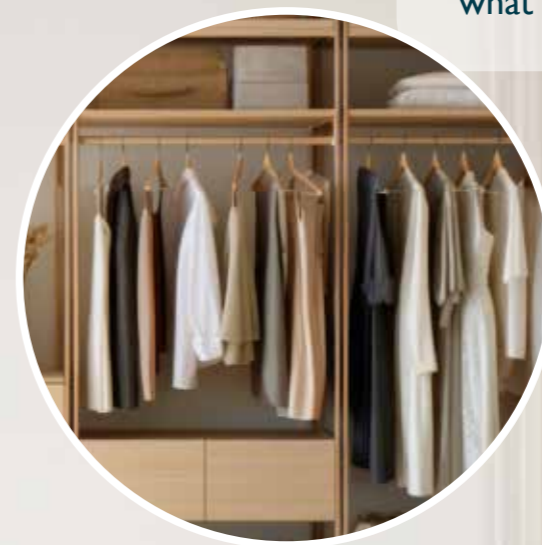
- ♥ Installing a large whiteboard with reminders to help support someone through the day.
- ♥ Setting up an Alexa to remind someone of key events.
- ♥ Installing an analogue clock, in the person's field of view and set to the right time, can help someone make sense of the time of day.
- ♥ Remember to have contrasting colours between flooring and walls and avoid 'strong' colours; pastels and calming shades will help promote better sleep.

### EXAMPLES OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGY

- ♥ **Fall detection technology** - fitted in the flooring, worn on the body; accessed by a pull cord, pendant or a movement sensor.
- ♥ **Vibrating pillow or flashing pillow** - connected to door bell, fire alarm or alarm clock for those who are deaf / hard of hearing.
- ♥ **Sleep apps** - can help promote better sleeping routines and tackle insomnia.



Think about black out curtains or blinds to help create the right environment for sleep.



Label the drawers well and think about opening up wardrobes so people can see their clothes easily. Stick photos of the inside of the wardrobe onto the outside to help aid understanding of what is inside.

Think about purchasing a Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) lamp to help people wake up well.



Use contrasting bed linen and sheets to help define the sleeping area.



## ADAPTING YOUR HOME GARDEN

**Getting around** – Try to ensure the garden is easy to access and has a straightforward layout. Paths and patios should be level, non-slip and a single colour. Provide handrails to support mobility and include raised planters to make gardening easier. Contrasting colours between garden features make them stand out.

**Safety** – Ensure the garden is safe and Enclosed. Ensure there is a clear line of sight between the garden and the house so that a person can see and be seen.

**Planting** – Choose plants that appeal to the five senses with vibrant colours, beautiful scents and that are interesting to touch, as well as those that are well-known and stimulate fond memories. Suggestions include:

- ♥ Hydrangea
- ♥ Japanese maple
- ♥ Carnations
- ♥ Ox eye daisy
- ♥ English lavender

Familiar plants & features to reflect a person's life & past (e.g. water to stir memories of a local stream, etc.)

Furniture to support activity (i.e. raised planters for access, accessible glazed toolshed so objects are easily located, vertical garden with contrasting colour handrails for stability & visibility)

Calm & peaceful providing gentle multi-sensory stimulation (i.e. fragrant plants, wildlife, water, etc)

Direct physical & visual access to the garden.

Entrance is obvious & easy to see.

Level, non-slip & single colour surface.

Sheltered & open seating areas to spend time with others or alone.

Use of colour & contrast to make key features visible & easy to identify.

Consider walking with purpose and avoid dead ends.

## EXAMPLES OF DEMENTIA FRIENDLY TECHNOLOGY

### SUPPORT AND WELLBEING

#### Communication - Music for dementia

- ♥ [www.musicfordementia2020.com](http://www.musicfordementia2020.com)
- ♥ [www.alzproducts.co.uk/dvds-for-people-with-dementia-alzheimers](http://www.alzproducts.co.uk/dvds-for-people-with-dementia-alzheimers)
- ♥ <https://remarc.bbcrewind.co.uk/>

**The Wayback** - virtual reality film series designed to fully immerse the viewer in a positive moment from our collective past  
<https://thewaybackvr.com>

**Life history explorations and recording tools** - The My House of Memories app lets you explore objects from the past and share memories together  
[www.houseofmemories.co.uk](http://www.houseofmemories.co.uk)

**Digital reminiscence, activity resources** - [www.hatads.org.uk](http://www.hatads.org.uk)

Song-task association - Memory Tracks  
<https://memorytracks.net/>

Other websites and products are available and can be found through a search engine and typing in 'dementia products for the home'.

Safer walking - consider smartphone apps, door sensors, alarms and tracking devices.

Brain teaser games or apps -  
[www.mindmate-app.com](http://www.mindmate-app.com)  
[www.lumosity.com](http://www.lumosity.com)

Visual and auditory stimulation - Crdl is a therapeutic intervention that provides a sensorial experience through touch and sound. [www.crdl.com](http://www.crdl.com)

Online communication tool -  
[www.mycarematters.org](http://www.mycarematters.org)

Smart door bell - Ring  
<https://en-uk.ring.com>

## FURTHER INFORMATION AND USEFUL LINKS

For further information and advice about adaptations and technology you can use to create a better home environment for someone with dementia, check out the websites below.

- ♥ See our Dementia Information Hub **Padlet.com** - the go to place for dementia-friendly guidance.
- ♥ And our Dementia Friendly Housing Guide covering planning, design, management and adaptations.
- ♥ [www.housinglin.org.uk/housing-networks/dementia-and-housing-working-group](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/housing-networks/dementia-and-housing-working-group)
- ♥ [www.alzproducts.co.uk](http://www.alzproducts.co.uk)
- ♥ [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Housing-for-people-with-dementia-are-we-ready](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Housing-for-people-with-dementia-are-we-ready)
- ♥ <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/tappi/>
- ♥ Other websites and products are available and can be found through a search engine and typing in 'dementia products for the home'.





## Improving outcomes for people living with dementia

If you are interested in joining the working group, please contact us via:  
[www.housinglin.org.uk/housing-networks/dementia-and-housing-working-group](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/housing-networks/dementia-and-housing-working-group)

With thanks to Irwell Valley Homes, Hornsey Consulting, McCarthy Stone & Housing 21