

The impact of a global pandemic on persons living with dementia and their care partners: An analysis of 417 survey responses

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Abstract

Background: In the midst of the current global health crisis, it is critical to capture the lived experiences of older adults and their care partners to inform priorities for health care services. The COVID-19 pandemic that surfaced in 2019 impacted the physical and emotional health of older adults living with dementia and their care partners. The goal of this project was to explore the experiences and needs of people living with dementia and their care partners during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of an ongoing evaluation of dementia support services provided by the Alzheimer Society of British Columbia in British Columbia, Canada.

Method: People living with dementia and care partners were recruited from the communication channels of the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Participants completed an online survey that was developed around the priorities identified in the context of the COVID-19 and Dementia Task Force convened by the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

Result: A total of 417 completed surveys were analysed (395 care partners, 22 people living with dementia). Overall, respondents indicated that they were able to access information that was helpful for maintaining their own health and managing a period of social distancing (74% care partners, 86% people living with dementia). Care partners reported a number of serious concerns, including the inability to visit the person that they care for in long-term or palliative care. Participants also reported that the pandemic increased their levels of stress overall (58%, 62%) and that they felt more isolated than they did before the pandemic (74%, 81%). The use of technology was reported as a way to connect socially with their loved ones, with the majority of participants connecting with others at least twice per week (79%, 75%). Many indicated an interest in learning more about using technology to connect with others (32%, 50%).

Conclusion: Evaluating the complex effects of a global pandemic through the experiences of people living with dementia and their care partners is vital to inform health-care priorities to restore their quality of life and health and better prepare for the future.