

# Early Dementia Diagnosis Paves Way for Support

Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative

When Douglas Wagner was first referred to Chelsie Toews, Geriatric Assessment Nurse in Lacombe, because of memory loss, she did a comprehensive assessment. One month later, a doctor confirmed her assessment with a diagnosis of dementia.

His wife, Anelize, struggled with having to take charge of this new reality.

“The biggest thing for me was that I didn’t know where to go or what to do,” she says. “I was thrown into something I had no idea about.”

Anelize found support through the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network. “It was good to not feel alone. I found people who understood and would steer me in right direction,” Anelize says.

## **Clinic’s approach ensures timely diagnosis**

Lacombe is one of five communities in the Wolf Creek Primary Care Network (PCN). The Lacombe clinic approach to screening for frailty, which includes testing for cognitive competency and other criteria, contributes to informing a diagnosis of dementia. This ‘right in the clinic’ approach supports timely diagnosis, and the ability to plan proactively with the individual and their families.

As a result of a timely diagnosis, Anelize and Douglas were able to be linked with services in Lacombe, largely as a result of Lacombe’s participation in the Primary Health Care Integrated Geriatric Services Initiative (PHC IGSI) which supports efforts to of local primary health care teams to provide ongoing care and support for people living in the community with cognitive impairment or dementia.

“PHC IGSI has been a catalyst for change and key to building awareness about dementia in Lacombe,” Chelsie says. PHC IGSI has supported five education sessions for the local community and service providers. Along with the Wolf Creek PCN, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and the Alzheimer’s Society are key partners in spearheading and implementing programs and services to help Lacombe become a more Dementia Friendly Community.

## **Anelize and Douglas find support in Lacombe**



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The first stop for Anelize and Douglas was the Alzheimer's Society, where they found information about the dementia diagnosis, living with dementia, and the supports available locally.

Douglas participated in Opening Minds Through Art, a program offered by FCSS

"He loved going to the art program," Anelize says. "And I had a little slice of my old husband back." She adds "We discovered that he has art in him."

The community offers other programs, including Minds in Motion – a coordinated effort between the Alzheimer's Society and the PCN. These programs offer mental, creative and physical activities to keep people living with early stage dementia engaged.

"Lacombe FCSS has been able to offer enhanced services due to the Wolf Creek PCN's presence," says Carlene Wagner, Seniors Services coordinator, Lacombe FCC. "Together we will continue to pursue a community where older adults have access to information and resources that allow them to live successful lives in spite of age or economic challenges they may be experiencing."

The need for local programs is reinforced by statistics. In 2016, people 65 years and older comprised 15.7 percent of the community's residents, which is above the provincial average of about 12 percent.

Through the support of community partners and innovative programs, Lacombe is reducing the stigma of dementia, and better supporting people living with dementia and their caregivers. And that's good for Anelize and Douglas.

### **Community partners**

- Alzheimer's Society of Alberta and the Northwest Territories
- Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and Meals on Wheels
- Alberta Health Services
- Wolf Creek Primary Care Network