

Vision for integrated living for persons with memory decline

The objective is to create new forms of living as alternatives for living alone and residential care.

DIVERSITY

There are several different living solutions and services, and they are all needed. The residents have different needs and hopes, and their life situations can also vary greatly. It is harmful to think that everyone should live in the same way. The starting point should always be one's own home, and the way one wants to live and manage one's living.

INTEGRATION

No group should be excluded from residential communities. Persons with memory decline should not be moved from their neighborhoods or secured away with gates or locks. They need to be integrated just like all other residents. This requires both social inclusivity and flexible physical environments. Efficiency in care planning must not necessitate resident moves, the care should be brought to the resident.

INDEPENDENCE

Safety is always important, but it should not come at the cost of a good life. We should not forget that life at all ages involves risks. We need to look for measures that help persons with memory decline live safely but are not in conflict with personal freedom and right of self-governance. Ideally, support from one's residential community, familiar social encounters, and a resident coordinator will recognize individual needs to ensure recognition and fulfillment of personal wishes.

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility of the built environment benefits everyone. For places and services to be 'memory-accessible' we need to also consider e.g. sensory environments, shared and public spaces, public transit, services, running errands, and event planning. If persons with memory decline will not participate in something, we need to recognise the barriers.

EXPERTISE

Memory care is a specialty field. It is imperative that expertise is both required and recognized in all areas of living, planning and services. User participation and genuine respect for the clients' voices is important on every level of decision making. Planning should not focus on merely accommodating for a service.

ECONOMY

Diverse and integrated living solutions can be accommodated with current economic resources as new options reduce reliance on residential care. Interpretation and application of current funding policies and regulations must recognize new forms of living and not work against them.

COLLABORATION

Genuine collaboration between different municipal, regional and regulatory bodies will enable high quality and flexible solutions for varying needs of the clients. Living solutions for persons with memory decline should focus on the 'living'. If we start applying institutional regulations to private living, we will only get more institutions.

Aspects to consider when designing for memory care



INTEGRATION

- Persons with memory decline are normal people, any of us may get memory decline. Memory decline advances slowly, often enabling a long and independent life
- Increased understanding and acceptance of diversity enables integration of various resident groups, and creating common spaces and activities to reduce loneliness
- Examples include multi-generational living, communal living, and day programs

FAMILIARITY

- Familiarity helps with comprehensibility, identity and sense of security
- It is important to recognize the value of one's own belongings, local landmarks and memories from different periods and everyday experiences
- Routines, familiar activities, and daily rhythms are beneficial in memory care



EXTERIOR ENVIRONMENTS

- Possibilities for outdoor recreation are important for wellbeing and mental alertness
- Green areas, parks, any pedestrian-friendly areas can serve as venues for venturing and sitting outdoors, exercise and social interaction
- Physical exercise is one of the most important recommendations in memory care

ACTIVITIES

- Meaningful activities and participation support the retention of remaining skills
- Persons with memory decline can attend a huge variety of activities and functions
- E.g. choirs, handcrafts, art, exercise etc. – can all create experiences of success





CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY

- Physical environments in memory care need to be clear to perceive and consistent for all senses
- Direct views, accessibility and logical spatial sequencing are important
- Excessive repetition and sameness can cause confusion and anxiety

HUMAN SCALE

- At some point, the world of a person with memory decline will start to shrink
- Human scale helps maintain references in the daily environment
- The best is if the residents can naturally keep active in their own environments with e.g. gardening, and other everyday tasks



PRIVACY VS. COMMUNITY

- Having the option for privacy is an essential part of an independent life
- Social interaction and having a community are also important for daily activity and sense of security
- Independence includes the choice of when to participate and when not, and the ability maintain one's own familiar and grounding routines

FLEXIBILITY

- Flexibility and adaptability of spaces is important, so that the environment can support the resident as their abilities or condition change
- An apartment can be opened up or combined with additional adjacent space to e.g. create a space for a helper
- Longer or repeated visits from family and friends will also need space
- Shared spaces need to accommodate various different uses



SENSORY ENVIRONMENT

- A good sensory environment increases comprehensibility and sense of security
- A right balance of stimuli is important as overstimulation increases anxiety and can lead to withdrawal as well as reducing the capacity for restoration after a busy day
- Clear lines of vision, a calm acoustical environment, pleasant materials, natural and tactile surface materials, and colors all support wellbeing in memory care, when used correctly

Topics of discussion and reflection

MINDSET CHANGE

Biggest changes often happen with shifts of mindsets. Memory decline still suffers from several false assumptions and societal stigma. Persons with memory decline are aware of their condition and can function independently in society for a long time.

How could we all shift our mindsets around memory decline?

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is often offered as a solution for memory care - and when successful, it can provide good support. Active use of technology, however, requires good cognitive skills. Persons with memory decline often crave human interaction as loneliness is one of the biggest daily issues for seniors and those living alone.

Age-technology also comes with significant ethical and privacy concerns, especially if devices constantly gather information or track the life of their users.

What kinds of technical solutions would best support the wellbeing of persons with memory decline?

APARTMENT DESIGN

The resident's individual needs and symptoms of memory decline should be taken into account in apartment design. This entails adaptability of spaces according to changing situations so that they can support and enhance the abilities of the resident. Clarity and familiarity of spaces as well as visual connections between them support the functionality of the resident and enhance the experience of managing the space.

How would you improve an apartment to be memory-friendly for yourself or a loved one?

EXTERIOR SPACES

When designing for memory care, exterior environments are frequently overlooked. It is important to enable independent outings to the exterior and managing everyday tasks such as grocery shopping. Good neighborhood services and public urban areas can support the life of persons with memory decline.

Landmarks, familiar routes, clear signage and lighting as well as benches and small resting places are all beneficial. Providers of commercial services should consider memory-friendliness in their operations.

How could you help a family member with memory decline with outdoor activities and managing their everyday tasks?

This brochure summarizes results from a consortium project titled 'Integrated Diverse Living Solutions for Persons with Memory Decline' directed by Aalto University research group for social and healthcare building (SOTERA) in 2021-2022. The consortium members were: Aalto University, ARA, City of Helsinki, City of Jyväskylä, Municipality of Kirkkonummi, City of Pori, City of Porvoo, Saint-Gobain Finland Ltd./ Ecophon, Finnish Ministry of Environment and Yrjö and Hanna Foundation.

SOTERA provides keynotes, education and seminars on memory-friendly design.
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