

Welcoming Everyone: Dementia-Inclusive Spaces and Materials Handout

Created by the University of Maine Center on Aging

Accessible materials and welcoming spaces change lives. When people can walk into a space, pick up a brochure, and immediately feel included — especially in activities connected to their own history and passions — they stay sharper, feel more valued, and hold onto the relationships that matter. And the benefits don't stop there. Communities that design for everyone become kinder, more empathetic places for all of us. This handout offers recommendations for creating accessible materials and making spaces welcoming.

Recommendations for Printed Materials

Style

- Present information one idea at a time
- Keep language simple, but not patronizing
- Stick to the main message
- Avoid jargon or slang that may not be understood
- If you use technical or medical terms, define them clearly
- Each section should stand alone; readers should not have to remember other sections to understand.

Pictures

- Pictures alongside text can be helpful, but too many can be confusing
- Ensure the pictures have a purpose and match the content

Format

- 14-point font is best for body text
- Use a simple font (for example, Arial)

- Use white space
- Use bullet points, bold text, and headings to separate information and highlight important pieces
- Avoid italics
- Avoid red-green combinations. People with color vision differences, which become more common with age, may not distinguish them.

Recommendations for Spaces

Signs

- Clear, simple language
- Simple, large print
- High contrast between font and background colors
- Placed at eye level
- Located at key decision points (for example, at the start of a hallway)
- Signage to restrooms needs to be clear and prominent throughout the space

Entry

- Entrance should be clearly visible and easy to identify
- Entrance and entry area should be well-lit

Physical Environment

- Ensure there is adequate lighting throughout the building
- Hallways should be flat, wide, and unobstructed
- Remove loose scatter rugs and mats — these are trip hazards and can cause visual confusion. Where carpeting is used, choose light, solid colors
- Place mirrors only where they serve a clear purpose — they can add to disorientation if used without intention
- Avoid overly patterned flooring, which can cause visual confusion or the perception of obstacles

Quick Self-Assessment Checklist

Use these questions to take a quick look at your space and materials through a dementia-inclusive lens.

- Can a first-time visitor find the entrance, restrooms, and main gathering area without asking for help?
- Are signs large, high-contrast, and placed at eye level?
- Is lighting bright and even, with no dark corners or harsh glare?
- Are walkways clear of obstacles, loose mats, and confusing floor patterns?
- Do your printed materials use plain language and a readable font size?
- Do images in your materials reflect the actual people and activities they represent?
- Could someone with memory loss pick up your brochure and understand its main message in under a minute?

Can Everyone Hear You?

It's also important to think about sound within your space. Large rooms with hard surfaces and high ceilings increase reverberation, making it harder to separate speech from background noise — even for people who use hearing aids. You can help.

- Arrange seating close to the speaker and away from loudspeakers and noisy areas.
- Ensure the speaker's face is well-lit and visible to everyone, making lip-reading and other facial cues possible.
- Soften the room with large, well-anchored carpets in light, solid colors, upholstered furniture, or tablecloths to absorb sound. Avoid scatter rugs, which are a trip hazard.
- Ask about accessibility needs when people register or arrive — a simple invitation removes the burden of self-advocacy from attendees.

For more information, you can visit [Lifelong Maine's Dementia Inclusive Online Resource Center](#).