

Designing for Dementia:

A Compassionate Passion for Detail

Beyond the troubling statistics of Alzheimer's disease and related dementia disorders (ADRD) are mothers, fathers, siblings, friends—and families—just like yours. The simple truth is that caring for a person you love who has dementia can be overwhelming. As the number of people with dementia grows, the need for additional memory care facilities grows with it. Architects and designers who fully understand the needs of dementia patients can help create purposeful and supportive memory care housing. Achieving that goal requires two things: knowledge of how ADRD affects the brain, and the ability to translate that knowledge into design decisions.

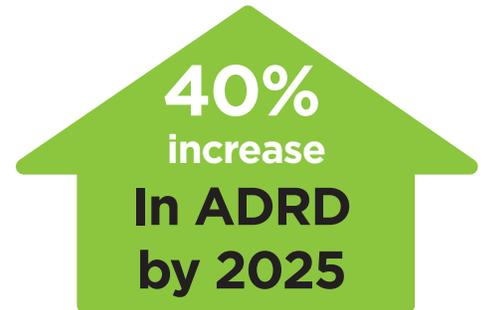
Getting Started:

Four Exterior Design Tips for Memory Care Facility Planning

Uniting on some basic guidelines can help a team keep priorities on track, beginning with exterior site planning and design.

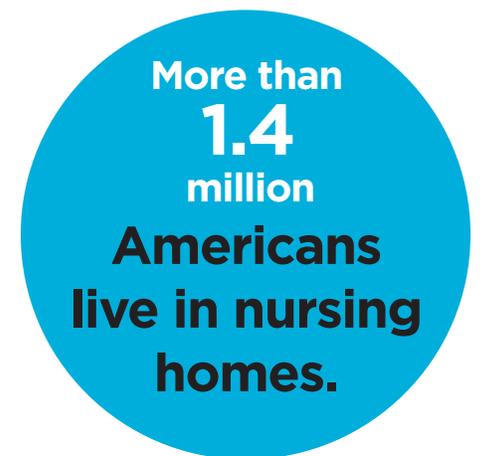
1. Envision exterior spaces that are comforting and appealing—homelike, from the moment the facility comes into view. Hospital, hotel or commercial attributes that do not promote a sense of home can confuse or alarm residents. Yes, it is a memory care “facility,” but more importantly, for the families who will use it, this will be home.
2. Regarding landscape and campus planning, serenity rules. Calming courtyards and gardens not only encourage social interaction, but foster friendships and a happier mental state. Additionally, incorporating abundant small group seating areas (like benches or patio furnishings) make the outdoor setting inviting.
3. Security is also essential, yet requires artful subtlety. The fact is that many people who have ADRD will develop a tendency to wander. Families need complete peace of mind that their loved one is absolutely safe. Protective measures (such as fencing camouflaged by landscaping) give residents freedom to move about, while establishing strong boundaries.
4. Creating spaces for residents to enjoy the outdoors without risking their safety is possible. Walking paths should be designed to make simple, continuous loops that return residents to a familiar entrance.

The fact remains, however, that much time will be spent indoors. While both exterior and interior design must be thoughtfully planned, there is nothing that has a bigger impact than what goes on inside.



By 2025 the number of people affected by Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia will reach 7.1 million - a 40 percent increase from today.

- Alzheimer's Association



- Center for Disease Control and Prevention,
“National Survey of Long-Term Care Providers,
2013-2014”

Take it Inside:

Four Interior Design Tips for Memory Care Facility Planning

Ensuring interior resident areas are pleasant and safe is just as multifaceted as the exterior design process. An effective floor plan must address the risk of wandering in different ways than the building and grounds. To consistently achieve this objective, we've found success by keeping key principles in mind:



1. Racetrack approach to circulation. The racetrack loop allows residents to walk throughout the facility yet always return to the place where they started. This can help residents fulfill their desire to walk without getting lost.



2. Hide doors or exits along the loop. Camouflaging exits or doors can help keep residents on the “approved” path and out of danger. This can be accomplished by hiding them behind curtains or painting a door the same color as adjacent walls.



3. Use color as a navigation tool. Color can help residents, and visitors, visually connect spaces with their purpose.



4. Support color navigation with objects. Prominent landmarks can help residents navigate at key decision points through the building. Objects can also help residents recall what happens in a particular space, such as television watching near the piano. These consistent, reliable clues help prolong the ability to navigate as dementia progresses.

The Next Level:

Light, Sound and Thermal Comfort

Natural light is an important indicator to the brain for processing time, season and place. For memory care residents, natural light has been shown to assist with maintaining a steady circadian rhythm and sleep pattern. It can let them know the season, and help them dress appropriately for their day. It is important to maximize opportunities to bring in natural light.

Additionally, interior lighting should be even and consistent throughout the facility. Dark or shadowy corners or hallways can feel ominous to the brain and may cause unnecessary distress to residents. Lighting that is soothing and without harsh glare is important.

By age 75, most people require twice as much light as the normal recommended standard, and nearly four times as much as a 20-year-old, to see satisfactorily.

- “The Importance of Lighting,” The Dementia Center

Thermal Comfort

Thermal comfort is the sense that helps us decipher hot and cold temperatures. The brain then signals how to best adapt or adjust our environment in response. For dementia patients, this sense can be affected. Where you or I might put on a sweater, open a window or adjust the thermostat to regain our thermal comfort, dementia patients may not be able to make this connection. Instead, they may experience the frustration of being too hot or too cold, without the ability to express or fix it.

It's insight like this that helps us understand why memory care residents are prone to experience depression and become easily agitated. To help offset the possibility of thermal discomfort among residents there are a number of things that can be done.



Comfort

1. Each resident room should be equipped with a dedicated thermostat for individualized comfort. However, the controls should be placed outside the room to keep residents from overcorrecting thermal needs.



Window Treatments

2. Window treatments are a great way to help avoid hot spots and minimize glare. Treatments should be functional and easy to use.



Warmth

3. Radiant heat is another way to support thermal comfort. Incorporated into flooring or ceiling, its even warming and cooling properties can eliminate draftiness and support overall comfort.

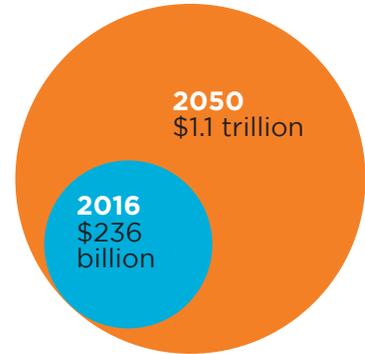
Learn triggers that can cause a person with ADRD to exhibit negative behaviors. This allows you to reduce or eliminate stressors related to the surrounding environment, improving the patient's quality of life.

Sound

Medical science continues to show that persons with ADRD often exhibit, or develop, extreme sensitivity to noise. Additionally, the ability to filter out background noise diminishes. Multiple conversations in the same room, or music along with conversation, for example, can confuse a person with ADRD. Providing quiet, peaceful places to chat without noise distractions can be very helpful. Choosing sound-muffling materials and one-on-one seating options in common areas can also help residents maintain focus and a sense of calm.

When it's time to consider mechanical and HVAC equipment, sound presents a unique challenge. There's just no getting around it, large facilities require hefty pieces of mechanical equipment that require maintenance and make noise. Equipment selection criteria should favor models with reduced sound levels.

Equipment should be placed away from resident rooms and common spaces when possible. An effective solution is to include a dedicated equipment room in the building's architecture that cannot be accessed by residents. Not only will this help reduce disruption to daily routines, but it will also reduce background noise and activity that can confuse residents and induce agitation.



The cost of caring for people in the US with ADRD in 2016 is estimated to be **\$236 billion**. By 2050, it is projected to be **\$1.1 trillion**.

- Alzheimer's Association

We're in it Together

These ideas are just the tip of the iceberg of how design can positively influence the experience of patients and their families. A spirit of compassion and collaboration between design professionals, stakeholders and end users is the first step to effectively improving access to high-quality care.

Progressive AE first hosts in-depth visioning sessions and focus groups that shed light on important day-to-day realities of memory care facilities. We continually interact with stakeholders to enhance the design process and bring unity to the vision. Not all architectural design requires a heart for humanity. Designing memory care facilities, however, demands it.

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