North Shore Community Resources | CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

September & October 2026

THE GRAPEVINE

North Shore Caregivers Newsletter



FEATURED STORY

'No Dum': A Sign of The Times in a Hyper-Cognitive Age
by Catherine Bryson

‘No Dum’: A Sign of The Times in a Hyper-Cognitive Age

By Catherine Bryson

‘Minds are like parachutes—they only function when open.’
Sir James Dewar

A warning to the reader: what you are about to read may be upsetting, but it will open your eyes as well as your mind.





A walk in my Vancouver neighbourhood (alas, I’ve lost the ‘sanctuary’ of North Van); recently revealed a street sign that originally read: ‘No Dumping’, but that had been mutilated since (possibly intentionally), so as to now read: ‘No Dum’ (see image above). And it is that innocent yet eye-opening sight that gave me the idea to research the extent of stigma surrounding Alzheimer’s dementia in our ‘hyper-cognitive’ culture. Today more than ever before, IQ and lightning-fast mental sharpness have become highly prized commodities and are the golden key to a life of status and wealth. I wondered, further, whether this stigma had improved at all in the light of media attention given lately to the plight of those with dementia (specifically Alzheimer’s), and their caregivers.

The gods of the Internet were particularly generous when I began my search. And here is what I found, both good and bad. I’ll be brief and use point-form. As caregivers, I well know you have packed schedules and little time for leisurely reading.

I based my findings on a 2024 report prepared by Dementia Alliance International (for full report see link in Resources below):

'World Alzheimer Report 2024: Global Changes in Attitudes to Dementia' A global survey of over 40,000 people around the world. My data is based on surveys of high-income countries (in this case Canada), both people with dementia (specifically Alzheimer's) as well as their carers.

Although truthfully, the results are mixed (both positives and negatives), overall, there is hope. As Kate Swaffer, dementia activist, said:

'People with dementia look forward to the day when we no longer have to be defined by our disease or our disabilities, and we are all treated equally.'

So, let us begin by defining stigma: 'The word stigma describes when a person or group of people is treated unfairly because the person or group is perceived to be 'different.'

Apparently, so I learned, there are 3 components to stigma. These are: Stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination.

Armed now with a sense of what we're dealing with, I will now launch into the report findings:

Rather than bombard you with bad news at the outset, (we get enough of that already), I'll begin with the positives and take it from there. At the end, I share this empowering resource called 'Flipping Stigma'.

- In answer to the question: 'Do you feel that in general people's attitudes towards dementia have changed in the last 5 years?' 51% of those with dementia said yes, and 65% of caregivers agreed.
- In terms of life satisfaction, 54% of caregivers to those with dementia said they had it.
- There seemed to be an agreement among the general population that dementia risk increases with an unhealthy lifestyle. This suggests an increase in dementia 'awareness' among most people, which is a positive, although 'lifestyle stigma' can make it challenging for some folks.

And now, we turn to the 'not so good' results of the survey:

- The report disturbingly informs the reader that in China, the common word for dementia is still 'senile retardation' (which in Chinese is 'Lao nian chi dai'). By noting this, my intent is most emphatically not to imply that the stigma is somehow 'worse' in China. The whole world discriminates. I only mentioned it because it lends credence to what I wrote about the 'No Dum' sign at the beginning.
- In 2019, 70% of Canadians believed dementia was 'a normal part of ageing' (in fact, it is not), while in 2024, 79% of the same group thought so. This erroneous belief could hinder people from getting a diagnosis (so the report said.)

- From 2019 to 2024, there was among those with dementia a growing perception of increases in discrimination towards them, in at least 14 different areas in their social lives, including, for example, difficulty making (and keeping) friends. Disturbingly, jokes about people's dementia symptoms increased from 32% in 2019 to 44% in 2024.

Indeed, as the report concludes, this kind (as well as other) kinds of societal stigma perpetuates 'a cycle of neglect and inadequate care.' A personal anecdote here (as I have lived experience since both my parents had dementia), my late father's gerontologist told me (not in so many words) that there was no point concerning myself about needing to spend time with my dad. Unfortunately, there are those who think the elderly in care are best left to themselves. Thankfully I disagree, and, as well as writing for NSCR, I volunteer with those with dementia in complex care and find it quite enjoyable. I always learn something new about working better with those with the disorder, even bringing 'slinkies' to the facility so they can re-experience the 1950s. I for one, choose to try to understand those with dementia, rather than have a stereotyped judgement. It is not a case of a homogeneous group, for every person with dementia is unique, like a fingerprint.

To conclude, I leave you with a couple of bright spots: first, a link (see Resources below), to the tremendously uplifting 'Flipping Stigma' website, an initiative listed on the World Health Organization's (WHO) 'Global Dementia' Platform.

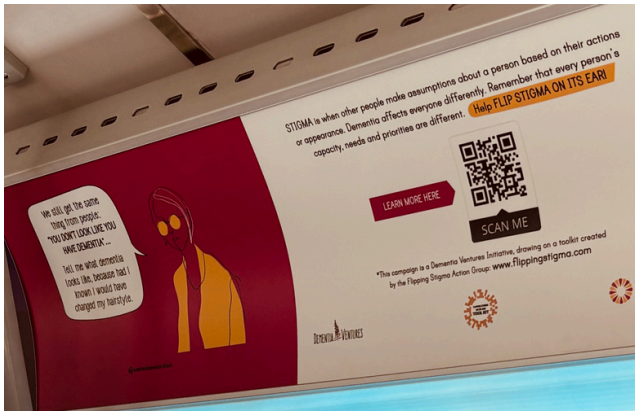
Let me quote how the report concludes: 'We must create environments where people with dementia and their carers can live meaningful, inclusive stigma-free lives.'

Indeed, let it be so. For aren't we all of us so like plants, including those with dementia, who must be nourished daily, and more than by 'bread alone' (as the saying goes), but by love and meaning, especially meaning.

And besides, maybe the whole thing about IQ is overrated anyway.

There are other more important qualities, such as the goodness of the human heart.

At least, one would hope so.



Resources

World Alzheimer Report 2024: Global changes in attitudes to dementia - 20 September 2024
https://www.alzint.org/u/World-Alzheimer-Report-2024.pdf

Dementia Ventures Initiative
https://www.flippingstigma.com
https://alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/stigma-against-dementia

Revisiting the World Alzheimer Report 2024: Challenging dementia stigma in popular culture & why we need media guidelines
https://www.alzint.org/news-events/news/revisiting-the-world-alzheimer-report-2024-becoming-an-advocate-and-a-force-for-change-as-an-lgbtq-person-with-early-onset-dementia

PubMed Central
Negative stereotypes, fear and social distance: a systematic review of depictions of dementia in popular culture in the context of stigma
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7670593/

A note on the images: The two different 'versions' of the same street sign I spotted on a walk recently. An ad on the bus for 'Dementia Ventures', a West End Seniors Group initiative I heard of.

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CARE PLANNING CONVERSATIONS WORKSHOP:

A FREE 2 PART WORKSHOP

Join us for the Care Planning Conversations series, presented by Dara Lewis and Umilla Stead from Vancouver Coastal Health's Goals of Care Support Team.

PART 1 - ADVANCE CARE PLANNING:

Advance care planning is the process of thinking and talking about your future wishes for health care with the people you trust and deciding who will speak for you if you are unable to speak for yourself. This workshop can be helpful as you plan ahead with your loved one for the care that they want, but also for yourself when thinking about wishes for your own health care.

PART 2 - EMPOWERING CAREGIVERS IN DECISION MAKING:

When a healthcare provider shares medical information about your loved one and asks if you have any questions, do you ever feel unsure what to ask? In this session, we'll share some key questions you can use to better understand your loved one's health situation and prepare for future changes. This session will also empower you or your loved one to share important information with the care team, helping them get to know your loved one and the care they do and don't want.



Dara Lewis is a registered nurse with 23 years of experience, currently working as an educator and clinical support with the Goals of Care Support Team across Vancouver General Hospital, UBC Hospital, and GF Strong. She's also an Adjunct Professor at UBC School of Nursing.



Umilla Stead has been an occupational therapist for almost 30 years and is the team lead for the Goals of Care Support team at Vancouver Coastal Health.

TUESDAYS, OCTOBER 20 & 27, 2026

1:00 PM - 2:30 PM | ON ZOOM

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

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Marsha's Weather

By Tobias Jesso

Marsha does not experience her days as a story with a beginning, a middle, an end. Dementia changed that. She shows her inner life to the world differently now. It is simpler and, in its own way, truer: watching her is like watching the weather, present, total, and sometimes unpredictable. At times, a fog coming in on cat's feet sitting quietly on the ground of her being, at times, a storm of emotions, mostly, a sunny disposition of kindness.

On a recent quiet Wednesday afternoon, her husband was talking, his voice choked, unsteady, giving her a quiet accounting of their 44 years together as he often does. How Marsha is a model mom. How the kids are succeeding. How lucky they are as a couple. How much he loves her. Marsha can't tell you the story of those four decades if you ask but something in her doesn't need the story. Some older, wordless part of her was still fully awake, still listening from deep in the brain and without warning, her tears were falling.

There was a time her husband would have looked at those tears and reached straight for an explanation; tears mean sad, something is wrong, fix it, but he has learned, slowly, that it wasn't that simple anymore. For over forty years, tending to his feelings had been etched into her like a pathway her body will never forget, long after the words for it are gone. Maybe her tears are that old devotion, still finding its way to the surface. Or maybe, she was just catching the feeling in the room the way you'd catch a tune, his emotion becoming hers.

Underneath it all sat something else, not an illness, not a diagnosis, just a quiet, permanent kind of ache that had nothing urgent about it. Like mist. It doesn't need a reason to be there. It's just weather in a valley they both know well.



This time, he didn't rush to name it. He didn't ask himself whether this was joy or sadness or frustration or something to worry about. He'd learned, over years of experience, to sit inside the not-knowing and not-being-able instead of solving his way out of it. His mantra now, "to be able to not be able". So, he just stayed. He took her hand. He let the weather move through the room without trying to change its course.

That's how it goes now. When Marsha cries, he checks she isn't in physical distress, he doesn't look for psychological explanation, he no longer analyzes; that's for writing about later. He sits close. He holds her hand; he stays with her in the experiencing. Sometimes he asks, gently, "what's there"? More often he just watches, quiet, patient, the way they watch mist drift across a valley they have loved for a long time. He has learned though, to not mirror her tears which only makes the weather worse. His tears are for later, at a private time, often at night, quietly, into his pillow.

♪ It's dementia and she'll cry if she wants to. You can cry too if it happens to you. ♪

Postscript: Trying to change dementia was like trying to control the weather for me but I eventually learned to do what I could i.e.; put on a raincoat or sweater, acting from inside and what I could control, my mood. Writing has helped this process immensely and as a mathematician/computer scientist by training, I would never have tried but for encouragement to journal from others.

Resources:

"It's My Party" (1963) by Wally Gold, John Gluck Jr., Herb Weiner, Seymour Gottlieb.

Events Calendar

SEPTEMBER

Tues 01	**Caregiver Support Group Meeting** (In Person & Zoom)	**6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**
Thurs 03	**Men's Support Group Meeting** (In Person)	**10:30 AM - 12:30 PM**
Wed 09	**Korean Group Meeting** (In Person)	**2:00 PM - 4:00 PM**
Wed 14	**Bereavement Support Group Meeting** (In Person & Zoom)	**6:00 PM - 8:00 PM**
Mon 21	**Persian Group Meeting** (In Person)	**6:00 PM - 8:00 PM**
Mon 28	**Caregiver Support Group Meeting** (In Person & Zoom) *Please note date change for this meeting originally scheduled for Oct 6	**6:30 PM - 8:30 PM**

OCTOBER

Thurs 01	**Men's Support Group Meeting** (In Person)	**10:30 AM - 12:30 PM**
Wed 14	**Korean Group Meeting** (In Person)	**2:00 PM - 4:00 PM**
Mon 19	**Persian Group Meeting** (In Person)	**6:00 PM - 8:00 PM**
Tues 20	**Care Planning Conversations Workshop I** (Zoom)	**1:00 PM - 2:30 PM**
Wed 21	**Bereavement Support Group Coffee Social** (In Person)	**11:00 AM - 12:30 PM**
Sat 24	**Senior's Expo at Silver Harbour Senior's Centre** (In Person)	**12:00 PM - 4:00 PM**
Tues 27	**Care Planning Conversations Workshop II** (Zoom)	**1:00 PM - 2:30 PM**

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MEN'S CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

A monthly support group specifically for male caregivers who support their spouses/partners.



The group's goal is to create community and offer a time of sharing, listening, and connecting for men with experience of caregiving for their partners.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- September 3rd (In Person)
- October 1st (In Person)



FIRST THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH

10:30 AM - 12:30 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

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CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP

A monthly support group for family caregivers who support their loved ones!



The group's goal is to create community and offer a time of sharing, listening, and connecting for anyone with experience of caregiving for family members.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- Tuesday, September 1st (In Person & Zoom)
- Monday, September 28th (In Person & Zoom)*

Please note date change for this meeting originally scheduled for Oct 6



FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH*

6:30 PM - 8:30 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM & ZOOM

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

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PERSIAN WELLNESS & EDUCATION GROUP

We aim to bring together members of the community to meet, share, and talk about topics brought forth by the group.



To join the new NSCR Persian Telegram Group, to receive information, meeting reminders, and to connect with the North Shore Persian community, scan or click the QR code.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- September 21st (In Person)
- October 19th (In Person)



THIRD MONDAY OF EACH MONTH

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM

For more info: vic.gailiunas@nscr.ca

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CAREGIVER BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

A group specifically for people experiencing grief in the loss of a loved one.



The group aims to create community and offer a time of sharing and resources, listening, and connecting with others with similar experiences.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- September 14th - 6pm - 8pm (In Person & Zoom)
- October 21st - 11:00am - 12:30pm
  Bereavement Support Group Coffee Social (In Person)



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2026

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM & ZOOM

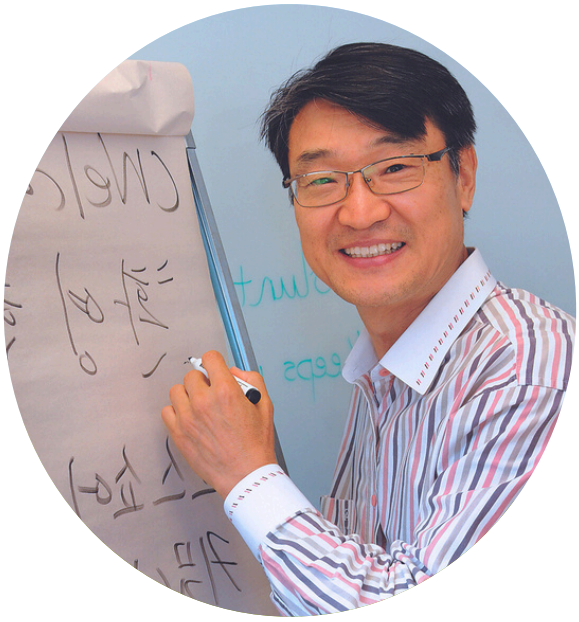
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KOREAN WELLNESS & EDUCATION GROUP

We aim to bring together members of the community to meet, share, and talk about topics brought forth by the group.



This group is held entirely in Korean, with guest speakers, resources, group interaction, and creative arts.

NEXT MEETINGS:

- September 9th (In Person)
- October 14th (In Person)



SECOND WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH

2:00 PM - 4:00 PM | NSCR COMMUNITY ROOM

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