

# Dementia-inclusive planning and design guidelines



April 2023

# About these guidelines

Globally, at least 50 million people live with dementia—a number that is expected to triple by 2050. People living with dementia have specific needs in navigating their neighbourhoods, which are often not captured by broader age-friendly design guidelines. This document offers a toolkit of urban design strategies and actions that municipalities, developers, and other community members can implement to create more dementia-friendly cities. These planning and design strategies have the power to improve urban environments and wellbeing for all community members by boosting comfort, safety, inclusion, and sense of place.



Photo: Micheile Henderson / Unsplash

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# Acknowledgements

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## Thank you to our partners:



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## About Happy Cities

Happy Cities is an urban planning, design, and research firm that uses an evidence-based approach to create happier, healthier, more inclusive communities. We harness the science of wellbeing to advise housing providers, municipalities, developers, and organizations around the world on how to design buildings and urban spaces that support people's health and happiness.

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## About DemSCAPE

The goal of the DemSCAPE project is to generate evidence-based knowledge, knowledge mobilization tools, and resources for informing policy and practice to create dementia-friendly communities. There is limited research in this area, reinforcing the importance of evidence-based neighbourhood design principles to support people living with dementia in maintaining independence and community connections for as long as possible. The goals of this project are to: A) identify common neighbourhood destinations and built environment features that affect mobility, engagement, and participation in the community for people living with dementia; and B) develop tools and resources including planning and design guidelines for dementia-inclusive neighbourhoods, an easy-to-use environmental audit and advocacy tool, and a short video highlighting the lived experience of mobility in the neighbourhood for people living with dementia.

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# Background

## Impact

Across Canada and beyond, growing numbers of people are living with dementia. Dementia can affect people of any age; however, most people who are diagnosed with dementia are 65 or older. It is essential to design our cities and neighbourhoods to meet the needs of this growing demographic.

## Who this document is for

These guidelines offer a resource on dementia-inclusive planning and design for anyone involved in shaping city streets and spaces. This document additionally seeks to help community members, people living with dementia, and care partners understand how the environment can support their independence, comfort, and safety.

## Key audiences

- **Municipalities**
- **Developers**
- **Community organizations** (i.e., advocacy groups, seniors centres and community centres, housing organizations, etc.)
- **People with lived experience and their care partners** (to help them understand how the environment works at a planning and design level)

## By the numbers:

**50 million** people, globally, live with dementia



In Canada, **597,000** were living with dementia in 2020

**955,900** will be living with dementia by 2030

## Neighbourhoods can be designed to support health and wellbeing.

The neighbourhood environment has a critical impact on everyone's quality of life, including people living with dementia. Dementia-friendly urban planning and design can help support essential aspects of healthy living and wellbeing, including mobility, physical activity, social connection, independence, a sense of belonging, and access to transit, shops, and services.

### There are four main components to dementia-friendly communities:

1. Education and awareness
2. Built environment
3. Programs and services
4. Support for people living with dementia and their care partners

While action in all four areas is essential, these guidelines focus on how decision-makers can reduce stigma and foster inclusion through the planning and design of the **built environment**, with a focus on the neighbourhood context.

## Good neighbourhood design benefits everybody.

**Dementia-friendly cities offer universal benefits for everyone. The strategies and actions in these design guidelines—such as improving pedestrian paths, crosswalks, and placemaking—can improve streets and public spaces for all community members. In particular, the guidelines in this document can significantly benefit people such as older adults, people with cognitive impairments, children, people who do not speak or read English, people with disabilities, and people who are neurodivergent.**

At the same time, there are specific neighbourhood design considerations that are unique for people living with dementia. These considerations are generally not identified in general accessibility

plans or strategies. Due to cognitive decline and sensory changes, people living with dementia can experience difficulties finding their way around the neighbourhood, understanding their surroundings, and accessing local destinations and amenities. Dementia can also contribute to heightened sensory sensitivity, which can make it challenging for people to navigate complex urban environments and increase their likelihood of feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

If the environment is not designed to meet the needs of people living with dementia, it can pose challenges to their safety and effective functioning in the community. Over time, people living with dementia need support from care partners to maintain their activities in the community. If the neighbourhood does not meet their needs, people living with dementia may gradually abandon visiting community places and stay at home. In turn, this can lead to deteriorating cognitive, mental, and physical health—and social isolation.

## How we created the Guidelines

The *Dementia-inclusive Planning and Design Guidelines* are based on data from three main sources:



### What we heard

People living with dementia often face stigma—from strangers and close family and friends alike. People who attended the community forum mentioned that dementia is “invisible”, which can make it difficult for bus drivers or other community members to recognize and understand that the person may need support or help. Further, participants often faced denial or a lack of understanding from family members, who sometimes tried to prevent people living with dementia from maintaining independence or running errands on their own in the community. Participants also mentioned experiencing a lack of understanding, ignorance, and stigma from others, which can make it difficult to share their needs and feel comfortable in public spaces.

In general, all community forum participants were supportive of the guidelines. Participants agreed on the importance of all the chosen strategies and actions, while offering many related ideas and examples to improve these strategies. During the community forum, participants were asked to select their top three to five strategies from these Guidelines for dementia-inclusive

neighbourhoods. The three that rose to the top were: 2.1) Pedestrian paths and sidewalks, 3.4) Public toilets, and 3.5) Signage. Feedback from municipal interviews and the community forum has been incorporated throughout these guidelines.

In addition to improving urban design in the public realm, people with lived experience whom we engaged shared additional challenges and action areas for dementia-inclusive communities:

- **Education and awareness** around what it means to live with dementia
- **Stigma** around dementia
- **Limited resources** to offer community services for people living with dementia
- **Limited community spaces** to support programming for people living with dementia (both indoors and outdoors)
- Maintaining **social connections** since the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Changing urban environments**

## Principles for dementia-friendly design

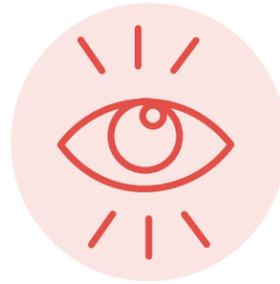
These principles show how the strategies and actions presented in Section 2 (Guidelines) can positively impact people living with dementia and their care partners. There are six principles for dementia-friendly design:

### Familiar



Familiar environments help people living with dementia recognize where they are and find where they want to go by designing features that people have seen before and can easily recognize. Familiar neighbourhoods support independence and wayfinding.

### Legible



Legible spaces help people living with dementia navigate their neighbourhoods by using obvious design cues to clearly communicate the function or purpose of a space, feature, path, or building.

### Distinct



A distinct environment includes features that are unambiguous, varied, and interesting. People living with dementia rely on distinctive spaces and landmarks as visual cues for wayfinding.

### Accessible



Accessible environments make it easy and convenient for people of all abilities to access services and amenities within walking distance of their homes, supporting independence and social inclusion. Accessibility applies to all aspects of the built environment.

### Comfortable



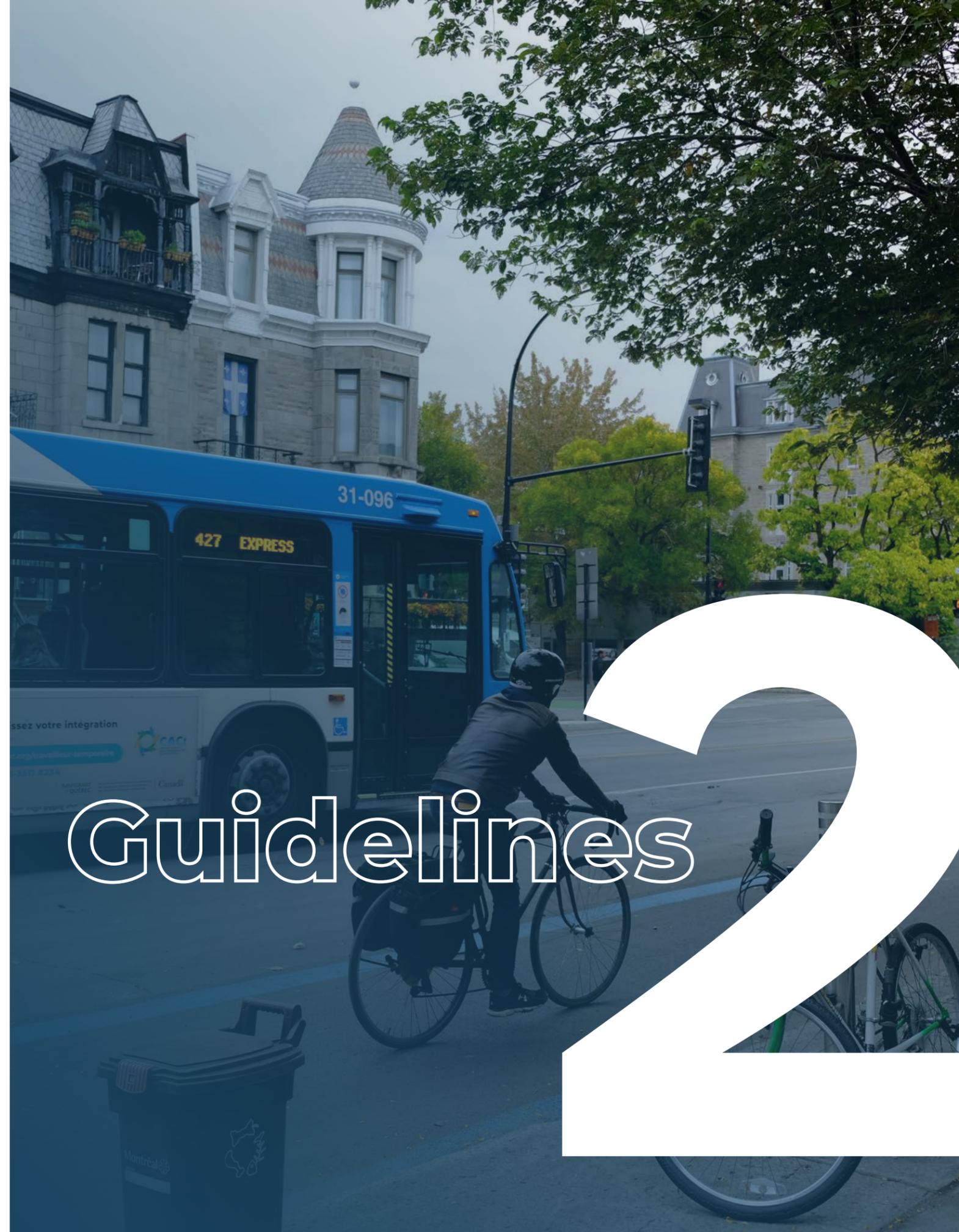
Comfortable environments are welcoming and non-intimidating. People living with dementia may have difficulties with sensory overstimulation, such as with bright lights, crowds, or loud noise. They can benefit from serene, quiet, and pleasant spaces to pause, rest, or socialize.

### Safe



Safe environments allow people to spend time in the public realm without experiencing fears or risks. People living with dementia may be less aware of physical and social dangers and can experience contrast sensitivity, which increases the risk of falling.

*These principles were adapted from several sources. For more information, please refer to Appendix B and Appendix E.*



# Guidelines

# Design realms for dementia-friendly communities

These Guidelines include **three design realms**, which organize information based on the scale and stage of implementation.

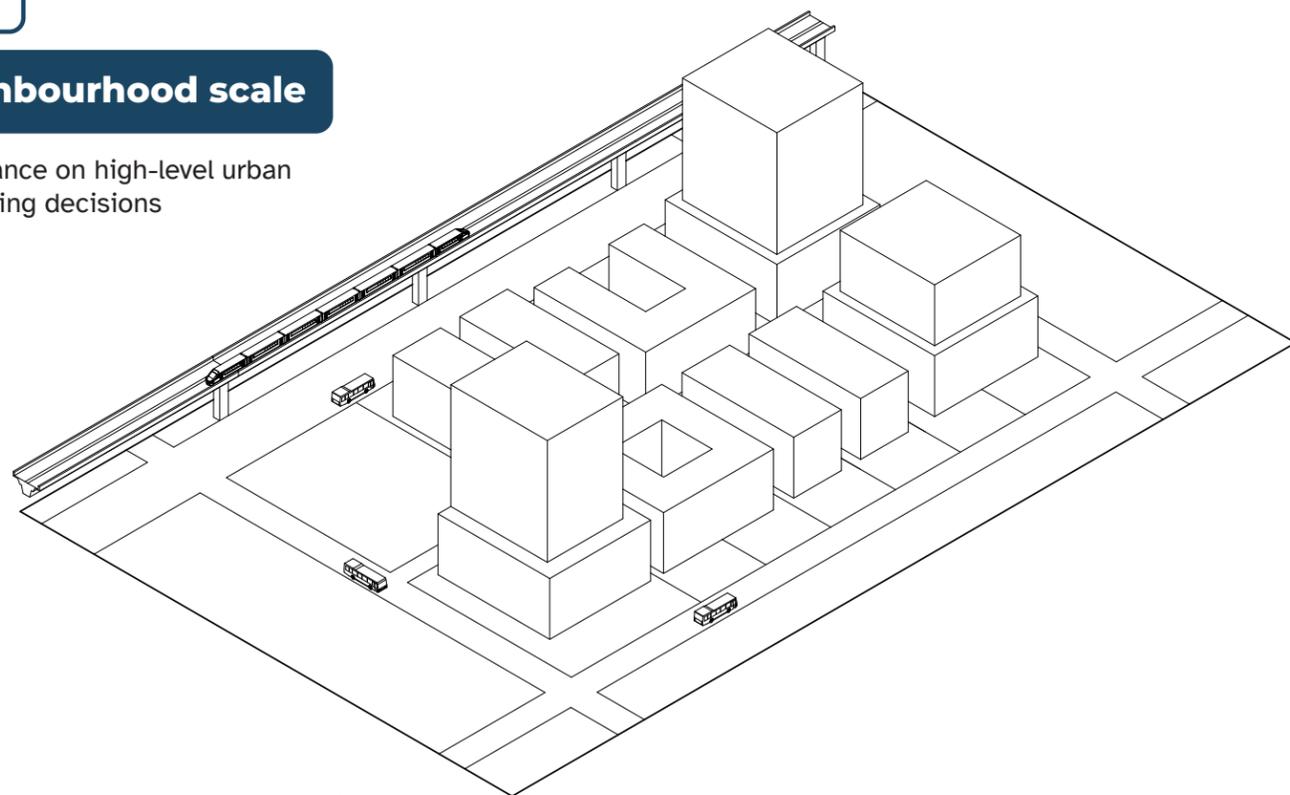
Each realm includes several strategies, which identify high-level categories of action within the built environment. There are **20 strategies** in total across the three realms.

Within each strategy, actions provide specific examples of how to support people living with dementia through the built environment. There are **69 actions** in total.



## Neighbourhood scale

► Guidance on high-level urban planning decisions

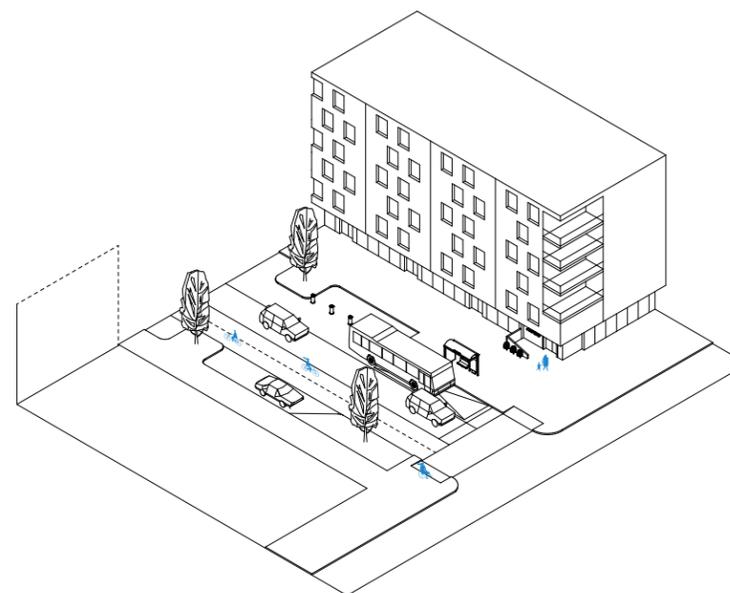


- Strategy 1.1.** Land use designation (p. 16)
- Strategy 1.2.** Street grids (p. 18)
- Strategy 1.3.** Building form (p. 20)
- Strategy 1.4.** Transit routes (p. 22)
- Strategy 1.5.** Open spaces (p. 24)



## Street scale

► Mid-scale design decisions for pedestrian and road networks



- Strategy 2.1.** Pedestrian paths and sidewalks (p. 28)
- Strategy 2.2.** Pedestrian crossings (p. 30)
- Strategy 2.3.** Building edges and entrances (p. 32)
- Strategy 2.4.** Transit stops (p. 34)
- Strategy 2.5.** Parking and drop-off (p. 36)



## Detailed design scale

► Design of the micro-environment and supportive amenities



- Strategy 3.1.** Seating (p. 40)
- Strategy 3.2.** Public art (p. 42)
- Strategy 3.3.** Placemaking (p. 44)
- Strategy 3.4.** Public toilets (p. 46)
- Strategy 3.5.** Signage (p. 48)
- Strategy 3.6.** Ground treatments (p. 50)
- Strategy 3.7.** Grade (level) changes (p. 52)
- Strategy 3.8.** Lighting (p. 54)
- Strategy 3.9.** Acoustics (p. 56)
- Strategy 3.10.** Vegetation (p. 58)

# Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

Neighbourhood planning and design provide the framework and foundation for walkable, dementia-friendly neighbourhoods. Decisions at the neighbourhood scale are made at the early planning stages of community design.

The neighbourhood scale involves high-level urban planning considerations, such as street networks, land use designation, overall building form, open spaces, and transit routes.

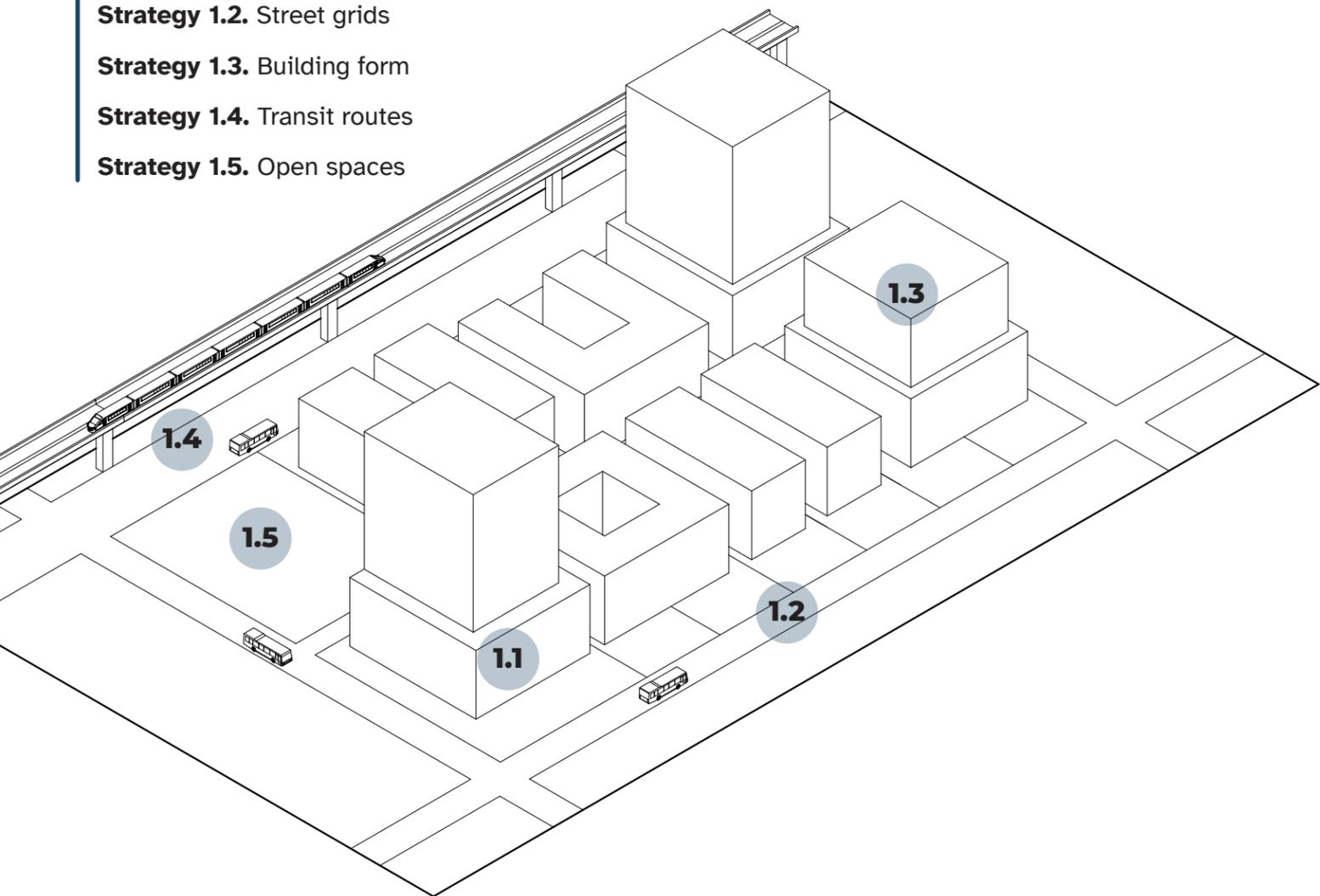
**Strategy 1.1.** Land use designation

**Strategy 1.2.** Street grids

**Strategy 1.3.** Building form

**Strategy 1.4.** Transit routes

**Strategy 1.5.** Open spaces



## The importance of the neighbourhood for people living with dementia

- Most people living with dementia rely on walking and transit to navigate the city, spending much of their time close to home.
- Dementia leads to challenges in understanding spaces and sensory changes, which can make it difficult to navigate the neighbourhood built environment.
- Evidence shows that well-planned, complete neighbourhoods can positively impact quality of life for people living with dementia, by fostering autonomy, dignity, a sense of belonging, opportunities for social interaction, and mental and physical health.
- Low-density suburban and rural areas often struggle to offer amenities, shops, and services within walking distance. Municipalities can consider which areas may be under-served, and support accessible resources and community-based services for people living with dementia in those areas.
- People living with dementia are less likely to visit natural areas due to challenges in accessibility and a lack of supportive facilities. As a result, access to open spaces and green areas within the neighbourhood is crucial to support wellbeing for people living with dementia.

## When should you consider this realm?

- In new developments or communities
- In new and existing neighbourhoods, when considering transit planning
- In new and existing neighbourhoods, when making rezoning and land use decisions

## What policies can influence this?

- Official community plans (OCP)
- Secondary plans and zoning by-laws
- Parks, open space, and recreation strategies and master plans
- Transportation plans

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

**Strategy 1.1. Land use designation (overview)**

Land use designation determines which land uses—such as housing, business, or parks—are permitted within the neighbourhood. Designing complete, walkable communities benefits people living with dementia by providing access to core services and social opportunities within easy walking distance.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Accessible:** Mixed-use areas provide easy access to core services within walking distance of home



- **Distinct:** Mixed-use areas provide diverse building forms and recognizable businesses to help navigation and wayfinding

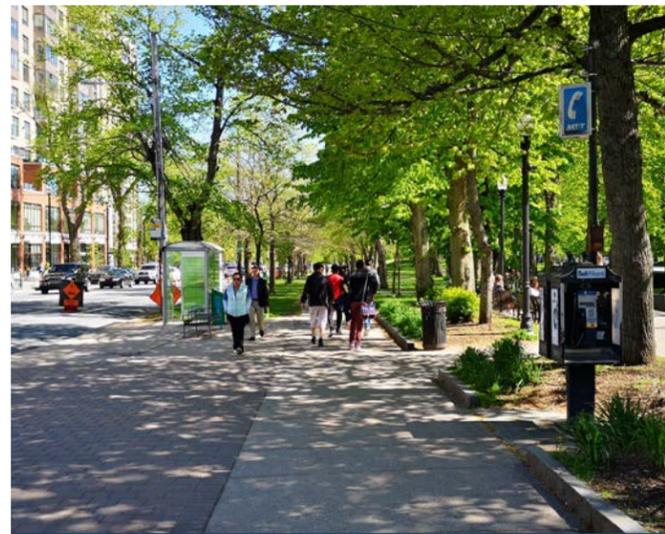
**Action 1.1.1.**  
Provide walkable access to primary services

**Action 1.1.2.**  
Provide access to local commerce and small shops

**Action 1.1.3.**  
Prioritize access to community spaces



A corner grocery store in a residential neighbourhood in Vancouver. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities



A walkable street in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Photo: Tristan Cleveland / Happy Cities

Realm 2: Street scale

**Strategy 1.1. Land use designation (detailed actions)**

**Action 1.1.1.**  
Provide walkable access to primary services

- Locate primary services within the range of around 500 metres from home (such as groceries, post offices, pharmacies, transit)
- Locate secondary services within 800 metres from home (such as shopping malls, community centres, parks, medical services).

*These distances are community-specific, and often depend on zoning and street grids.*

**Action 1.1.2**  
Provide access to local commerce and small shops

- Include ground-level shops to aid with wayfinding and provide opportunities for social interaction along the street.
- Integrate small-scale, local shops in residential neighbourhoods to provide convenient and familiar services for people living with dementia.
- Consider implementing a dementia-friendly business recognition program, which can increase awareness and provide safe neighbourhood destinations for people living with dementia. For example, the Township of Langley has implemented an [Age-friendly Business Recognition Program](#).

**Action 1.1.3.**  
Prioritize access to community spaces

- Prioritize access to community centres, which can provide programming for people living with dementia and their care partners.
- Provide free-to-use, flexible, indoor or weather-proof spaces, which offer essential, safe spaces for people living with dementia and their care partners to maintain social interaction.



The Shipyards in North Vancouver offers a weather-proof, free community space. Photo: Happy Cities

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

### Strategy 1.2. Street grids (overview)

Well-planned street grids (i.e., with suitable block sizes and a legible hierarchy of street types) are crucial to create a positive pedestrian experience. People living with dementia benefit from a well-connected street grid, which makes it easier for people to navigate and find their way.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Legible:** Clear and connected streets allow pedestrians to navigate the environment with ease



- **Distinct:** Clear differentiation and hierarchy of streets sets a foundation for easy navigation

**Action 1.2.1.**  
Provide a clear hierarchy of streets

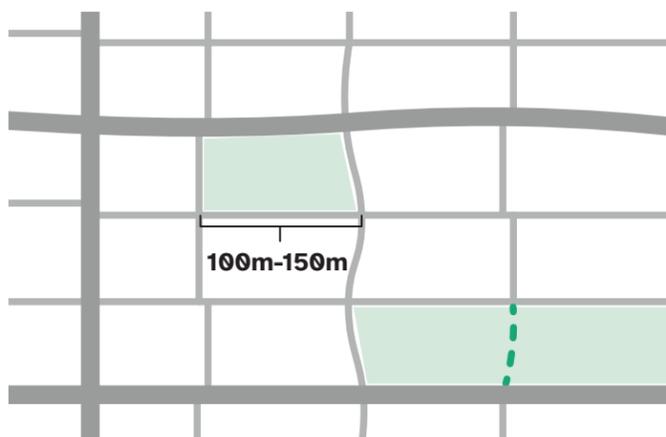
**Action 1.2.2.**  
Create small street blocks

**Action 1.2.3.**  
Create a varied grid pattern

**Action 1.2.4.**  
Create gently winding and connected streets



Vancouver's streets follow a clear hierarchy. Illustration: Happy Cities



Small street blocks help people navigate their neighbourhoods more easily. Illustration: Happy Cities



A gently winding pedestrian street in Logroño, Spain. Photo: Isabel Garcia / Happy Cities

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

### Strategy 1.2. Street grids (detailed actions)

**Action 1.2.1.**  
Provide a clear hierarchy of streets

- Differentiate main streets, side streets, laneways, and walking paths through design (i.e., width, pedestrian infrastructure, and signage).
- Design pedestrian routes that avoid busy main streets.

**Action 1.2.2.**  
Create small street blocks

- Create blocks that are 100-150 metres long per side. This distance equals around 2-4 minutes of walking time.
- Where large blocks exist, break them up with mid-block pedestrian connections and crosswalks.

**Action 1.2.3.**  
Create a varied grid pattern

- Consider adding some variety in block size and shape to aid wayfinding.
- Where possible, avoid monotonous blocks that lack distinctiveness. Repetitive grids can feel confusing for people living with dementia.

**Action 1.2.4.**  
Create gently winding and connected streets

- Where longer blocks are unavoidable, creating gently winding streets. Winding blocks provide a sightline for better navigation and wayfinding.



*"The layout and system of Vancouver streets is easy to remember. The streets with numbers are horizontal [east-west], and the streets with names are vertical [north-south]. At the north, it is mountainous. Whenever I see the mountains, I recognize the north, and know I won't get lost."*

—Walk along interview participant

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

**Strategy 1.3. Building form (overview)**

Building forms impact pedestrian experience and wayfinding. People living with dementia benefit from varied building forms, which help them recognize where they are and contribute to a unique sense of place.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Distinct:** Varied buildings make it easier to navigate and create a sense of place



- **Familiar:** Maintaining heritage buildings and long-established places helps with wayfinding

**Action 1.3.1.**  
**Retain heritage structures as landmarks**

**Action 1.3.2.**  
**Create distinctive buildings to serve as landmarks**



The Dominion Building in Vancouver, built in 1910. Photo: Xicotencatl / Wikimedia Commons



Science World is a recognizable building along the waterfront in Vancouver. Photo: Another Believer / Wikimedia Commons

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

**Strategy 1.3. Building form (detailed actions)**

**Action 1.3.1.**  
**Retain heritage structures as landmarks**

- Retain heritage structures to serve as familiar, recognizable, and prominent landmarks in people’s mental map of the neighbourhood. Heritage structures often include distinctive elements and human-scaled details at the ground-level, which improve the street experience for people living with dementia.

**Action 1.3.2.**  
**Create distinctive buildings to serve as landmarks**

- Highlight important community buildings through distinctive architectural design.
- Include various forms of buildings in new developments so that they are distinct.
- Use local materials, colours, and styles.
- Avoid monotonous glass buildings with no distinguishing features.



Historic buildings and landmarks can help with wayfinding. Photo: Ken Lane / Flickr

“Landmarks are really helpful. I find that in Vancouver the buildings are very similar. Some of the buildings look identical, even ones right next to each other or three blocks from each other. So that can be very confusing.”

—Community forum participant



Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

**Strategy 1.4. Transit routes** (overview)

Transit routes enable people of all ages and abilities to easily reach destinations. People living with dementia benefit from increased autonomy if they can independently navigate transit systems.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Accessible:** Transit that accommodates physical and cognitive needs

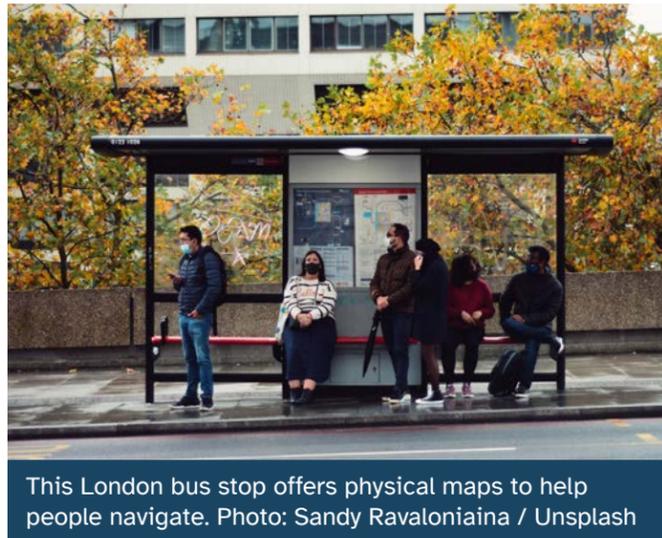


- **Familiar:** Established and reliable transportation routes with clear wayfinding

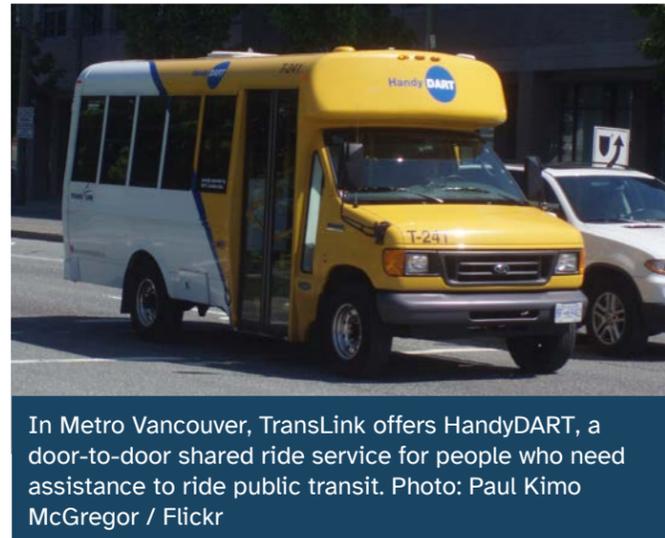
**Action 1.4.1.**  
Ensure transit systems are easy to navigate

**Action 1.4.2.**  
Provide local transit options with frequent stops

**Action 1.4.3.**  
Locate stops at strategic areas near services



This London bus stop offers physical maps to help people navigate. Photo: Sandy Ravaloniaina / Unsplash



In Metro Vancouver, TransLink offers HandyDART, a door-to-door shared ride service for people who need assistance to ride public transit. Photo: Paul Kimo McGregor / Flickr

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

**Strategy 1.4. Transit routes** (detailed actions)

**Action 1.4.1.**  
Ensure transit systems are easy to navigate

- Provide consistent information about routes and departure times across neighbourhoods.
- Offer diverse trip planning options for those who don't have a smartphone, such as a website and physical maps.
- Minimize the number of transfers needed along popular transit routes.

**Action 1.4.2.**  
Provide local transit options with frequent stops

- Consider offering both a local transit option that stops at every block and a rapid transit option that gets people to their destination quickly.
- Consider a local transit service, such as TransLink's HandyDART, that brings riders directly to their destination.

**Action 1.4.3.**  
Locate stops at strategic areas near services

- Locate stops near seniors-focused services, such as community centres.
- Locate stops near hospitals and medical clinics.
- Locate stops near shopping areas, restaurants, and green spaces.



A bus stop across from a pharmacy in Downtown Vancouver. Photo: GoToVan / Wikimedia Commons

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

**Strategy 1.5. Open spaces** (overview)

Diverse open spaces allow people to spend time in nature, which boosts mental and physical health. People living with dementia benefit from safe outdoor destinations where they can socialize and feel like they are a part of the community. However, natural areas can be challenging to access for people living with dementia if they are not accessible.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Distinct:** *Open space and nature provide wayfinding cues to help with navigation*



- **Comfortable:** *Places to stop and rest away from noise and crowds support comfort and wellbeing*

**Action 1.5.1.**  
**Enhance access to natural areas**

**Action 1.5.2.**  
**Create informal gathering spaces**

**Action 1.5.3.**  
**Design frequent parklets or small-scale green spaces**



Flat walking paths within parks can enhance access to nature within cities. Photo: Arthur Castro / Flickr



An adult exercise park. Photo: Prosperity Horizons / Wikimedia Commons



A former intersection converted into a small, green space in Montreal. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities



A small, informal seating area in a public plaza, surrounded by planter boxes and away from the street edge. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities

Realm 1: Neighbourhood scale

**Strategy 1.5. Open spaces** (detailed actions)

**Action 1.5.1.**  
**Enhance access to natural areas**

- Provide accessible pathways or overlooks where people can still interact with the natural area, such as a bench with a view of water.
- Offer access to an accessible public toilet in natural areas.

**Action 1.5.2.**  
**Create informal gathering spaces**

- Create quiet seating areas removed from high-traffic and busy areas.
- Create small-scale seating areas near schools, parks, or shopping areas so that people living with dementia can sit and observe.

**Action 1.5.3.**  
**Design frequent parklets or small-scale green spaces**

- Ensure access to green space within 150 to 300 metres from home.
- Re-purpose street lanes and parking spaces to create parklets.
- Create spaces for physical activity, such as outdoor workout circuits.

# Realm 2: Street scale

Realm 2 provides guidance on the design of neighbourhood blocks. These design strategies consider how streets, pathways, and sidewalks function for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles, and

how buildings meet the edge of the pedestrian realm. Intentional design decisions at the block scale ensure people can move safely and efficiently around the neighbourhood.

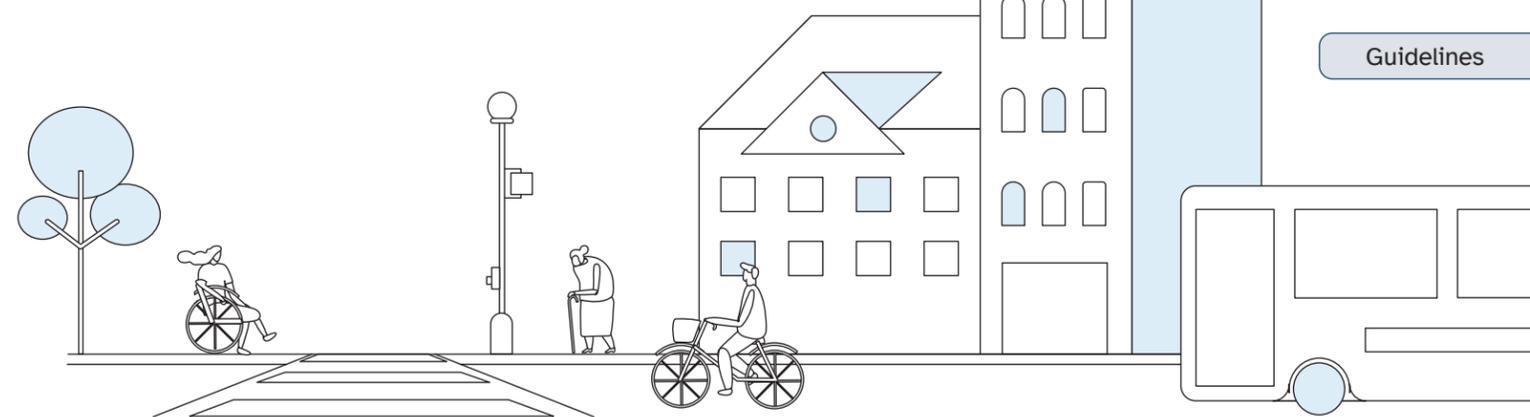
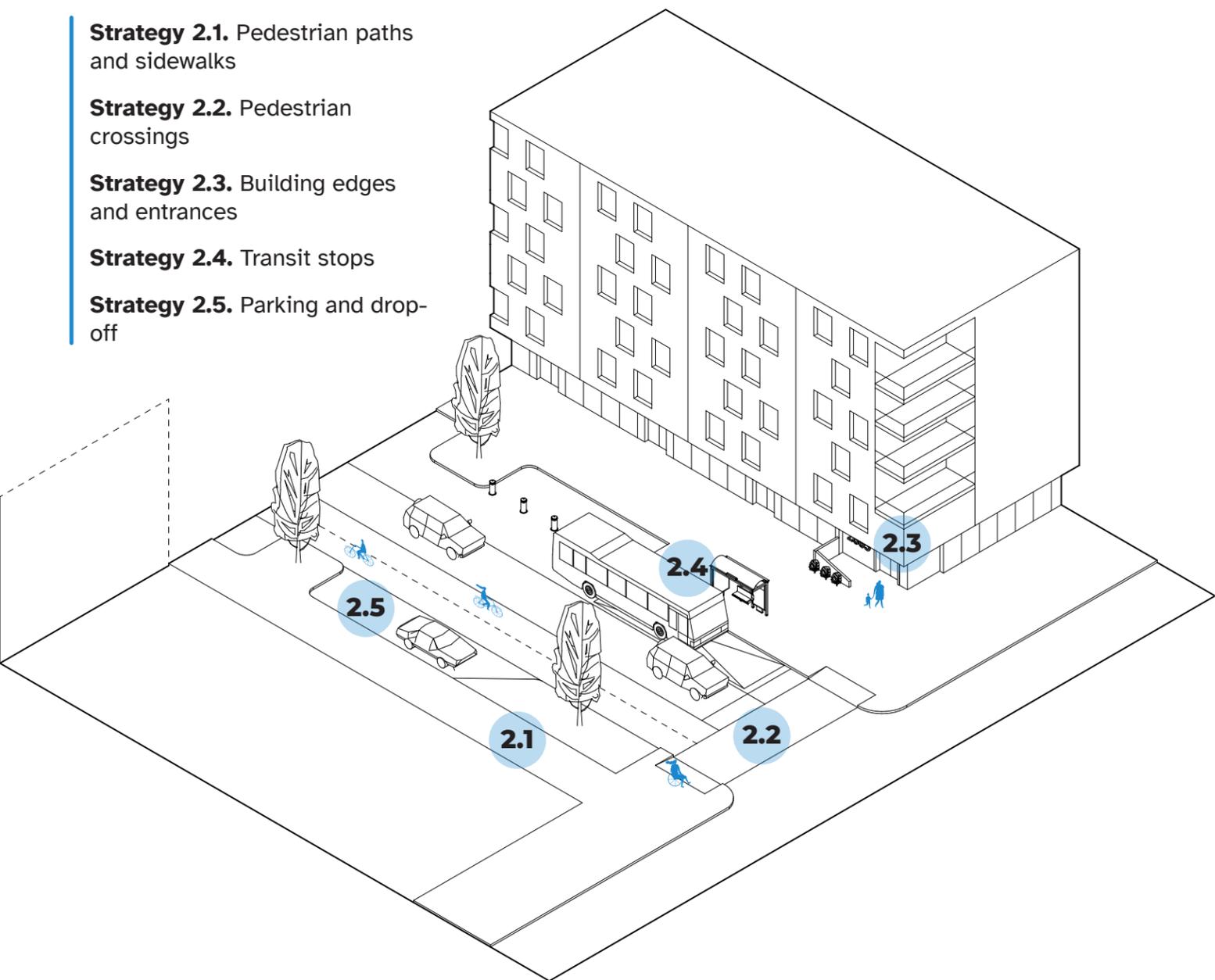
**Strategy 2.1.** Pedestrian paths and sidewalks

**Strategy 2.2.** Pedestrian crossings

**Strategy 2.3.** Building edges and entrances

**Strategy 2.4.** Transit stops

**Strategy 2.5.** Parking and drop-off



## The importance of the street for people living with dementia

- Going for walks in the neighbourhood helps people living with dementia maintain physical health and social connection.
- People living with dementia may find it difficult to navigate complex or disconnected street networks.
- Traffic, crowds, and poorly maintained or inaccessible sidewalks disproportionately impact people living with dementia.
- People living with dementia need ample time and space to cross streets and make decisions. Carefully designed pedestrian infrastructure is crucial to ensure walkability and safety.
- Blank and monotonous façades can be confusing for people living with dementia. For example, they may not be able to recognize their home or front door if it is identical to others nearby. Careful design of building edges and entrances can help address this challenge.

## When should you consider this realm?

In new developments or existing neighbourhoods, when designing:

- Parks, plazas, and other open spaces
- Community centres and public buildings
- Streets and sidewalks
- Bike infrastructure
- Housing developments
- Commercial destinations such as main streets and shopping centres

## What policies can influence this?

- Secondary plans
- Street design guidelines
- Park strategies and park plans
- Neighbourhood design guidelines
- Development permit checklists
- Transportation plans

Realm 2: Street scale

**Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths and sidewalks (overview)**

Pedestrian paths and sidewalks allow people to navigate the neighbourhood with ease. Well-maintained and accessible sidewalks help people living with dementia to access the neighbourhood safely and comfortably, such as by reducing the risk of falling or getting lost.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Comfortable:** People living with dementia can walk at their own pace



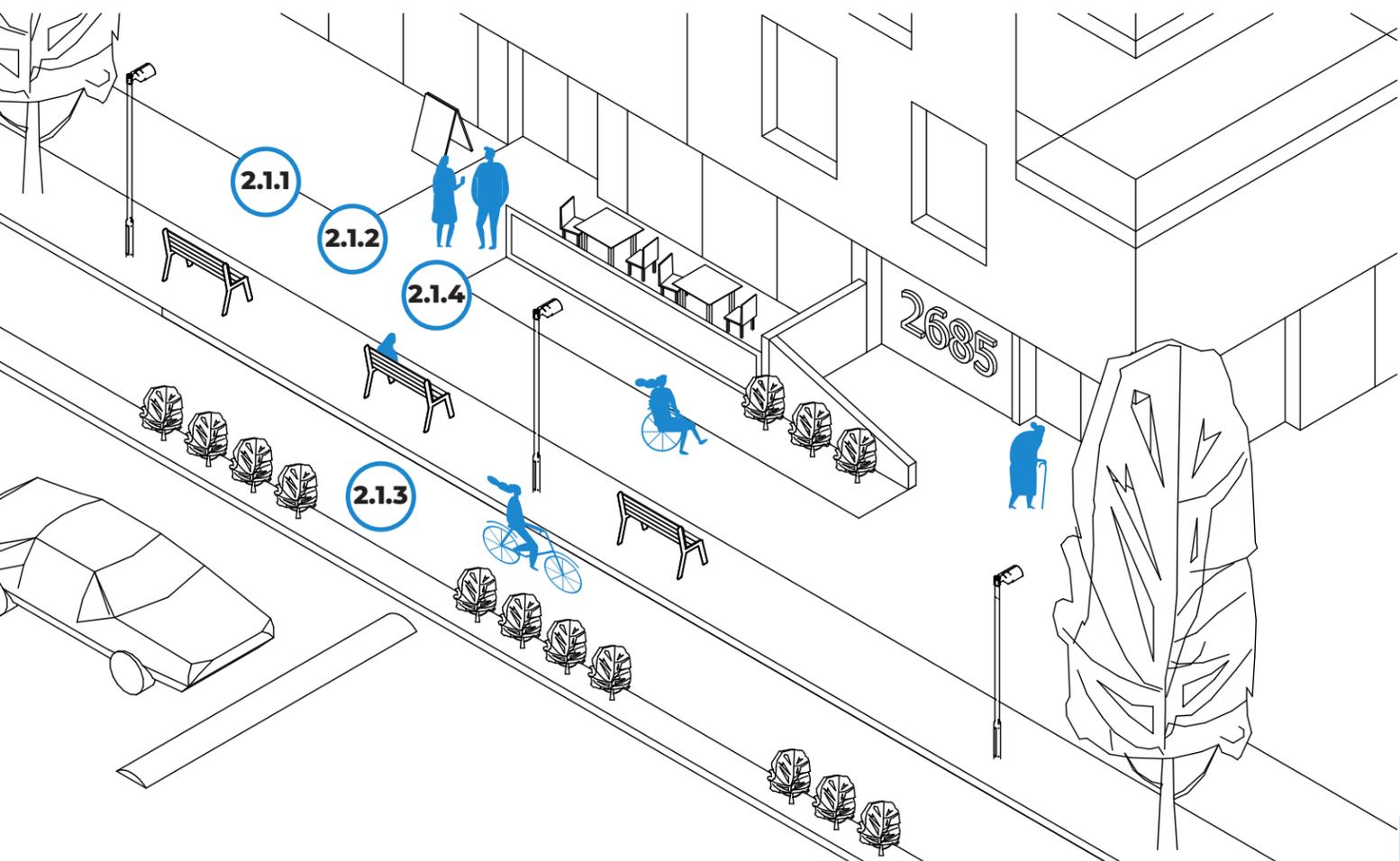
- **Safe:** People living with dementia can walk to and from destinations with minimized risk

**Action 2.1.1.**  
Design wide sidewalks

**Action 2.1.2.**  
Create direct and pleasant walking paths

**Action 2.1.3.**  
Separate bike and pedestrian pathways

**Action 2.1.4.**  
Maintain clear sidewalks



Realm 2: Street scale

**Strategy 2.1. Pedestrian paths and sidewalks (detailed actions)**

**Action 2.1.1.**  
Design wide sidewalks

- Design sidewalks with a minimum width of 1.8 metres to allow wheelchair users and another person pass side by side.
- Consider designing wider sidewalks (2-3 metres) to provide greater flexibility and comfort, particularly in busy areas.

**Action 2.1.2.**  
Create direct and pleasant walking paths

- Create direct pedestrian routes between important destinations, following quiet streets.
- Use traffic calming measures to slow down adjacent road traffic, such as curb bump-outs or speed bumps.
- Maintain a clear and direct path of travel without hazards (such as stairs) to access desirable areas and amenities.

**Action 2.1.3.**  
Separate bike and pedestrian pathways

- Ensure that there are dedicated bike paths to discourage cyclists from using sidewalks.
- Use vegetation or level changes to separate uses.
- Provide clear signage to differentiate walking and biking paths.
- Provide designated crossings for pedestrians across bike lanes.

**Action 2.1.4.**  
Maintain clear sidewalks

- Minimize sandwich board signs, bollards, and other obstructions on sidewalks that can create confusion or tripping hazards.
- Clear snow, ice, and fallen leaves from sidewalks.
- Reduce tripping hazards, including from roots and cracked pavement.
- Cut back branches and vegetation to ensure good sightlines.



Photo: Andi Weiland / Wikimedia Commons

Realm 2: Street scale

### Strategy 2.2. Pedestrian crossings (overview)

Well-designed crossings are crucial to ensure a safe and comfortable pedestrian experience. People living with dementia benefit from accessible crossings that provide clarity, ease, and safety.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**

-  **Safe:** People living with dementia can walk to and from destinations with minimized risk
-  **Accessible:** People living with dementia can walk to and from destinations with minimized risk

**Action 2.2.1.**  
Create frequent crossings

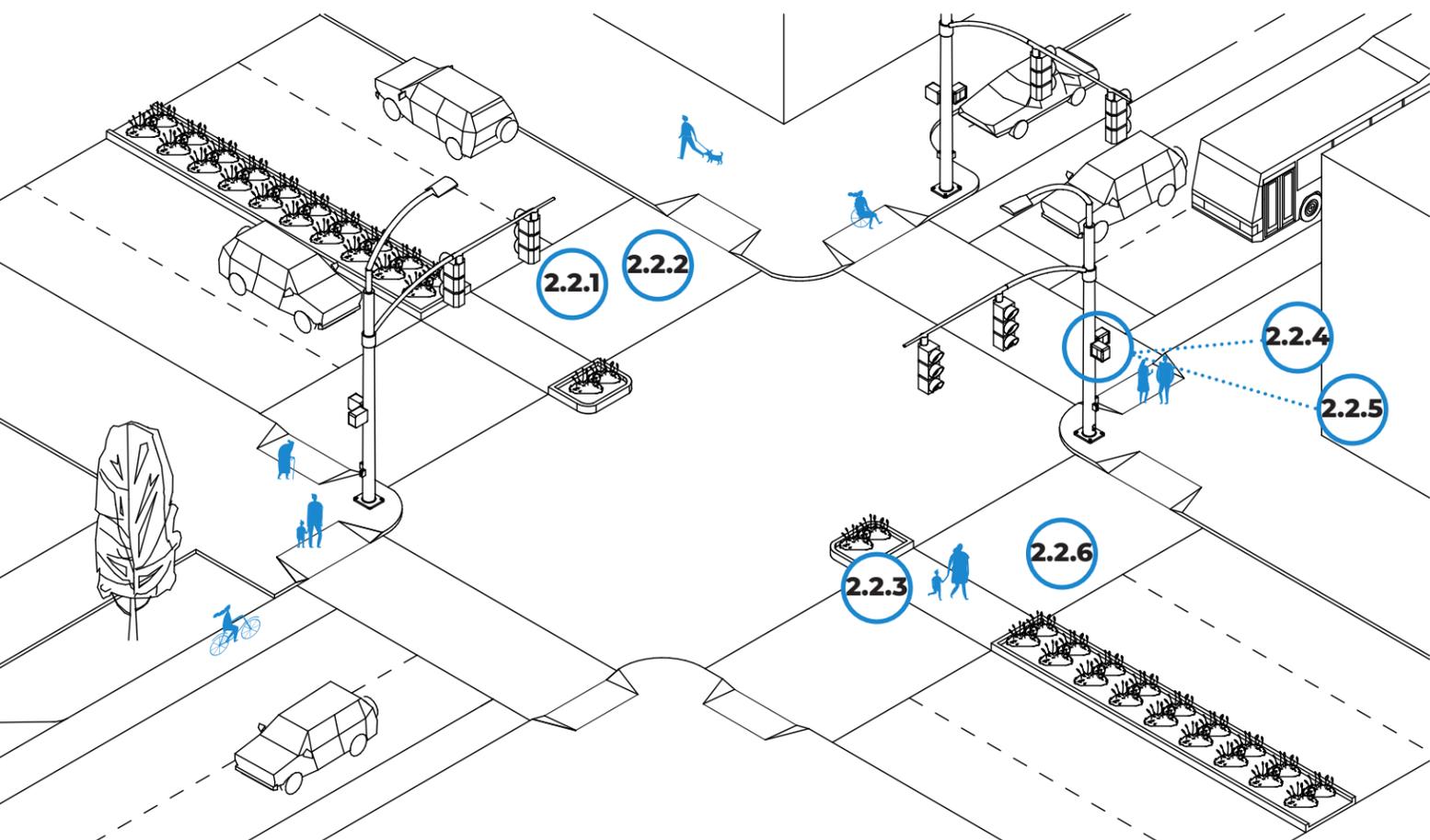
**Action 2.2.2.**  
Create ground-level crossings

**Action 2.2.3.**  
Provide pedestrian islands

**Action 2.2.4.**  
Provide sensory aids

**Action 2.2.5.**  
Give enough time to cross

**Action 2.2.6.**  
Design consistent and clearly marked crossings



Realm 2: Street scale

### Strategy 2.2. Pedestrian crossings (detailed actions)

**Action 2.2.1.**  
Create frequent crossings

- Provide pedestrian crossings at every block.
- Install mid-block crossings on long street blocks (over 300 metres) and at key destinations.

**Action 2.2.2.**  
Create ground-level crossings

- Prioritize ground-level crossings rather than elevated crossings. Ground-level crossings are easier to access, and can help remove some anxiety when crossing streets by making the crossing immediately obvious to pedestrians.

**Action 2.2.3.**  
Provide pedestrian islands

- Install pedestrian islands on busy roads, to allow people to pause and cross the street in multiple stages if required.
- Ensure pedestrian islands are at least 1.8 metres wide, with an ideal width of 2.4-3 metres and a length of 12 metres.

**Action 2.2.4.**  
Provide sensory aids

- Provide audible cues at crossings, such as voiced countdowns, and consider pitch and timing that suits older adults.
- Include tactile indicators at crossings to provide additional cues on environmental changes.

**Action 2.2.5.**  
Give enough time to cross

- Reduce crossing distances by narrowing the street with curb bump-outs.
- Extend crossing signal times to provide ample time to cross.
- Give consistent crossing times at similarly designed streets and intersections across the neighbourhood to increase predictability.
- Consider a tap-card system to give extra crossing time for those who need it.

**Action 2.2.6.**  
Design consistent and clearly marked crossings

- Ensure crossing designs are easily recognizable and consistent across and within neighbourhoods.
- Consider solid crosswalks with contrasting colours and textures from the sidewalk and street.
- Accompany crossings with signage to reduce the potential for confusion.

Realm 2: Street scale

**Strategy 2.3. Building edges and entrances (overview)**

Building edges and entrances greatly impact the pedestrian experience. For instance, long, blank building façades discourage pedestrian activity and reduce trust among strangers. In contrast, human-scale facades and features can boost trust, social connection, sense of place, and the likelihood of people walking on the street, supporting autonomy and community connections for people living with dementia.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Legible:** People living with dementia can understand the function of different buildings and how to move through them



- **Distinct:** People living with dementia can recognize where they are in the neighbourhood

**Action 2.3.1.**  
**Design pedestrian-oriented building edges**

**Action 2.3.2.**  
**Ensure facades and entrances are legible**

**Action 2.3.3.**  
**Create clear gradients between private and public spaces**



Realm 2: Street scale

**Strategy 2.3. Building edges and entrances (detailed actions)**

**Action 2.3.1.**  
**Design pedestrian-oriented building edges**

- Include building step-backs for tall buildings (over six stories) to ensure the street feels human-scaled. These regulations may vary by municipality and neighbourhood.
- Include details such as different materials, varied windows and doors, colours, and ornamentation relating to the local architectural context.
- Include weather protection elements, such as awnings and overhangs.

**Action 2.3.2.**  
**Ensure facades and entrances are legible**

- Provide views into the building to improve wayfinding and orientation.
- Ensure glass doors are marked to avoid confusion.
- Distinguish and define entrances through the architectural design of the building by using overhangs, step-backs, or different colours and materials.

**Action 2.3.3.**  
**Create clear gradients between private and public spaces**

- Create legible gradients between private and public spaces to help reduce confusion as to what is private property and what is the public realm.
- Use architectural elements, such as low fences and vegetation, to create transition areas.
- Pay particular attention to areas that could be hazardous, such as loading bays or parking garage entrances. Mark the transition into these spaces with bollards, tactile paving, or signage.



Photo: David Baker Architects

Realm 2: Street scale

**Strategy 2.4. Transit stops (overview)**

Comfortable transit stops help encourage transit use. Easy access to public transit is essential as an affordable means of getting around the neighbourhood or city, particularly for those who cannot drive. For people living with dementia, having a place to sit and be sheltered from the elements while they wait for transit is crucial.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Comfortable:** People living with dementia can wait for transit in different weather conditions

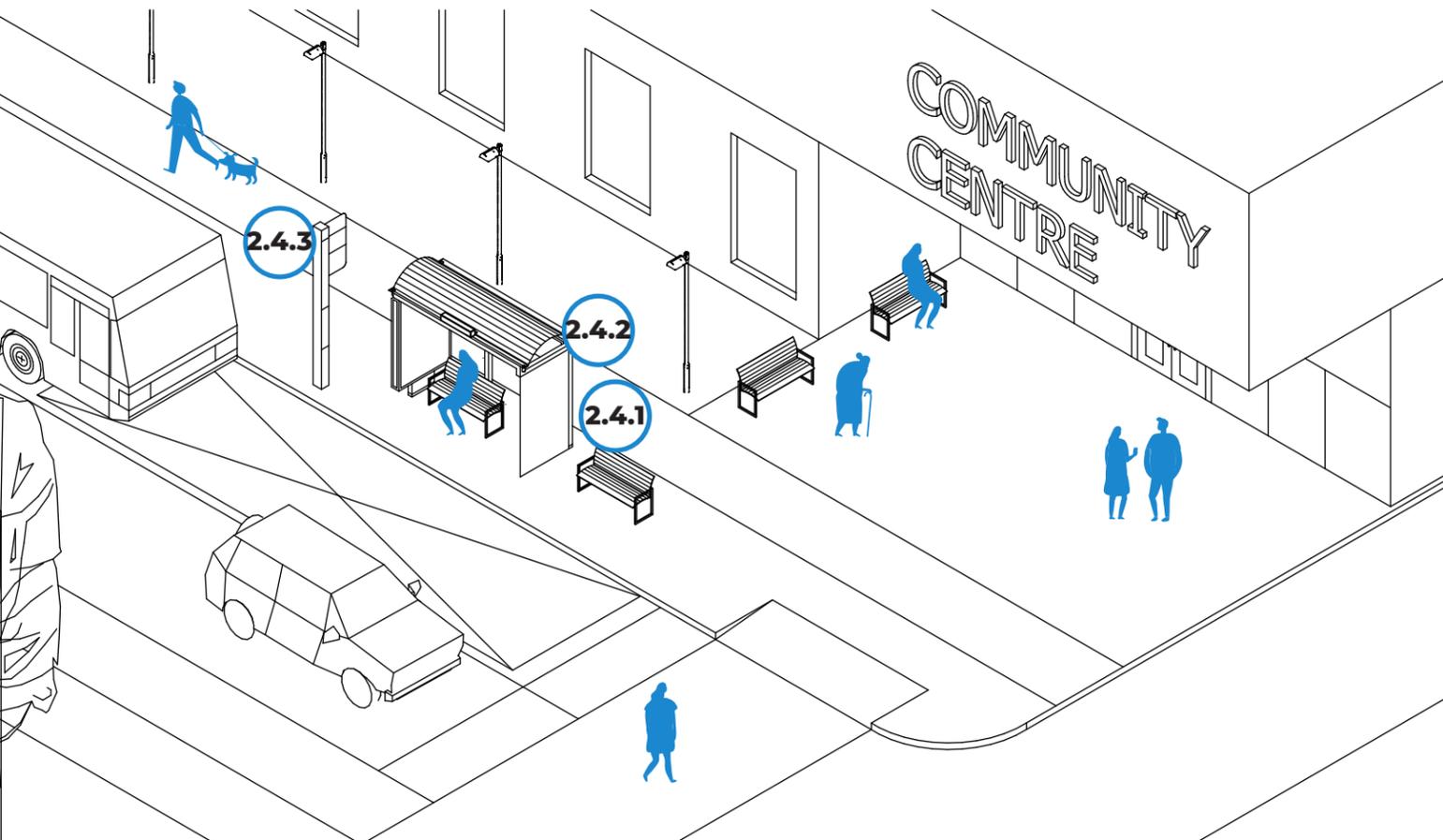


- **Familiar:** Predictable and easy-to-use transit stops make it easier to navigate the neighbourhood or city

**Action 2.4.1.**  
Provide ample seating at transit stops

**Action 2.4.2.**  
Create enclosed and sheltered transit stops

**Action 2.4.3.**  
Include navigational tools at transit stops



Realm 2: Street scale

**Strategy 2.4. Transit stops (detailed actions)**

**Action 2.4.1.**  
Provide ample seating at transit stops

- Provide additional seating (more than one bench) at high-priority transit stops, such as near seniors centres.
- Ensure seating follows a recognizable and comfortable design.

See strategy 3.1., Seating, for more detail.

**Action 2.4.2.**  
Create enclosed and sheltered transit stops

- Create enclosed transit stops that provide shelter from the wind, sun, and rain while people wait for a bus or tram.

**Action 2.4.3.**  
Include navigational tools at transit stops

- Provide clear signage.
- Give each transit stop in the network name and number, to help with navigation.
- Include a map of the nearby bus routes, to aid with trip planning and navigation.
- Provide live arrival times at transit stops, to help reduce uncertainty.



This Seattle bus stop offers seating, shelter, live arrival times, and physical maps to help people navigate. Photo: Oran Viriyincy / Flickr

Realm 2: Street scale

### Strategy 2.5. Parking and drop-off (overview)

People living with dementia and their care partners often rely on private vehicles or taxis to get around due to a lack of other options or accessibility challenges. Easy access to well-planned parking and drop-off can reduce risks and decrease conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**

- 
**Safe:** Allows for safe drop-off by a care partner or transportation service providers, such as taxis or a service like HandyDART
- 
**Accessible:** People living with dementia can safely access core services that are not walkable

**Action 2.5.1.**  
Break up parking areas

**Action 2.5.2.**  
Create drop-off areas for cars at key locations



Greenery and walking path through a parking lot. Photo: UC Davis Arboretum and Public Garden / Flickr



Depaved parking lot and rain garden. Photo: Philadelphia Water Department / Flickr

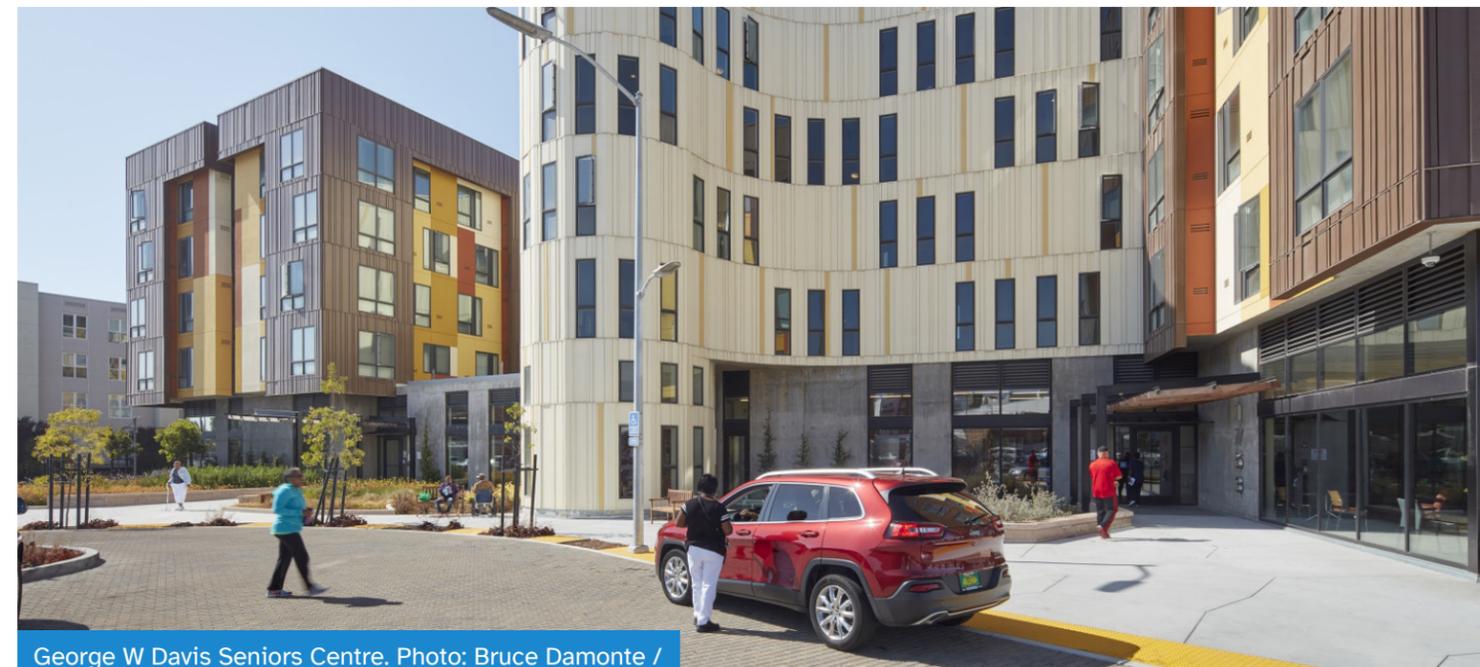
### Strategy 2.5. Parking and drop-off (detailed actions)

**Action 2.5.1.**  
Break up parking areas

- Break up large parking areas with greenery, rain gardens, and marked pedestrian pathways.
- Ensure parking areas don't interfere with pedestrian access to the building or public space.
- Create clear pedestrian crossings and paths of travel across parking lots.

**Action 2.5.2.**  
Create drop-off areas for cars at key locations

- Provide accessible drop-off locations at shops, services, and other essential destinations to reduce travel time and frustration for people living with dementia and their care partners.
- Consider drop-off areas at services and destinations that people living with dementia may frequent, such as community centres, clinics, and hospitals.



George W Davis Seniors Centre. Photo: Bruce Damonte / David Baker Architects

# Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Realm 3 focuses on detailed design decisions that determine quality, comfort, and functionality. The strategies and actions in Realm 3 apply to any outdoor space that is open to the public. These

details can transform places into high-quality and desirable destinations that foster a sense of belonging and encourage social connection.

**Strategy 3.1.** Seating

**Strategy 3.2.** Public art

**Strategy 3.3.** Placemaking

**Strategy 3.4.** Public toilets

**Strategy 3.5.** Signage

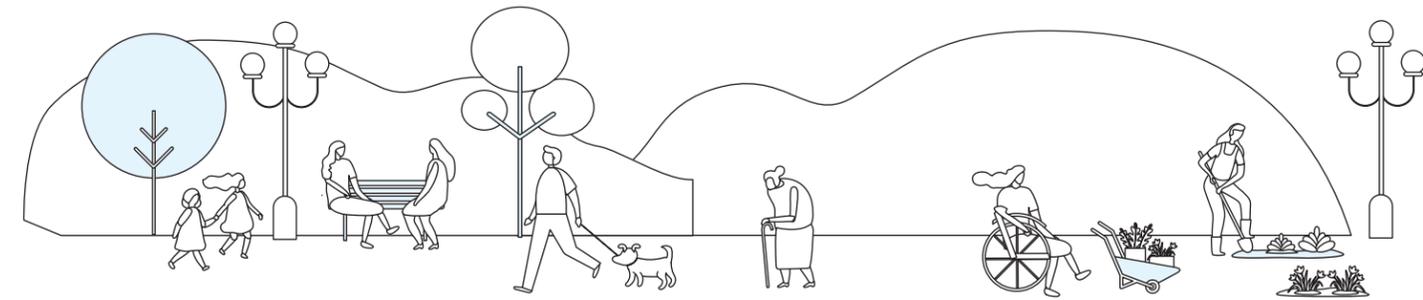
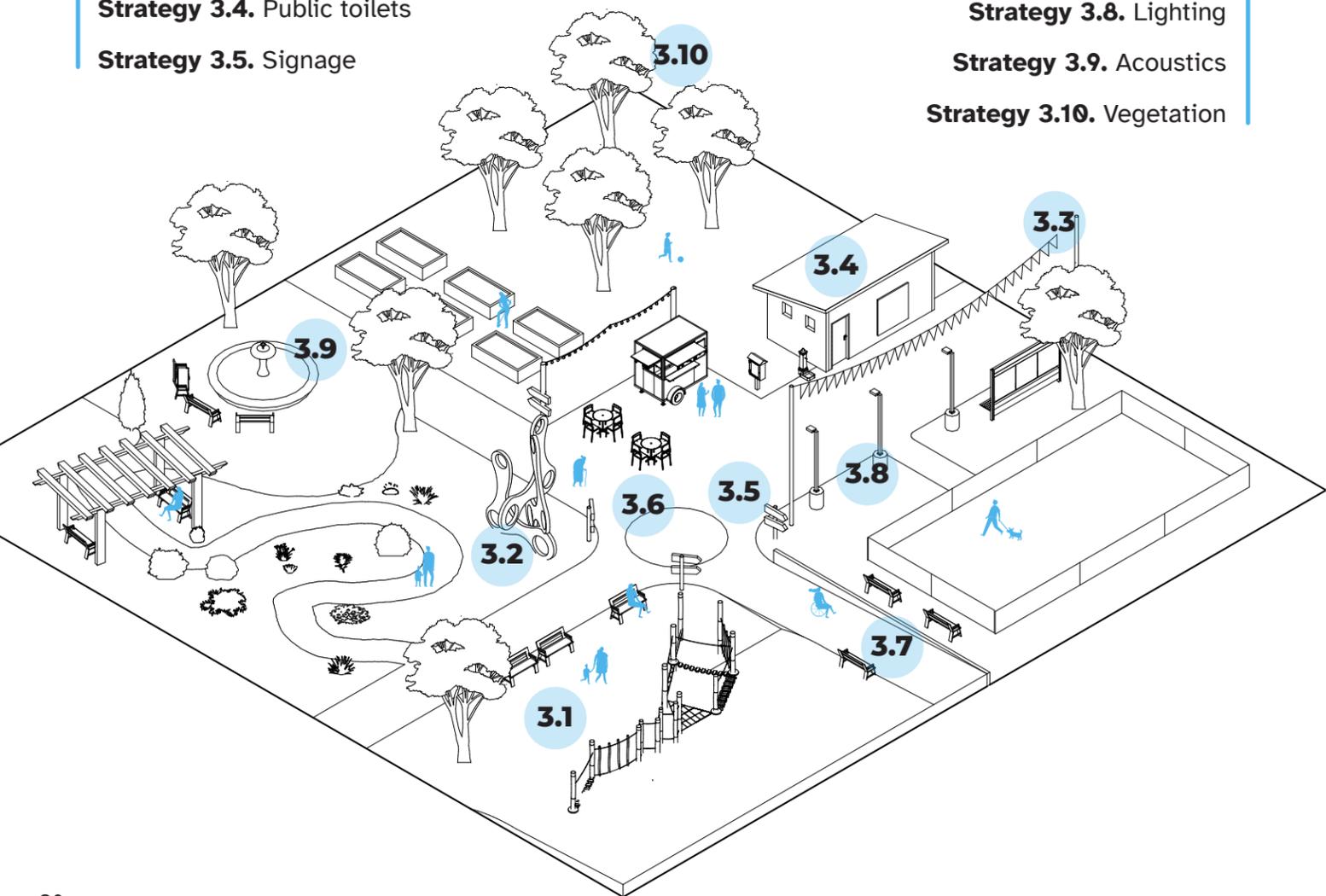
**Strategy 3.6.** Ground treatments

**Strategy 3.7.** Grade (level) changes

**Strategy 3.8.** Lighting

**Strategy 3.9.** Acoustics

**Strategy 3.10.** Vegetation



## The importance of detailed design for people living with dementia

- People living with dementia can feel overwhelmed in public spaces. User-oriented design can help reduce feelings of overcrowding and provide areas to pause, rest, and orient.
- Design interventions that increase comfort can help people feel at ease and enjoy staying in a space longer.
- Designers should consider the full spectrum of a user's sensory experience, including visuals, sights, and sounds. For instance, some sounds are positive for people living with dementia, such as kids playing, birds chirping, and running water. Other sounds, such as traffic or large crowds, can be overwhelming.
- Colour is an effective way to distinguish spaces and create visual interest.
- Placemaking and public art provide positive benefits for people living with dementia by offering wayfinding cues, destinations, and opportunities to interact with the community.
- Clear and easy-to-read signage is crucial for helping people living with dementia navigate spaces.

## When should you consider this realm?

In new developments or existing neighbourhoods, when designing:

- Parks, plazas, or other open spaces that are publicly accessible
- Community centres and public buildings
- Residential developments
- Pedestrian-oriented streets

## What policies can influence this?

- Neighbourhood design guidelines
- Development permit requirements
- Detailed design requirements
- Building codes
- Wayfinding and accessibility standards

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.1. Seating (overview)**

Seating is crucial for people with limited mobility who need to rest frequently. In addition, well-designed seating areas can serve as a destination for people living with dementia, encouraging physical activity and increasing opportunities for social connection.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Comfortable:** People living with dementia can take rests when needed



- **Familiar:** Predictable and easy-to-use seating centred around appealing destinations

**Action 3.1.1.**  
**Create accessible seating**

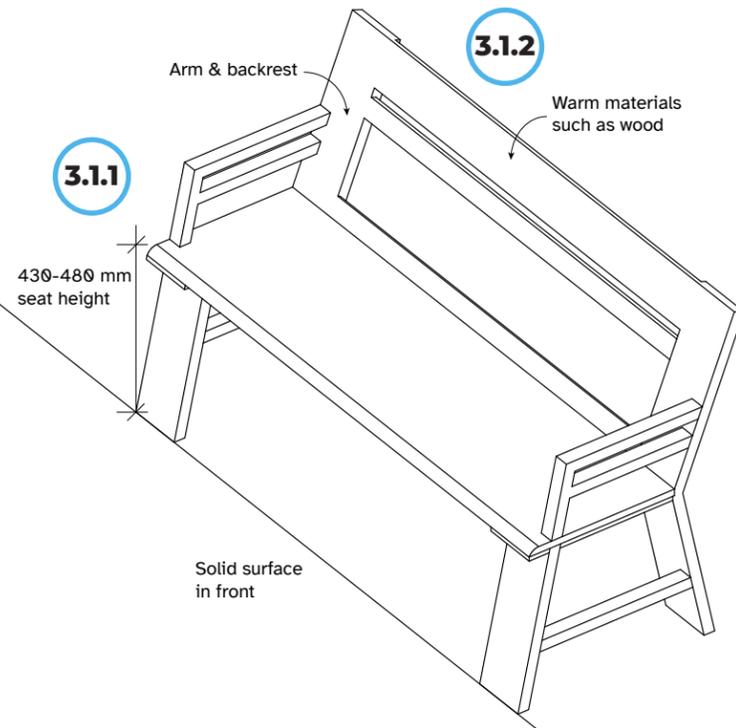
**Action 3.1.2.**  
**Provide familiar and usable seating**

**Action 3.1.3.**  
**Place seating frequently and strategically**

**Action 3.1.4.**  
**Provide shaded and sheltered seating**

**Action 3.1.5.**  
**Co-locate seating with interesting features**

**Action 3.1.6.**  
**Ensure that seating is easy to find**



Seating outside Mabuhay Court. Photo: Cesar Rubio / David Baker Architects

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.1. Seating (detailed actions)**

**Action 3.1.1.**  
**Create accessible seating**

- Ensure that seat heights are 430-480 millimetres above ground level.
- Create a solid surface directly in front of the bench to allow easy access with a mobility device.
- Provide diverse seating options for those with limited mobility or hearing and vision loss (i.e., located away from loud noise sources and at 90° angles to another seat for ease of social interaction).

**Action 3.1.2.**  
**Provide familiar and usable seating**

- Include armrests and a backrest.
- Offer seating with a traditional “bench” shape to ensure that people can easily recognize it as a place to rest.
- Design seating using sturdy and warm materials, such as wood.
- Provide opportunities for someone to preview the space before choosing to sit there.

**Action 3.1.3.**  
**Place seating frequently and strategically**

- Place seating every 100 metres at a minimum in public spaces.
- Include seating along uphill paths and decision points (such as junctions) to provide an area for people living with dementia to rest and orient themselves.

**Action 3.1.4.**  
**Provide shaded and sheltered seating**

- Offer sheltered seating options.
- Use trees or other architectural elements, such as a gazebo or trellis with vines, to provide shelter and enclosure for seating areas.

**Action 3.1.5.**  
**Co-locate seating with interesting features**

- Provide seating near areas of activity, such as playgrounds, water features, community gardens, and dog parks.
- Provide seating near places to buy food or drinks, such as coffee or ice cream.

**Action 3.1.6.**  
**Ensure that seating is easy to find**

- Ensure that seating is easily visible from walking routes.
- Provide a map or signage showing seating availability in public spaces.

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.2. Public art (overview)**

Public art supports a sense of belonging, better wayfinding, and opportunities for people to pause and interact. Public art creates destinations for people living with dementia to visit, increasing their physical activity and opportunities for community interactions.

**Action 3.2.1. Support a diverse range of public art**

**Action 3.2.2. Co-create art with the community**

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



• **Distinct:** People living with dementia can recognize where they are in the neighbourhood



• **Familiar:** Triggers memories and familiar sights, and can enable social connections with familiar neighbours



Small-scale public art can include painted street elements along active travel routes. Photo: Happy Cities



A woman paints a community mural with a local artist. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities



Large-scale public art can reflect local history in prominent locations. Photo: Can Pac Swire / Flickr

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.2. Public Art (detailed actions)**

**Action 3.2.1. Support a diverse range of public art**

- Create small-scale and large-scale public art that can help with wayfinding.
- Design public art that can serve as a social gathering area.
- Use large-scale public art to mark important junctions or nodes.
- Consider creating a series of public art installations that can help identify walking routes through the neighbourhood.

**Action 3.2.2. Co-create art with the community**

- Provide spaces, funding, and support for community-created art.
- Consider opportunities to invite people living with dementia and their care partners to participate in creating community art in a safe and comfortable way.
- Reflect local history and heritage in community-generated art to help celebrate the past and provide memory cues.

*“Public art is unique, and can help with wayfinding and placemaking. It also helps people to connect. Often, we can see people gathering around a public art and talk about it. Children are also always stopping. It is a good way to stimulate social connectedness.”*

—Community forum participant



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.3. Placemaking (overview)

Placemaking supports a sense of belonging, better wayfinding, and opportunities for people to pause and interact. Placemaking creates destinations for people living with dementia to visit, increasing their physical activity and opportunities for community interactions.

Dementia-friendly principles:



• **Distinct:** People living with dementia can recognize where they are in the neighbourhood

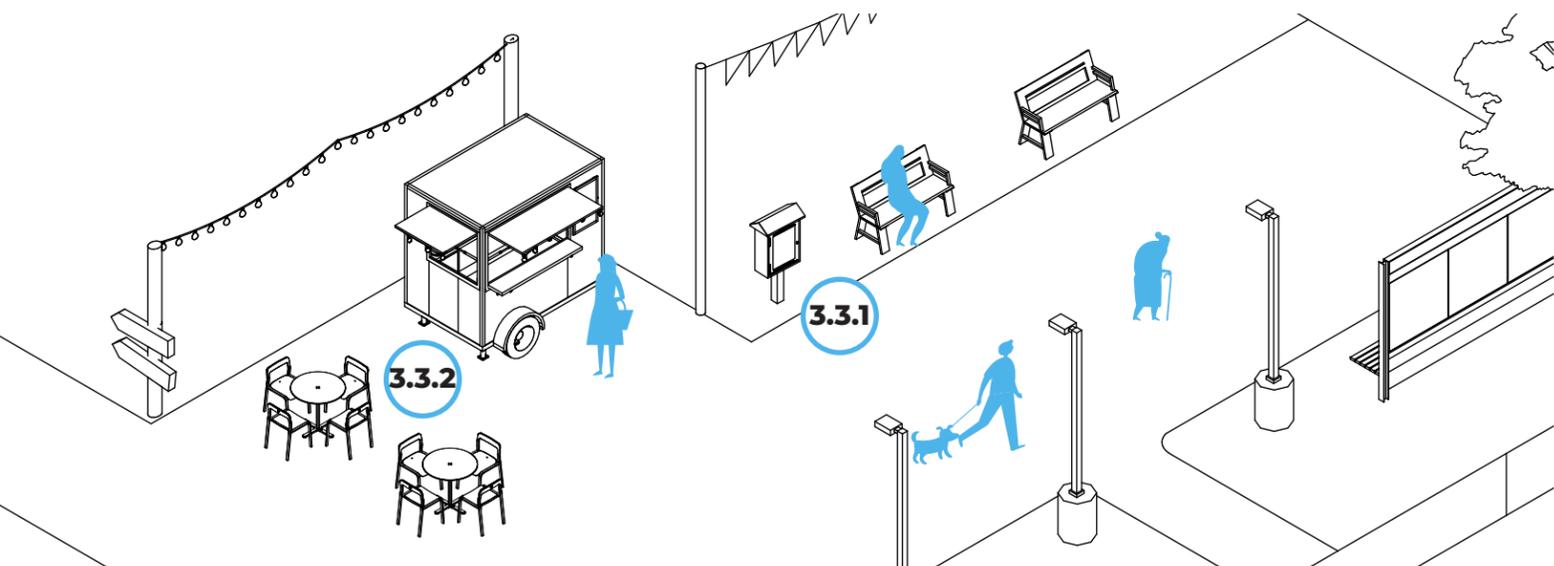


• **Familiar:** Triggers memories and familiar sights, and can enable social connections with familiar neighbours

**Action 3.3.1.**  
Include small-scale placemaking features

**Action 3.3.2.**  
Design flexible spaces for pop-ups

**Action 3.3.3.**  
Provide pet-friendly green space



Pet-friendly space. Photo: Bruce Damonte / David Baker Architects



A little free library on a neighbourhood street. Photo: Paul Sableman / Flickr

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.3. Placemaking (detailed actions)

**Action 3.3.1.**  
Include small-scale placemaking features

- Consider small-scale placemaking features, such as a little book library, a seed library, a rock garden, or colourful bunting and banners.

**Action 3.3.2.**  
Design flexible spaces for pop-ups

- Create flexible spaces with accessible pathways, good lighting, and infrastructure (i.e., running water and electrical connections) to support a wide range of pop-up activities, such as markets or live music.
- Create flexible spaces to play games, such as lawn bowling or beanbag toss.

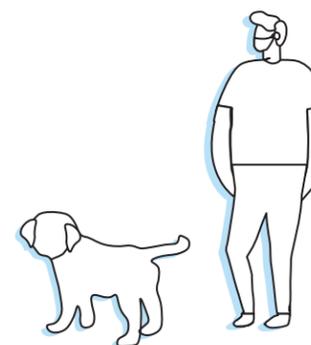
**Action 3.3.3.**  
Provide pet-friendly green space

Pets can boost wellbeing by providing companionship, a reason to get out and exercise, and an opportunity to connect with others in the neighbourhood. People living with dementia may also have service dogs.

- Ensure clear signage and separation between on-leash and off-leash areas to reduce risks of injury and conflict.
- Provide seating near dog parks so that people can safely observe pets.

“Placemaking helps people living with dementia understand unfamiliar places, regardless of if they visited the space before or not, by providing elements that make the space feel more comfortable and safe.”

—Community forum participant



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.4. Public toilets (overview)**

Access to a toilet is a human right. Lack of access to public toilets can hinder people’s ability to venture out into the neighbourhood, particularly for people living with dementia. People need safe and easy-to-access public toilets in key destinations throughout the neighbourhood, such as at parks, transit stations, shopping areas, and more.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Comfortable:** People can use a public space without fear of not being able to meet their biological needs



- **Accessible:** People living with dementia and other disabilities can access the required facilities

**Action 3.4.1**  
**Create accessible and easy-to-find public toilets**

**Action 3.4.2.**  
**Maintain cleanliness and safety**

**Action 3.4.3.**  
**Design with high-contrast surfaces**



The Portland Loo. Photo: Mattsjc / Wikimedia Commons



It’s important to ensure contrast between the toilet seat, toilet fixture, walls, and floors. Illustration: Happy Cities

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.4. Public toilets (detailed actions)**

**Action 3.4.1.**  
**Create accessible and easy-to-find public toilets**

- Ensure that pathways to and from toilets are easy to navigate and accessible.
- Avoid placing public toilets in areas that require stairs to access them.
- Provide obvious signage to indicate where the public toilet is located (i.e., provide directional signage to communicate that a public toilet is available 200 metres away).
- Provide a unisex family toilet to offer flexibility for families and people who need assistance from care partners.
- Provide seating and a place to rest or wait near the toilet.
- Ensure that toilets are unlocked and free to use.

**Action 3.4.2.**  
**Maintain cleanliness and safety**

- Consider installing self-cleaning toilets in locations where regular maintenance will be difficult.
- Consider locating public toilets near to other areas of activity, such as a playground or a transit stop, to discourage other uses and vandalism.
- Carefully consider lighting both inside and around the public toilet to ensure visibility, particularly for older adults.

**Action 3.4.3.**  
**Design with high-contrast surfaces**

- Ensure contrast between the toilet seat and the rest of the toilet fixture.
- Ensure contrast between the toilet fixture and the walls and floors of the bathroom.
- Ensure that flooring has a simple or solid pattern, and is not slippery or reflective.

“If toilets are not available in grocery stores, transit stations, or parks, that can prevent people living with dementia from accessing those spaces.”

“When I go to the grocery store, if toilets are not available to me, then I can’t make the trip.”

—Community forum participants



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.5. Signage (overview)

Signage provides critical information to people about how to move through the neighbourhood and find destinations. People living with dementia may not have access to a smartphone and may become more easily disoriented. Well-placed signage and informative signage can transform their experience of the neighbourhood.

Dementia-friendly principles:



• **Legible:** Easy-to-understand directions help people know where they are and where they want to go



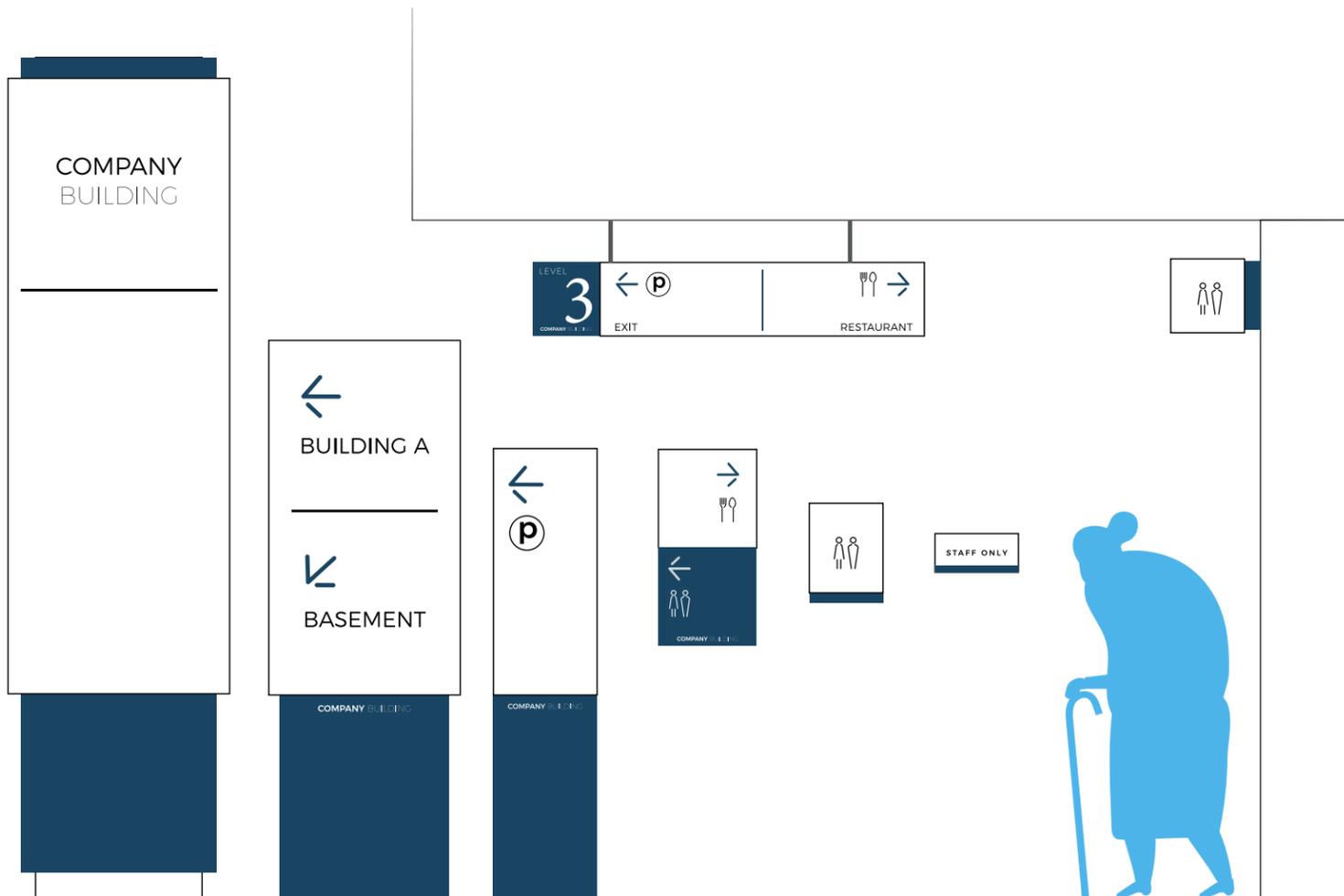
• **Accessible:** Ensures people's ability to read and understand signage at critical points

**Action 3.5.1.**  
Place signage at decision points and building entrances

**Action 3.5.2.**  
Ensure signage is visible

**Action 3.5.3.**  
Provide informative signage

**Action 3.5.4.**  
Make signage easy to read



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

Strategy 3.5. Signage (detailed actions)

**Action 3.5.1.**  
Place signage at decision points and building entrances

- Fix signs to the doors they refer to, not to the adjacent surface.
- Place signs at eye level.

**Action 3.5.2.**  
Ensure signage is visible

- Ensure that signage is visible from multiple directions. For example, double-sided signage ensures that people can see the information regardless of which direction they are approaching from.
- Provide lighting to illuminate signage and ensure that it is visible at all times of day, while being careful to minimize glare.

**Action 3.5.3.**  
Provide informative signage

- Provide signage that indicates the location of amenities, particularly areas to buy food or drink, public toilets, and seating.
- Indicate the distance to access amenities, using the number of minutes or steps for clarity.
- Provide easy-to-read maps at critical locations and decision points, such as near transit stops or at an entrance to a park.
- Include voice prompts and announcements where possible.

**Action 3.5.4.**  
Make signage easy to read

- Use clear language and text, including a bold typeface with good contrast between the text and background.
- Use clear and familiar icons alongside text to provide multiple ways to convey information.
- Consider familiar graphics that are well-understood by people living with dementia.

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments (overview)**

Ground treatments, such as paving, impact people's ability to navigate the neighbourhood. People living with dementia have an increased risk of falling compared to other older adults. A seamless path of travel can reduce risks and allow them to access the neighbourhood independently.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



• **Safe:** People living with dementia can walk around the neighbourhoods while minimizing risks



• **Accessible:** People living with dementia can navigate the environment safely despite differences in cognition

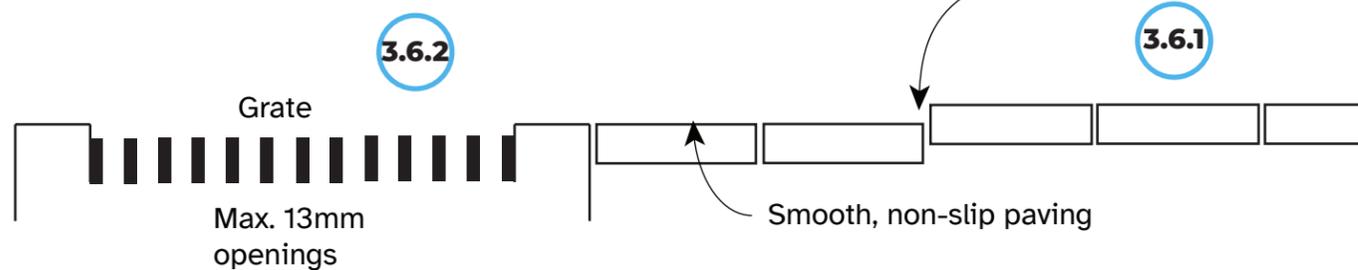
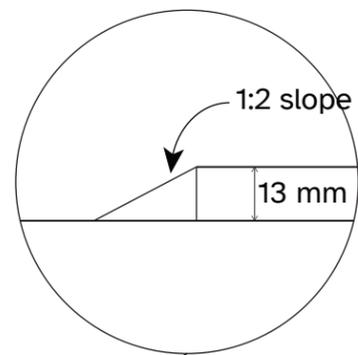
**Action 3.6.1.**  
Choose flat, smooth, non-slip paving

**Action 3.6.2.**  
Ensure grates and drains are flush with paving

**Action 3.6.3.**  
Avoid strong contrasting patterns



Flat, non-slip paving with tactile indicators and a grate flush with the surface. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.6. Ground treatments (detailed actions)**

**Action 3.6.1.**  
Choose flat, smooth, non-slip paving

- Ensure that joints between paving are less than 6 millimetres wide.
- Install a solid layer underneath brick or unit paving to ensure stability.
- Avoid using shiny materials, which reflect light, or slippery materials, such as tiles.
- Include well-defined edges to show where different surfaces start and stop.

**Action 3.6.2.**  
Ensure grates and drains are flush with paving

- Ensure that there is less than a 2 millimetre difference between surfaces.
- Where elevation changes are between 6 and 13 millimetres, provide a slope of 1:2 over the elevation change.
- Ensure that openings in grates are less than 13 millimetres.

**Action 3.6.3.**  
Avoid strong contrasting patterns

- Avoid strong, contrasting patterns on the ground. These can lead to confusion and depth perception challenges for people living with dementia.
- Use patterns and textures intentionally to indicate features or changes in the environment. For instance, a playground could have a different texture than a walkway.



Aberdour Sensory Garden. Photo: William Starkey/ Wikimedia Commons

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.7. Grade and level changes (overview)**

Grade changes are inevitable due to natural topography or obstacles, such as stairs and ramps. People living with dementia have an increased risk of falling and can experience depth perception challenges. Safely navigating level changes reduces fall risks and increases ability to navigate the neighbourhood independently.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



• **Safe:** Allows people living with dementia to walk while minimizing risks

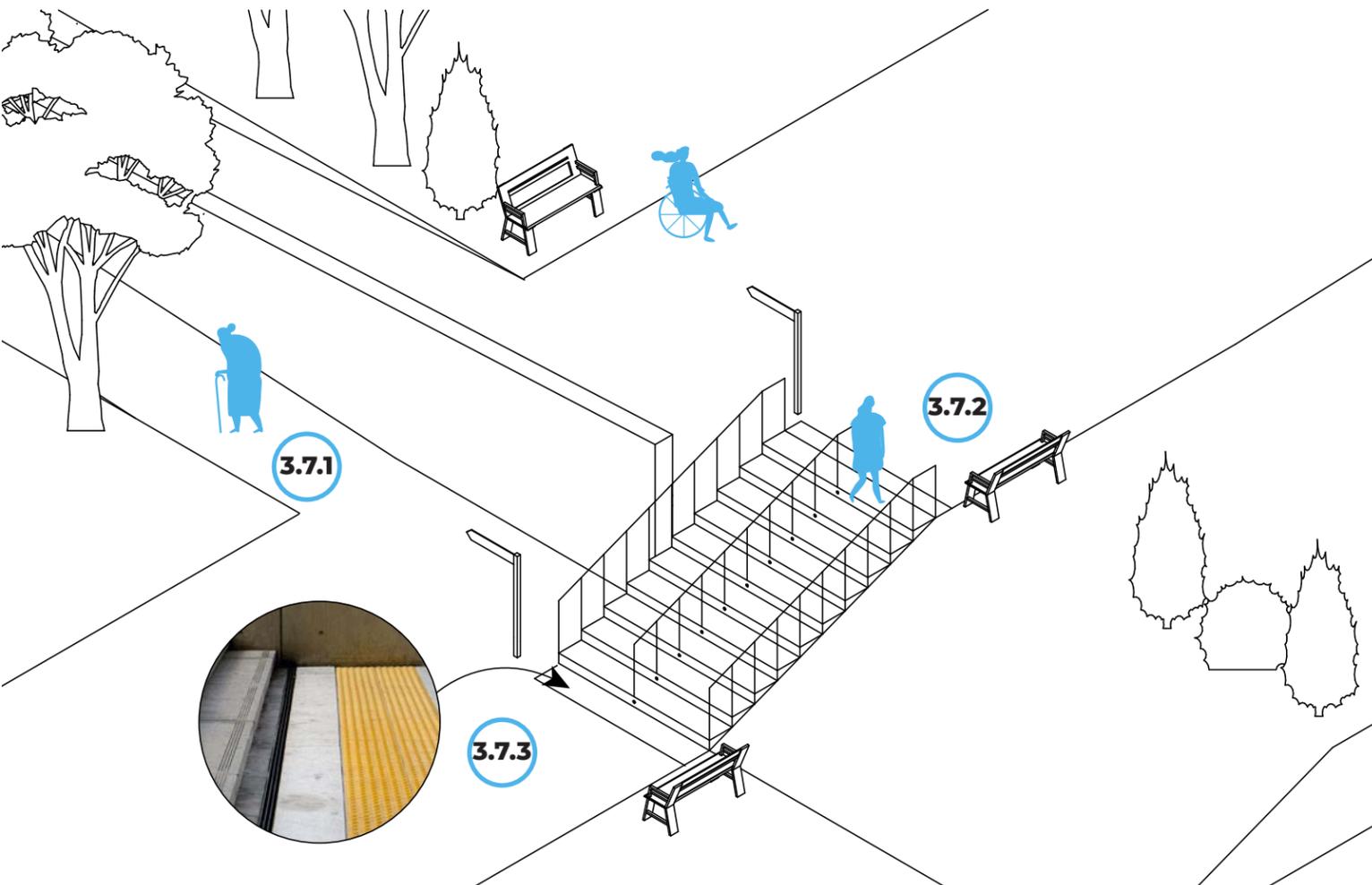


• **Accessible:** Allows people living with dementia to navigate the environment safely despite differences in cognition

**Action 3.7.1.**  
**Create gentle level changes**

**Action 3.7.2.**  
**Integrate unavoidable level changes**

**Action 3.7.3.**  
**Mark level changes clearly**



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.7. Grade and level changes (detailed actions)**

**Action 3.7.1.**  
**Create gentle level changes**

- Design a grade of 1:20 where slopes or ramps are required.
- Create flat areas to rest, with seating, where slopes are steeper than 1:20 and longer than 12 metres.

**Action 3.7.3.**  
**Mark level changes clearly**

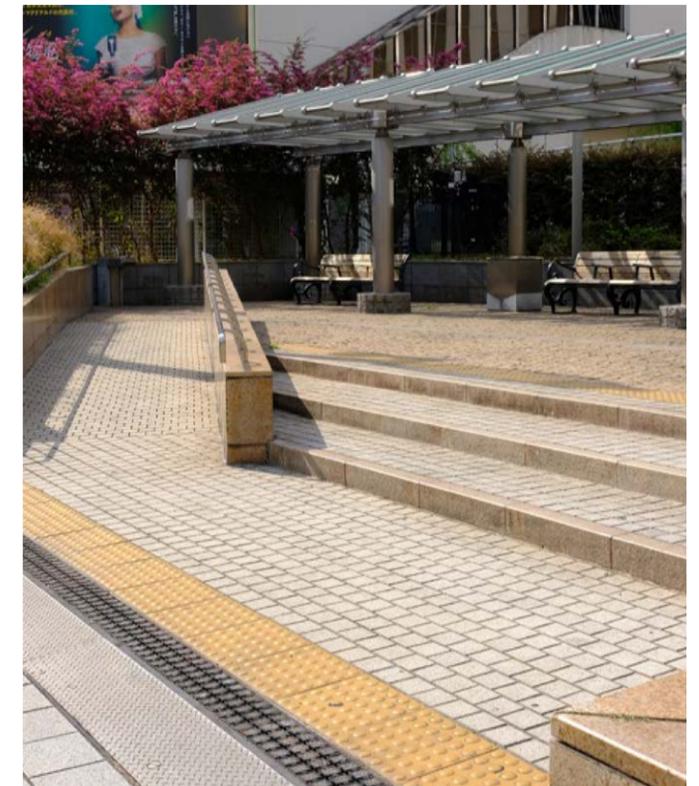
- Use contrasting paving to indicate potential hazards or changes in the environment.
- Integrate tactile warning strips and textures into and before stairs or other level changes.

**Action 3.7.2.**  
**Integrate unavoidable level changes**

- Design clear pathways to create a more gradual level change (for example, place a ramp next to a staircase).
- Use signage to indicate that a grade change is coming up ahead.
- Provide a rest area with seating at the top and bottom of level changes so that people can stop and re-orient themselves if they need to plan an alternative route.



Accessible ramp at Rocky Hill Veterans Housing. Photo: Eric Rorer / David Baker Architects



Sheltered rest area with tactile indicators to mark the level change and accessible ramp. Photo: Emma Avery / Happy Cities

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.8. Lighting (overview)**

Lighting is an important safety feature for people of all ages. Older adults take longer to adjust to different light levels, such as when moving from a very bright interior space to a dark exterior space. Older adults also require more lumens to see clearly. People living with dementia can benefit from a variety of lighting features to support the activities that may take place in a given space. Choosing lighting that minimizes glare can also help reduce confusion.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



• **Safe:** Adequate lighting creates a sense of safety and visibility when navigating spaces in low-light conditions

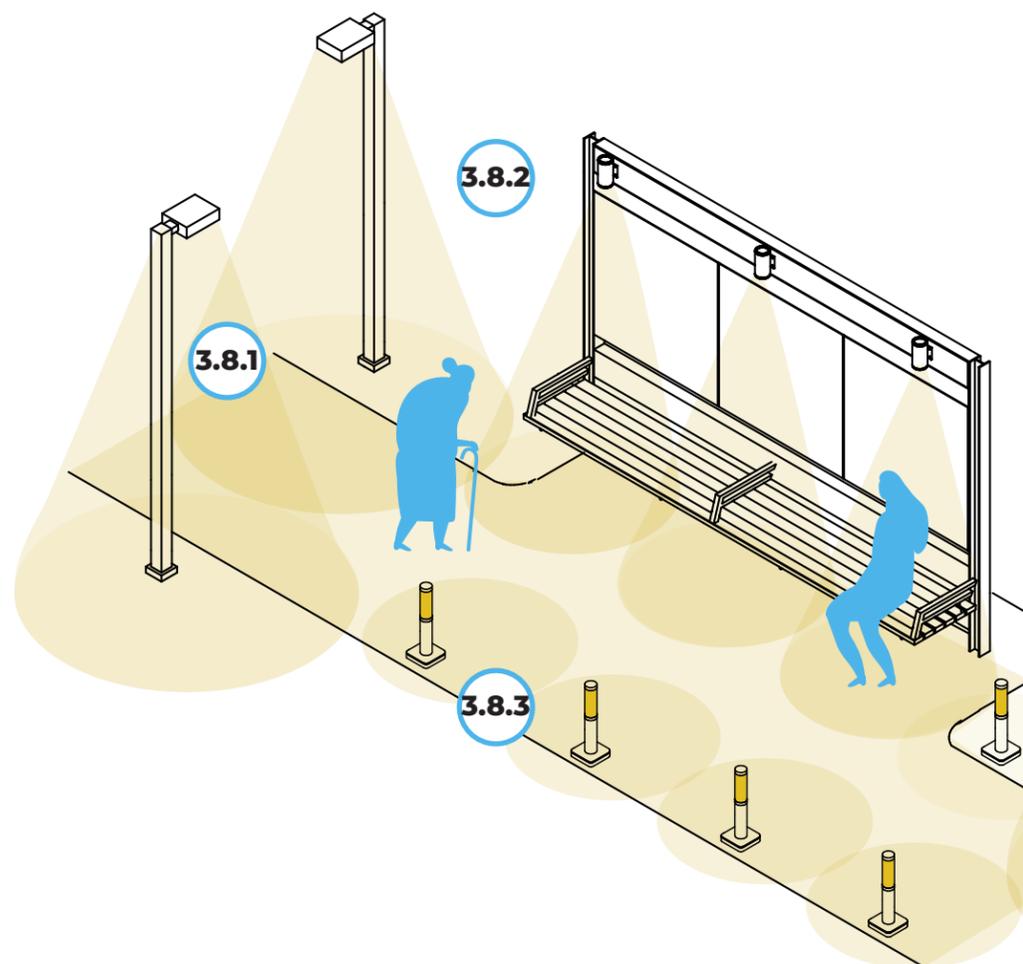


• **Accessible:** People living with dementia can navigate the environment safely despite differences in cognition

**Action 3.8.1.**  
Provide suitable lighting levels based on anticipated uses

**Action 3.8.2.**  
Use a variety of lighting types

**Action 3.8.3.**  
Minimize glare



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.8. Lighting (detailed actions)**

**Action 3.8.1.**  
Provide suitable lighting levels based on anticipated uses

- Ensure adequate levels of lighting for older adults, especially at night. As a rule of thumb, older adults require 50% higher illumination levels due to changes in light perception as people age.
- Consider lighting designed specifically for pedestrians, such as along the edges of pathways and sidewalks.

**Action 3.8.2.**  
Use a variety of lighting types

- Consider areas where light levels need to transition between areas with different functions and lighting levels.
- Design uplighting or indirect lighting incorporated into seating and pathways.
- Create playful or distinctive elements that incorporate lighting, such as overhead string lights.

**Action 3.8.3.**  
Minimize glare

- Minimize shadows and glare to reduce confusion and perception challenges for people living with dementia, such as thinking there is an obstacle ahead where none exists.
- Avoid spotlights, which create strong contrast of light and shadow that can confuse people living with dementia.
- Create even lighting levels in areas that people need to navigate at night.



Lighting integrated on buildings and walkways at Mabuhay Court. Photo: Cesar Rubio / David Baker Architects



String lighting at Mason on Mariposa. Photo: Craig Cozart / David Baker Architects

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.9. Acoustics** (overview)

Acoustics are critical to consider in outdoor spaces. Environmental sounds can be challenging to anticipate during the design stage. However, providing quiet spaces to pause can help people living with dementia by reducing stress and confusion and improving comfort levels. Sounds from everyday life can also help trigger memories and emotions for people living with dementia.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Comfortable:** Reducing distractions and potential for sensory overload supports attentional capacity



- **Familiar:** Familiar and pleasant sounds act as cues to remind people where they are

**Action 3.9.1.**  
**Mitigate noise through buffers**

**Action 3.9.2.**  
**Incorporate soothing sounds into the environment**

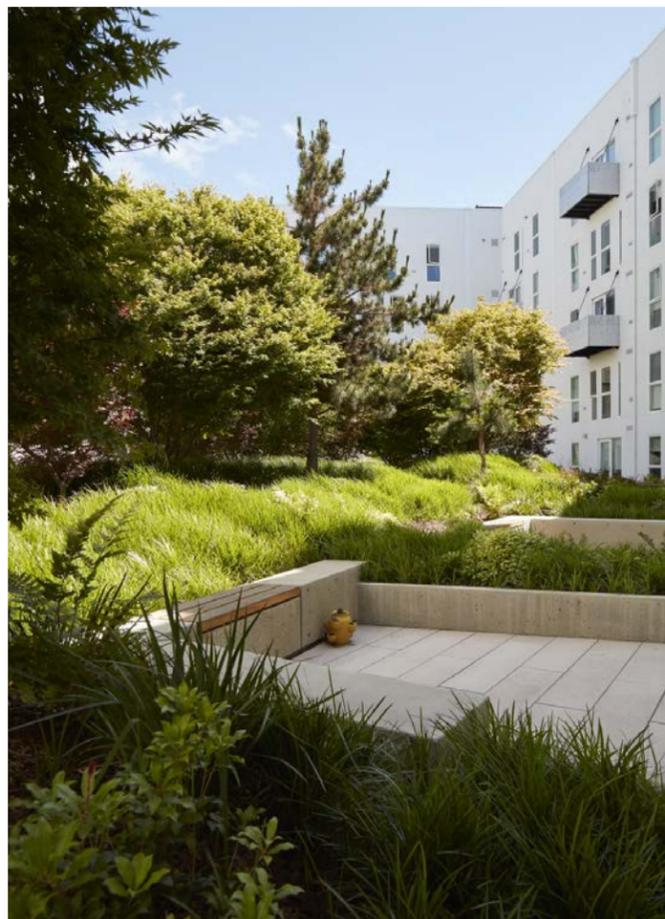
**Action 3.9.3.**  
**Include water features**



Maude's Garden. Photo: The Memory Hub



Seating facing a fountain and lake in Williamson Park. Photo: Alexander P Kapp / Wikimedia Commons



Seating in a peaceful area at Potrero 1010. Photo: Bruce Damonte / David Baker Architects

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.9. Acoustics** (detailed actions)

**Action 3.9.1.**  
**Mitigate noise through buffers**

- Create buffered seating areas away from noisy spaces to provide options to rest and retreat if needed.
- Use vegetation such as trees and shrubs to buffer seating areas and pedestrian pathways from roadways.

**Action 3.9.2**  
**Incorporate soothing sounds into the environment**

- Consider soothing sounds, such as running water, waves, or birdsong. Some people living with dementia also enjoy the sounds of children playing.

**Action 3.9.3.**  
**Include water features**

- Include access to views and sounds of water, which can have a positive sensory impact on people living with dementia.
- Use water features to create landmarks and destinations in the neighbourhood.

“My elderly mother has a mobility issue. She enjoys spending time at the shopping mall nearby, which has a fountain and sitting area, so people naturally sit down, bring dogs, socialize and talk. It is a great place for intergenerational interaction and social engagement.”

—Community forum participant



Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.10. Vegetation (overview)**

Vegetation improves people’s sensory experience of the environment, and contact with nature provides wellbeing benefits. People living with dementia can benefit from spaces that use vegetation thoughtfully in all seasons.

**Dementia-friendly principles:**



- **Distinctive:** *Vegetation has unique colours, shapes, and textures that can help distinguish the environment*



- **Familiar:** *Familiar plants can help trigger memories and environmental recognition*

**Action 3.10.1.**  
Use a range of vegetation to show the change in seasons

**Action 3.10.2.**  
Include natural elements outside of green spaces

**Action 3.10.3.**  
Create community and memory gardens

**Action 3.10.4.**  
Incorporate aromatic plants



A shared garden at Lakeside Seniors Apartments. Photo: David Baker Architects



Horniman Museum Garden. Photo: Bongo Vongo / Flickr



Sensory garden at BCA gallery. Photo: Chenzw / Wikimedia Commons



Planter boxes and street trees. Photo: City of Qualicum Beach

Realm 3: Detailed design scale

**Strategy 3.10. Vegetation (detailed actions)**

**Action 3.10.1.**  
Use a range of vegetation to show the change in seasons

- Plant seasonal and changing shrubs, flowers, and trees to help cue memories.
- Grow a variety of plants that change colour with the seasons, flowers that bloom at different times, and evergreen plants that retain foliage in winter.
- Carefully consider maintenance for vegetation near pathways, as fallen leaves can create slipping hazards.

**Action 3.10.2.**  
Include natural elements outside of green spaces

- Include planter boxes, hanging flower boxes, and green walls in urban environments or streetscapes.
- Plant a range of different street trees to help with wayfinding.

**Action 3.10.3.**  
Create community and memory gardens

- Create community gardens as social gathering spaces that allow for intergenerational interactions.
- Create memory gardens with signage, vegetation, and other placemaking features to provide a familiar place for people living with dementia to spend time outdoors.

**Action 3.10.4.**  
Incorporate aromatic plants

- Use aromatic plants to help stimulate and engage people’s senses and provide environmental and directional cues.
- Plant herbs and fragrant flowers in gardens.

*“During my walk, I like to appreciate the environment. There are beautiful trees with many colours. We can find greens, purples, a little bit brown. We live in a very beautiful city in Vancouver.”*

—Walk along interview participant



## Implementation

**These Guidelines articulate best practices for planning and designing dementia-friendly neighbourhoods. Access to safe destinations—and ways to get there by foot or transit—is crucial for people living with dementia to continue participating in the community and maintain social ties. By following evidence-based best practices for neighbourhood planning and design, municipalities can make informed decisions around future policy and concentrate resources where they will have the greatest impact.**



### Considerations

Municipalities can work with local community members, organizations, and professionals to identify which strategies and actions within these Guidelines best support their community's unique needs. The strategies and actions in this document can inform municipal and regional policy, such as Official Community Plans or Park Development Standards.

#### Here are some key steps for implementation:

- Analyze existing neighbourhoods (i.e., streets, open urban areas, plazas, and parks) to identify challenging areas for people living with dementia that do not meet community needs.
- Work in partnership with community organizations, people with lived experience, and care partners to:
  - Identify high-priority design strategies and actions.
  - Identify community areas or hotspots that would benefit from pilot projects.

- Carry out pilot projects in partnership with the community to see how the proposed design changes impact people living with dementia and their care partners.
- Consider the potential financial costs to implement dementia-inclusive strategies and actions city-wide.
- Share success stories with other municipalities and organizations to increase awareness and political support.
- Develop new policies to encourage dementia-friendly neighbourhood design.
  - Consider recognition programs or incentives for organizations and developers to implement new policies.

# Implementation

## Implementation (continued)

Beyond neighbourhood planning and design, municipalities, developers, and community organizations can improve neighbourhoods for people living with dementia and their care partners through:

- **Awareness and training:** Train community members and municipal staff to understand how to help and interact with people living with dementia. For example, the City of Burnaby is training its staff to support people living with dementia who are submitting their property taxes.
- **Programming:** Organize programming and activities to bring community members and people living with dementia together to build social connections, increase mutual understanding, and reduce stigma. For example, the [Burnaby Dementia Friendly Café](#) operates in a city-owned space.
- **Inclusive city-building processes:** Build inclusive civic processes that invite people living with dementia and their care partners to participate in shaping their community. For example, the City of Richmond engaged people living with dementia to create its 10-year Seniors Strategy.

### Changing urban environments:

Many municipalities across Canada are seeing rapid growth and redevelopment. These changing communities can be particularly challenging to navigate for people living with dementia. However, the following actions can help mitigate the challenges of rapid redevelopment:

- Create consistent design standards across neighbourhoods to make them easier to navigate.
- Retain heritage structures, landmark buildings, and community gathering spaces to aid wayfinding and familiarity.
- Consider temporary placemaking or public art interventions at construction sites to aid wayfinding, minimize confusion, and maintain safety around the site.
- Engage and inform community members of upcoming changes so that they can plan accordingly.



Construction of a new mixed-use development in downtown Edmonton. Photo: Dave Sutherland / Flickr

### Pilot project idea: Dementia-friendly path for walking and rolling

While implementing the Guidelines in this document throughout an entire city may take time, municipalities can consider creating a “dementia-friendly path” in their community as a pilot project and starting point for dementia-friendly design. This would involve creating, at minimum, one walking route in each city or neighbourhood that prioritizes the design strategies and actions in this document.

This type of project can allow municipalities to pilot the strategies and actions in these *Dementia-Inclusive Planning and Design Guidelines*, raise awareness in the community,

reduce stigma, and provide an enjoyable and comfortable walking and rolling route. The path(s) can use creative signage, colours, and branding and integrate with parks, local shopping areas, community centres, and other destinations that people living with dementia may frequent.

Beyond the benefits for people living with dementia, this type of safe, comfortable, accessible walking path can be an enjoyable destination and travel route for kids, seniors, people with disabilities, and other community members more broadly.



 Happy Cities

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