

# Dementia Friendly Life Enrichment Program (DFLEP): SaskAbilities

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Healthcare Excellence Canada would like to formally acknowledge SaskAbilities' generosity in sharing their skills, knowledge, expertise and experiences to inform this promising practice.

## About Healthcare Excellence Canada

Healthcare Excellence Canada (HEC) works with partners across the country to shape a future where everyone in Canada has safe and high-quality healthcare. We bring together people, evidence and action to move Care Forward - spreading and scaling quality and safety improvements, strengthening capacity and collective leadership and catalyzing change in policy and practice.

At HEC, healthcare excellence means improving safety, quality and value for everyone. It means care grounded in what matters most to patients, caregivers, communities and people in the workforce. It also means care that respects and responds to First Nations, Inuit and Métis priorities and is culturally safe, equitable and supported by the appropriate use of technology. Together with our partners, we embed these foundations across the health system.

Our work also focuses on expanding access to safe, connected, high-quality care closer to home and community. This includes supporting people with primary health care needs and older adults with health and social needs.

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## Enabling Aging in Place collaborative

The Enabling Aging in Place collaborative brought together health and social service organizations from across the healthcare continuum to implement promising practices that can delay people's entry into long-term care. The collaborative aimed to improve safety, health and quality-of-life outcomes, while also reducing emergency department visits, lessening demands on care partners and making better use of health and social care resources.

Teams from communities across the country participated in the Enabling Aging in Place collaborative.



## Dementia Friendly Life Enrichment Program

SaskAbilities' Dementia Friendly Life Enrichment Program (DFLEP) provides individual and group services to people living in the community with dementia and their care partners. These individuals often feel isolated with their diagnosis, and this program aims to connect them with groups of peers and support services to build their sense of belonging and connection. DFLEP is the only in-person program in rural Saskatchewan for individuals living with dementia.

DFLEP provides critical support at all stages of dementia, not just the more advanced stages of the condition. This program enhances quality of life while also delaying entry to long-term care by reducing care partner burnout.

## Key Features

### Objectives

The objectives of DFLEP include:

- improving social inclusion and reducing isolation

- reducing stress and improving care partner well-being
- delaying progression of the illness
- reducing reliance on the healthcare system
- building dementia-friendly communities

### Population served

DFLEP supports individuals living with dementia and their care partners who are living in their own homes in Yorkton, Saskatchewan and surrounding rural communities.

### Program team

The program team includes a full-time dementia friendly life enrichment coordinator and two part-time dementia friendly facilitators. The SaskAbilities extended team provides oversight and other administrative supports.

The team works collaboratively to meet the overall program objectives of supporting individuals living with dementia and their care partners, while simultaneously building [dementia-friendly communities](#).

### Dementia Friendly Life Enrichment Program

DFLEP staff and volunteers focus on improving social inclusion and well-being by accompanying participants in recreation activities, helping them navigate systems and supporting instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs). The program provides person-centred supports for individuals living with dementia as well as peer and navigation support for their care partners.

## Referrals

Referrals to the program come through:

- self-referrals from individuals and their families
- primary healthcare teams
- social workers
- healthcare professionals providing homecare
- local social prescribers
- Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan First Link coordinators

## Enrollment and services

### Support for individuals living with dementia

The DFLEP journey starts with a referral, followed by a visit and assessment by the coordinator in the individual's home. The main objective is to get to know the individual's interests and needs.

The coordinator then develops a person-centred plan to support the individual living with dementia and their care partner. The support provided is responsive and flexible to the evolving needs of the individual and their care partner as the disease progresses.

Facilitators then coordinate life enrichment activities in the individual's home and community with the goal of enhancing quality of life for the individual living with dementia. Facilitator-accompanied activities depend on the individual's interests, but some examples include:

- attending community events
- trips to the lake
- horseback riding
- going out for lunch or coffee

DFLEP also provides support with IADLs, such as grocery shopping, light cleaning, laundry, meal preparation and other tasks.

Individuals living with dementia are invited to participate in both large- and small-group activities with their peers. Large-group activities are held once a month and include a shared meal and an activity for all group participants. Participants can also attend small-group activities based on shared interests. The program provides transportation to group activities, removing a significant barrier to participation for many. Each activity is designed to be socially engaging and focus on informal approaches to gathering. The goal is to reduce the sense of "helping" participants and instead foster a sense of "collaboration," where everyone contributes to the activity.

Group activities are also informed by the gifts and talents of participants. They are invited to share their gifts – such as music, baking, arts, crafts – with others. These activities help individuals connect with peers, who understand their experiences as people living with dementia and can support them. While the changes associated with dementia can be very isolating for individuals and their care partners, this program fosters strong connections.



## Support for care partners

DFLEP also prioritizes care partners of individuals living with dementia. While participants attend DFLEP activities, their care partners have time to run errands and attend appointments. This respite promotes care partners' well-being and ability to continue to support their loved ones.

Care partners of individuals living with dementia are also supported through peer-support groups. They share their lived and living experiences with each other and offer practical and emotional support. This builds a community of connection and resources for care partners to draw upon as needed.

These groups are also co-facilitated by care partners – called Peers – whose loved ones living with dementia have transitioned into long-term care or passed away. This allows Peers to share their experiences and offer support to others who are at stages they have already experienced. This can help reduce Peers' feelings of guilt and shame that may arise if their loved one moves into long-term care during the final stages of their illness.

The coordinator also works closely with care partners, helping them navigate systems, complete applications for services (e.g. home care) and manage complex behaviours and issues, including transitions into long-term care.

The strong connections built between care partners, Peers and DFLEP staff mean that care partners can turn to these resources for guidance and support. This reduces their

chance of experiencing crisis or needing to rely heavily on the healthcare system. Ultimately, the support and community the program builds can help delay admission to long-term care.

## Implementation context

DFLEP is a high-impact program successfully implemented in a rural context. It has the potential to be adapted for urban settings if delivered at the community or neighbourhood level. Where staffing levels are not sufficient to meet the needs of individuals living with dementia and their care partners, organizations could engage volunteers to provide additional support, similar to programs such as Nav-CARE.

## Outcomes<sup>1</sup>

### Improved quality of life

One hundred percent of care partners and individuals living with dementia surveyed indicated they feel their quality of life has improved since being in DFLEP.

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<sup>1</sup> The outcome and impact information shared reflects information available at the time of writing this promising practice. HEC would like to acknowledge that evaluation activities are an ongoing process for many promising practices and

the type of data collected is influenced by program goals, the length of time the program has been implemented and the level of resources available to support evaluation.

“I want quality days for [loved one living with dementia]. The DFLEP enables that to happen. With caring managers, coordinator and facilitators, we have a place at SaskAbilities where we feel we belong. [Loved one living with dementia] enjoys his outings with his facilitator; cooking, walks and lunches together, to name a few. We both enjoy the small and larger group outings. For myself, I benefit from connecting with people on the same journey – to share tips, laughs, hugs and tears.”

– Care partner of individual living with dementia

## Reduced loneliness and improved social connectedness

One hundred percent of care partners and individuals living with dementia surveyed indicated their social connections have improved since joining DFLEP.

“I feel I have support now, as I have no family or young friends to depend on. I have people I can talk to that can help me through difficult situations.”

– Individual living with dementia

The social connections built through DFLEP have evolved and extended outside of programming, with participants exchanging personal contact information to create a natural support system.

“The Dementia Friendly Life Enrichment Program has had a tremendous positive impact in our lives. Being with a group of people who are on the same journey as us has been so beneficial to us as we can share information, laugh and even gives hugs to one another. The connections are meaningful.”

– Care partner of individual living with dementia

The social connections of DFLEP are also long lasting. Some care partners who have transitioned their loved ones into long-term care remain active in the program. These individuals shared that they have developed a connection with the people in the program and are able to offer supports to others.

## Supporting delays in long-term care placement

DFLEP’s wrap-around supports aim to enable individuals living with dementia to remain at home for as long as possible. The program does this by supporting both individuals living with dementia and their care partners. It also recognizes that, in later stages of dementia, care needs increase – eventually to an individual requiring 24-hour support – and that this can be challenging for care partners to manage at home. DFLEP works to support the individual and their care partner for as long as possible and continues to assist them during transitions to long-term care, helping care partners manage this change.

“Support for the caregiver is so important. Respite hours provide a break in caregiving duties, which allows me to do the things I need to in the community. The program also provides information, which has given me strategies to use at home. Supports through programs such as these will help me care for my mom at home for as long as possible.”

- Care partner of individual living with dementia

## Improving care partner burnout

Eighty-eight percent of surveyed care partners indicated that DFLEP has implemented strategies to prevent care partner burnout. Respondents who answered “no” said they did not need specific strategies, as their loved one was in the early stages of dementia. However, these individuals noted that they would talk to program staff or other care partners if they needed assistance, knowing they could access support in future.

## Funding

DFLEP is a free program for individuals living with dementia and their care partners. The program is supported through core funding for staffing, training, travel, supplies and materials from the Government of Saskatchewan’s Ministry of Health on an annual basis. Additional grants are continually sought by the program team to enhance activities and ensure participants receive the support they need.

If you are interested in partnering, supporting, or growing DFLEP, please consider reaching out to the contact below.

# Asset-Based Community Development Approach

**Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)** is a strengths-based approach to solving challenges in communities that focuses on and develops the strengths of local assets (e.g. people, physical assets) that are key to ensuring a sustainable community.

SaskAbilities’ DFLEP engages deeply with local assets in the community of Yorkton and surrounding rural areas. The team uses community spaces such as parks, museums, local restaurants and churches to host activities. SaskAbilities’ reputation for being adaptive and willing to support flexibly when needs arise has helped the organization build strong connections with local partners that support DFLEP.

Another way the SaskAbilities team has engaged with the ABCD approach is in how they work alongside individuals living with dementia to share their gifts with the community. They are very purposeful in designing activities that not only allow the organization to “help” participants but enable the participants to contribute and share their gifts.

“With the program [loved one living with dementia] has met people on the same journey as him and is able to comfortably engage in conversation. [In] a group, he likes to help, getting a chair for someone, cleaning up dishes, opening up doors. It gives him purpose.”

– Care partner of individual living with dementia

The DFLEP team also encourages open communication with participants so they can adapt programming as needed to best support individuals living with dementia and their care partners.

SaskAbilities is focused on strengthening community networks to connect individuals living with dementia and their care partners with natural supports for when staff members are not available to support.

## Partnerships

DFLEP is supported by many community partners and has developed strong relationships that help deliver the program effectively. The Alzheimer Society provides a facilitator for the care partner peer-support program that works alongside Peers. The DFLEP team offers concurrent activities for individuals living with dementia during these sessions so that care partners can attend the group. This partnership allows the program to succeed by giving care partners time to participate while knowing their loved one is being supported.

Partners in the healthcare system provide referrals to the program, including local primary healthcare teams, homecare professionals, social workers, the community social prescriber and physicians. SIGN Senior

Mobility is another key partner that supports older adults with transportation in Yorkton.

Local restaurants and recreation spaces support DFLEP by providing facilities and activities for the group. These locations work with the DFLEP team to offer accessible, welcoming and dementia-friendly spaces where programming can take place safely. Similarly, churches and service groups have provided spaces to hold activities and host peer-support groups for care partners. These local partnerships provide opportunities for individuals living with dementia to continue to connect with and in their communities.

This promising practice was co-produced with SaskAbilities. Information was compiled in the fall of 2025. To reflect the changing and evolving nature of care, the information may change. We encourage you to reach out to this team for any information that could help you as you work to improve care for those living with dementia.

### How can I learn more?

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