

Connections

Linking a community of dementia support



Keeping informed and active

Every spring, communities come together to honour people affected by dementia at the *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*. While we look forward to a time when we can all meet in person again, we're welcoming the opportunity for British Columbians to participate in our flagship fundraiser by getting active close to home and walking their own way to support people affected by dementia this May.

As we move through the COVID-19 pandemic together, we're also continually adapting the ways we're able to provide support and education. We want anyone affected by dementia to know that they're not alone. Please connect with us through:

First Link® Dementia Helpline: The Helpline continues to operate into the evening Monday through Friday

(9 a.m. until 8 p.m.), with support available in Cantonese, Mandarin and Punjabi from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Minds in Motion® online: We are now offering the fitness and social program online. Visit alzbc.org/mim for details.

Tele-support groups: We are continuing to roll out groups across B.C. If you are interested in participating, please call the First Link® Dementia Helpline for more information.

Webinars: Find recordings of recent weekly webinars on topics such as "Deciphering research headlines" and "Personal planning in pandemic times" at alzbc.org/webinars.

Read and learn more

To learn more about how to support people affected by dementia in your community through the online *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*, visit walkforalzheimers.ca

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Finding hope and welcoming change this spring

It is now more than one year since the world changed dramatically following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been an extremely difficult year for many, with people affected by dementia often facing increased isolation and a loss of supports they rely on. The ongoing roll out of COVID-19 vaccines has brought with it a beacon of hope for us all, including families affected by restrictions to visiting care homes.

For caregivers who are feeling the weight of increased isolation, we have expanded our remote programming, including new online support groups and Minds in Motion® sessions. As we look to brighter days ahead, we will continue to share stories and raise funds at our *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*. The online fundraiser will see people in communities across the province walk individually or with their bubbles throughout the month of May. Our flagship fundraiser remains an important opportunity to raise critical funds — and awareness — to support people affected by dementia.

In this issue, we're pleased to share an update on our online Minds in Motion® program from one of the caregivers participating in the new online sessions, as well as answers to some of the most commonly-asked questions about COVID-19 vaccinations that we've been receiving on the First Link® Dementia Helpline. Also in this issue, we share some words from a caregiver who spoke at our virtual *Breakfast to Remember* last month, and of course, everything you need to know about participating in the *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*. We hope you'll join us!



Barbara Lindsay

Barbara Lindsay, LLB
Interim Chief Executive Officer
Alzheimer Society of B.C.



First Link®
DEMENTIA HELPLINE

Questions about dementia or memory loss?

English: 1-800-936-6033
Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003

English: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Cantonese or Mandarin and Punjabi: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.





JOIN US FOR THE IG WEALTH MANAGEMENT WALK FOR ALZHEIMER'S

Walk or move your own way this May to honour and remember people in your life who have been affected by dementia. Then join us on Sunday, May 30, for a celebration online.

Funds raised will support local services and education for people affected by dementia. You can double your impact today - all donations made between now and April 11 will be matched up to \$35,000!

To register and fundraise today visit [walkforalzheimers.ca](https://www.walkforalzheimers.ca).

COVID-19 vaccines: Your questions answered

It has now been over a year since the coronavirus profoundly changed our lives. The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt deeply by people living with dementia and caregivers. We've heard people affected by dementia describe the COVID-19 vaccine as a light at the end of the tunnel.

Vaccination is the most effective way to be protected against COVID-19. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. encourages people living with dementia and caregivers to receive the vaccine as soon as it is available to them.

Here are the answers to questions we have received about the vaccines. However, if you have questions or concerns about the vaccine and your personal situation, we recommend connecting with your doctor or other health-care provider.

Are the approved COVID-19 vaccines safe for people living with dementia to receive?

People living with dementia were not included in the clinical trials studying any of the approved vaccines. However, the trials did indicate that these vaccines are safe and very effective in older adults. Additionally, to date, no dementia-specific adverse effects have been reported to Health Canada, which we would expect to have seen by now as countries are focusing on vaccinating older adults. As such, the vaccines are strongly recommended by Health Canada for people living with dementia. For more information about the vaccines currently approved in Canada, please visit alzbc.org/vaccines.

What are the risks of receiving a vaccine?

Current data suggests that the approved vaccines have only mild side effects. People occasionally report

fatigue, headache or pain at injection site (particularly after the second dose), but most experience no side effects at all.

As the vaccine has begun to be distributed globally, there have been some reports of allergic reactions. However, all of these people were appropriately treated and suffered no long-term effects. It is not unusual for some people to have allergic reactions to vaccines, but this remains very unlikely.



Will I need to give consent for a person living with dementia to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?

Consent must be obtained before anybody can be vaccinated and this is still true for people living with dementia. Health-care practitioners will seek consent before vaccinating someone living with dementia. If the person is deemed to be unable to give consent, a supportive decision maker will be contacted. In this case, health-care providers administering the vaccine should still be honest and respectful when

COVID-19 vaccines, continued

vaccinating someone living with dementia and explain what is happening, as well as the risks and benefits. This process will likely differ depending on the care setting. Many families of people living with dementia in long-term care may be contacted to obtain consent in the days before vaccinations begin, while for individuals living in the community, consent is usually obtained at the vaccination site. To learn more about informed consent for the COVID-19 vaccine, you can visit the Public Guardian and Trustee's website at alzbc.org/pgt.

How will I know when I am eligible for the vaccine?

British Columbia's COVID-19 Immunization Plan is made up of four phases, which are primarily organized by age. B.C.'s Immunization Plan depends on many factors and information is subject to change. Visit the official website for the most up-to-date information on vaccine distribution and timelines at alzbc.org/immunization.



A caregiver's perspective

Naomi Mison, a member of our Leadership Group of Care Partners, recently shared her thoughts with us on this topic.



Naomi Mison

What does the COVID-19 vaccine mean to you?

The fact that my mother was able to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine in her long-term care facility provides me with a small sense of relief knowing that she has an added layer of protection against the virus.

What are you looking forward to once the threat of the virus has passed?

In a post-COVID world, I am most looking forward to being able to travel freely, embracing my family and friends without hesitation, and hopefully, systemic changes to long-term care.

Keeping Minds in Motion[®], online!

Terry and Bob Waines live in Victoria, where they attend Minds in Motion[®], the Society's social and fitness program for people living with dementia and a caregiver. They were among the first group of people to attend Minds in Motion[®] in its new online format. Terry, who is a caregiver to Bob, shares her experience with the program, which is now open to new participants.

What was it like when you first attended Minds in Motion[®] in person?

We first went in 2018 when Bob was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment. It was important to be with people who understand and accept you. If someone's a little slow, they understand. It was also fun. There was quite a range of people there and that was good for us.

What are some of the benefits of the sessions?

The person who leads the exercise is excellent. The seated exercises, as well as the social aspect, are really good. We never talk about dementia. It's a breath of fresh air.

How have the online Minds in Motion[®] sessions been for you?

We're really glad to get back there because we really enjoy socializing. Bob does too. Sometimes it's a bit tough for him. But I don't know how important it is for everyone to do it exactly the same way. It feels good to move your body no matter what you do.

We laugh a lot. Laughter is good. It's quite a bit harder when there are five other couples on a screen. It can take longer to get to know one another, but we're starting to make connections with the people who are travelling along the dementia journey with us.



Terry and Bob Waines

I think it can be a lonely journey if you're isolating yourself. You really struggle in this and unless you feel like you're struggling along with someone else, it can be quite lonely.

What would you say to someone considering joining a group?

The social aspect and being with people who understand is important. It's hard to tell exactly what the other people in the group are dealing with, but we're all there with the same understanding of dementia. There's also an accountability that's so important. We're with other people and we have a good laugh. It keeps you thinking of other things.

What brings you joy?

My little puppy dog Demi! She keeps us laughing and moving. The other thing that keeps both of us grounded is that we've always lived by the ocean. It's so important. I love it.



Minds *in* Motion® online

What participants are saying

This fall, the Alzheimer Society of B.C. began a pilot project to offer an online version of Minds in Motion®, a social and fitness program for people living with early-stage dementia and a care partner. Participants, like Terry who is interviewed on page 6, shared what it was like joining the popular program in an online format. Here's what they had to say:

What do you like most about Minds in Motion® online?

- “The feeling of belonging and realizing that I am not unique in my current situation.”
- “I love the social and exercise components. I have really missed the program and this works out wonderfully. It definitely fills the void.”

- “It’s a great way to assist in keeping Mom active and engaged during the outbreak.”
- “Considering the COVID situation, it’s very helpful.”

Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your experience?

- “I appreciate the effort to keep Minds in Motion® in our lives during these isolating times.”
- “We really enjoyed it.”
- “The leaders were very personable, made everyone feel comfortable in this new age of being online.”

Would you like to spring into setting healthy brain goals with Minds in Motion®?

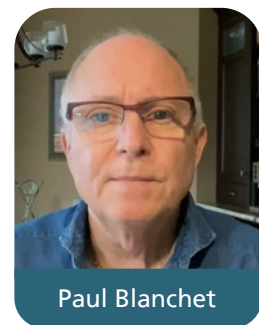
New sessions are beginning regularly. Learn more at alzbc.org/mim

Thank you for making Breakfast to Remember a success!

On March 4, people from around the province joined us for a *Breakfast to Remember* fundraiser like none other, featuring keynote speaker Col. Chris Hadfield, to help raise funds to provide support for people affected by dementia. Thank you to all our volunteers, sponsors, donors and guests – including Paul Blanchet, a Kamloops-based caregiver to his wife Linda, who lives with young onset Alzheimer’s disease.

“When she was diagnosed it was a shock,” said Paul. “Linda and I decided quickly that we wanted to give back and do all we could while we were on this journey. We started speaking out about it.”

Paul and Linda dedicated themselves to helping other families affected by the disease, work Paul detailed in his powerful talk. Among others who spoke alongside Paul was Lynn Jackson, a member of the Society’s Leadership Group of People Living with Dementia and emcee Dawna Friesen, anchor of *Global National*, who also shared her personal connection to dementia.

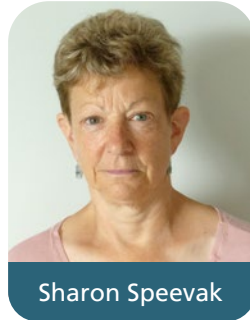


Paul Blanchet

We are grateful for all speakers and supporters who furthered the conversation about dementia and helped us in our work to change the future of the disease.

Celebrate volunteers with us this spring!

This National Volunteer Week, from April 18 – 24, help us recognize volunteers by following @AlzheimerBC on social media as we showcase their accomplishments. We are excited to introduce one of our outstanding volunteers, Sharon Speevak, who is the honouree at this year's IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's in Nanaimo.



Sharon Speevak

Sharon Speevak is the youngest of five children born in Montreal to Robert Speevak. Robert was a second-generation Ukrainian immigrant and trained as a navigator during the Second World War. As a child, he took her to a park and they laid on a blanket while he taught her the constellations. His knowledge and impeccable values shaped the person Sharon became and she cherished the time she spent learning from him under the stars.

When Robert was diagnosed with dementia, Sharon and her siblings began learning all they could about the disease. "Our initial reaction was to go out and

learn more," Sharon says. "We went into problem solving mode, getting books and pamphlets on Alzheimer's disease like we were going to fix it."

Sharon, who had moved to Nanaimo, connected with the Alzheimer Society of B.C. for support and education. Her sister, who lived in Ottawa, became Robert's primary caregiver. Sharon flew out twice a year to help provide support, but the experience of living far away from her father and her sister was still extremely difficult and guilt inducing.

Years after her father passed away, Sharon chose to turn her experience into an opportunity to help educate and support others who were embarking on their own dementia journeys. Sharon connected with the Nanaimo branch of the Alzheimer Society of B.C. and was trained to provide dementia education sessions, as well as facilitate caregiver support groups.

"You can't go back and change the past, but you can change the future in providing support for others," she says. "Looking back and guiltling yourself isn't helping anyone – learn about the disease, get out there and make life better for caregivers and people experiencing dementia."

About Connections

Connections is a quarterly print and digital publication produced by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Articles cannot be reproduced without written permission.

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- **Email** newsletter@alzheimerbc.org
- **Call** 604-681-6530; 1-800-667-3742 (toll-free)
- **Mail** to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.
300-828 West 8th Avenue,
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

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Are you a person living with dementia?

We also publish *Insight*, a publication for people living with dementia or cognitive impairment. For more information, visit alzbc.org/insight-newsletter.



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