

# Supporting Brain and Heart Health in Faith Communities

*A guide for faith communities to promote healthy aging, dementia risk reduction, and supportive community environments.*

## Dementia in Los Angeles County

- There are an estimated **190,300** adults aged 65 and older living with Alzheimer's dementia.<sup>1</sup>
- Between 2019-2020, an estimated **322,280** adults provided care for someone with dementia and cognitive impairment.<sup>2</sup>
  - Among these caregivers, **59%** were female and **32%** are between ages 50-64.
- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias is the **2nd** leading cause of death, accounting for numbers of **6,409** deaths in 2024.<sup>3</sup>

## The Brain-Heart Connection

The heart and brain are closely connected. The heart supplies the brain with the oxygen-rich blood it needs to learn, think, and remember. Conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and stroke can damage blood vessels or reduce blood flow to the brain. Over time, this can increase the risk of memory loss and dementia. Supporting heart health is one important way to help protect brain health.



## Why Faith Communities Matter

Faith communities can play an important role in supporting healthy habits, encouraging social connection, and helping people access care and resources. As trusted spaces, faith communities are a great source of education and information around topics like brain health, heart health, and dementia.



## Ways Faith Communities Can Support Brain and Heart Health<sup>4</sup>

### Share Health Information



Incorporate brief health messages during announcements, sermons, bulletins, newsletters, or ministry meetings.

### Promote Physical Activity



Organize walking groups before or after services or offer exercise, stretching, and dance classes for older adults.

### Support Healthy Eating



Partner with food banks, encourage healthy potluck options, or host nutrition demonstrations.

### Promote Screening and Early Action



Host health fairs and blood pressure screening events, and invite healthcare providers to lead talks or Q&A sessions.

## Creating Dementia-Friendly Faith Communities<sup>4,5</sup>

Faith communities can also help create environments where people living with dementia and their caregivers feel welcomed, supported, and included. This can include building a sense of community and belonging, educating members about dementia, creating safe and supportive spaces, and encouraging members to support people living with dementia and their families. These efforts can help prevent crises by promoting early support, connection, and ongoing care.

### Educate your faith community about dementia

- Invite a caregiver or person living with dementia to share their personal experience
- Host a *Dementia Friends* session

### Create a safe and friendly environment

- Assess your buildings for safety and accessibility
- Host a memory café for caregivers and people living with dementia

### Encourage members to support people living with dementia

- Organize prayer groups
- Create a buddy system or volunteer list to help with rides for medical appointments

### Connect members to care and resources

- Provide information on legal and financial planning and how to complete advanced directives
- Coordinate with local Alzheimer's disease centers and local Alzheimer's organizations to share resources and connect families to support services

## Resources for Faith Communities

### Alter Dementia

Learn more about partnering with Alter to become a dementia-friendly faith community. The Alter program offers education and training, dementia-specific resources, and consultations to support your efforts. **Website:** [www.bit.ly/4nmza4v](http://www.bit.ly/4nmza4v)



### California Alzheimer's Disease Centers (CADCs)

California has a statewide network of CADCs that provide community education and outreach in the form of lectures, workshops, and support groups. Get to know your local CADCs:

- USC/Rancho Los Amigos California Alzheimer's Disease Center
  - **Website:** [www.bit.ly/4t10L7p](http://www.bit.ly/4t10L7p)
- Mary S. Easton Center for Alzheimer's Research and Care at UCLA
  - **Website:** [www.bit.ly/4trmRW1](http://www.bit.ly/4trmRW1)



### Dementia Friends

Alzheimer's Los Angeles leads Dementia Friends in CA. Request an in-person Dementia Friends session at your congregation. Email [RSVP@alzla.org](mailto:RSVP@alzla.org) or call the Alzheimer's LA Helpline at 844.435.7259. **Website:** [www.bit.ly/48QVc9D](http://www.bit.ly/48QVc9D)



### Memory Cafe Alliance

Learn more about memory cafes and how you can start one in your faith community. **Website:** [www.bit.ly/4d0kOmU](http://www.bit.ly/4d0kOmU)



### UsAgainstAlzheimer's Brain Health Together: Working Together in Faith and Action Toolkit

Access resources to learn more about brain health and Alzheimer's and dementia, including materials and videos you can share with your faith community. **Website:** [www.bit.ly/4tpulsq](http://www.bit.ly/4tpulsq)



### Sources

1. Dhana et al (2023). Prevalence of Alzheimer's disease dementia in the 50 US states and 3142 counties. <https://doi.org/10.1002/alz.13081>
2. California Health Interview Survey (2019-2020). Los Angeles County Data Files. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. [www.chis.ucla.edu](http://www.chis.ucla.edu)
3. Community Burden of Disease and Cost Engine Tool. <https://skylab.cdph.ca.gov/communityBurden/>
4. Brain Health in a Box: Working Together in Faith and Action. Brain Guide by UsAgainstAlzheimers and Alter Dementia. <https://assets.mybrainguide.org/en/BrainGuide-Faith-In-Action-Toolkit-EN.pdf>
5. Dementia Friendly Faith Communities. Dementia Friendly America. <https://dfamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/DFASector-Faith-508.pdf>

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