Designing public spaces for people with dementia
A person with dementia can find it difficult to access and use public services.

A combination of dementia and age-related sensory impairments makes it difficult to integrate visual and auditory information. The environment can seem disorientating and even disturbing.

There are some simple inexpensive changes you can make that can help people with dementia to use your services.
Designing public spaces for people with dementia

Making it easier to use your services

People with dementia find it difficult to make sense of the world around them. Processing visual and auditory information is much more difficult. They forget very quickly where they are going and what they are looking for. An environment that is clearly defined and has regular triggers to key facilities can support people to be as safe and independent as possible.

Make it easier to locate key facilities

The combination of dementia and sight problems in old age can make it difficult to understand the world around you.

- Use open plan layouts
- Use glazing between service areas instead of blank walls
- Use clear and consistent graphic signage
- Use distinct and different colours for doors to rooms with different functions.

Make it easy to find the toilet

Sometimes people seem to be incontinent when they just forget to go to the toilet or cannot find it. Paint the door a strong contrast colour compared to other rooms. Use signage that combines text with pictures; there are suppliers of custom-made signage. Replace white toilet seats with darker ones for tonal contrast. Ensure support rails are of strong tonal contrast to the walls and that the lighting is good. Leave the light on or use PIR sensors that turn lights on automatically when someone enters the toilet.
Use continuous tone and colour
Avoid strong tonal contrast on flooring in different rooms. A dramatic change between rooms or between different areas can be perceived as a step or a hole and can cause falls.

Use strong tonal contrast to define the space
Using a strong tonal contrast on skirtings, wall rails and door frames can clarify the space and the location of key facilities. (Light Reflectance Value 30)

Stairs, steps and rails
Use strong tonal contrast on nosings, stepped skirtings and handrails.

Signage
Provide signage that combines pictures and text. Place it at eye level, at regular intervals and at decision points.

Lighting
Aim to increase light to twice the normal level. Keep curtains clear of windows and cut planting near windows. Increase the number of light sources. Change single pendants for branch pendants with more lamps. Check lampshades are safe if you are increasing the wattage of lamps.

Staff rooms or private facilities
To help avoid unwanted access, disguise doors by using similar tones on the door frame and surrounding walls. Continue a wall-fixed hand rail across the door if appropriate.
Things to avoid

Shiny reflective surfaces, especially on floors, can appear wet or create glare. This can be confusing and cause people to hesitate or trip.

Patterned surfaces can be perceived by people with dementia as three-dimensional or even moving. A patterned carpet can be disturbing and off-putting.

Strong tonal contrast on the floor between one room and another can look like a step or a hole. Some people stop abruptly, or refuse to cross the threshold.

Keep distracting noise levels down. Shut windows if there is noise from outside. Soft furnishings, curtains, wall coverings and flooring can absorb sound. Half height partitioning in large, crowded waiting areas can absorb chatter.

Remove mats or other trip hazards. Ensure there are rails next to steps and stairs.
More information

**Alzheimer’s Society**
http://www.alzheimers.org.uk
A range of factsheets with tips on caring for people with dementia

**Dementia Services Development Centre**
http://dementia.stir.ac.uk/virtualhome
An online interactive tool that illustrates good practice in design for people with dementia. Although the focus is on care homes the principles are transferrable to other settings.

**The Dementia Centre**
www.dementiacentre.com
Free downloads of signage
PSS Head Office
18 Seel Street, Liverpool L1 4BE
**Phone: 0151 702 5555**
**Email: information@pss.org.uk**
Guidance

Dementia Design Audit Tool (2nd Ed.)
ISBN 978 1 85769 215 0 Dementia Services Development Centre

Light and lighting design for people with dementia
ISBN 981 1 85769 250 1 Dementia Services Development Centre

Dulux Trade Colour & Contrast Guide (free CD)
Guidance for specifiers on how to achieve sufficient tonal contrast
Phone: 08707697668
Email: colour_contrast@ici.com
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