

Dementia in the Chinese Community: A Resource for Health and Social Care Providers

What is this resource?

- There are cultural differences in dementia care needs. With dementia rates among diverse ethno-racial populations growing in Canada, health and social care providers need resources to better support all people living with dementia.¹
- This resource provides a summary of research focusing on the unique experiences of people living with dementia in the Chinese community, tailored for health and social care providers.

How can I use this resource?

- Use this resource to inform your care practices with people impacted by dementia in the Chinese community.
- Share this resource with other health and social care providers.



Summary of Key Points

Perceptions of Aging

- Older Chinese adults prioritize happiness as the most important aspect of healthy aging.²
- Healthy aging involves experiencing positive emotions, pursuing an active lifestyle, and maintaining sound health, strong social networks, and financial independence.²

Perceptions of Dementia

- Perceptions of dementia vary in the Chinese community.³
- Some believe memory problems associated with dementia are part of the normal aging process and may refrain from seeking medical assistance.⁴
- For others, dementia is interpreted through a supernatural lens or is considered a mental illness. Mental illness is often highly stigmatized in the Chinese community.⁴

Influences of Tradition, Culture, and Family Duties on Caregiving

- Confucianism advocates for filial piety, emphasizing that children should obey, respect, and devote themselves to their aging parents by providing care.³
- There is also a cultural obligation to provide care for older adults. This duty traditionally falls to the eldest son but is increasingly being assumed by female children in North America.^{3,4,5}

Attitudes Towards Long-term Care

- In the Chinese community, the inability to provide care for a family member at home can lead to feelings of shame for both the individual caregiver and the entire family.⁴
- Many Chinese Canadians feel that long-term care homes are financially inaccessible.⁶
- There are concerns regarding the potential for mistreatment and cultural insensitivity in long-term care.⁶

Introduction and Key Characteristics

- As of 2021, 1.7 million individuals in Canada identified as Chinese, comprising 4.7% of the total population.⁷
- The majority of Chinese Canadian individuals emigrate from the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, although other Chinese immigrants hail from around the world.⁸
- This population speaks a variety of languages, including Cantonese, Mandarin, Fukien, and English.⁸
- Results of the Landmark Study Volume 2 indicate that by 2050, one out of every four people who develop dementia in Canada will be of Asian origin (including South Asian and East Asian). The Landmark Study outlines several reasons that people from racialized communities may receive poorer quality of dementia care, highlighting the importance of education among health-care professionals.¹

Perceptions of Aging

- Chinese older adults believe healthy aging involves experiencing positive emotions, pursuing an active lifestyle, and maintaining sound health, strong social networks, and financial independence.²
- Older Chinese adults prioritize happiness as the most important aspect of successful aging, emphasizing positive emotions as a crucial factor in building cognitive, psychological, and social resources.²

Perceptions of Dementia

- Perceptions of dementia in the Chinese community are diverse.³
- Some believe memory problems associated with dementia are a normal consequence of advanced age. As a result, Chinese individuals may delay seeking help until the condition has progressed.⁴
- Other members of the Chinese community may interpret dementia through a supernatural lens and will consult traditional Chinese healers or trusted experts in the community.⁴
- For others, dementia is considered a mental illness. Mental illness is often highly stigmatized in the Chinese community.⁴
- Stigma and guilt related to dementia can lead to the concealment of the condition from others, resulting in delays or refusal to seek care or assistance.³

Influences of Tradition, Culture, and Family Duties on Caregiving

- Chinese Confucianism advocates for filial piety, emphasizing that children should obey, respect, and devote themselves to their aging parents by providing care.³
- Perceptions of filial piety differ across Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China.⁵
- This cultural obligation to provide care typically falls to the eldest son and his wife.^{3,4} If the family does not have a son, or if the eldest son is unable to fulfill this role, the duty falls to the remaining children.⁴ However, the responsibility to provide parental support is increasingly being assumed by female children in North America.⁵

Attitudes Towards Long-term Care

- Chinese family caregivers are often concerned about how other members of the community perceive their ability to provide care. The inability to provide care for a family member can lead to feelings of shame for both the individual caregiver and the entire family.⁴
- In the Canadian context, many Chinese Canadians believe long-term care homes are inaccessible because of financial limitations.⁶
- Members of the Chinese Canadian community have concerns about the potential for mistreatment and cultural insensitivity in long-term care homes.⁶
- Chinese Canadian older adults may feel more dignified receiving support from a family caregiver in the comfort of their own home rather than in a long-term care home.⁹

Where can I find more information?

Visit forwardwithdementia.ca to find resources about dementia for the Chinese community (available in English, French, Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese). These resources can be helpful for people living with dementia and family and friend caregivers that you serve in your practice.

References

1. Alzheimer Society of Canada. (2024). The Many Faces of Dementia in Canada (The Landmark Study: Volume 2).
<https://alzheimer.ca/en/the-many-faces-of-dementia-in-canada-landmark-study-volume-2>
2. Zhang, W., Liu, S., & Wu, B. (2018). Defining Successful Aging: Perceptions From Elderly Chinese in Hawai'i. *Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine*, 4.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2333721418778182>
3. Chan, S. M. (2012). Exploring dementia care in Chinese immigrant families in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada [University of British Columbia].
<https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0105183>
4. Elliott, K. S., Di Minno, M., Lam, D., & Mei Tu, A. (2014). Working with Chinese Families in the Context of Dementia. In *Ethnicity and Dementias*. Taylor & Francis.
5. Zhang, W. (2022). Perceptions and expectations of filial piety among older Chinese immigrants in Canada. *Ageing and Society*, 42(3), 497–520.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X20000902>
6. Leung, D. Y. L., Lee, C. T., Chu, S. Y. J., Ng, F., Wen, P., Fan, J., Cheung, D. S. K., Seto Nielsen, L., Guruge, S., & Wong, J. (2023). Chinese family care partners of older adults in Canada have grit: A qualitative study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 00, 1-12.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.15878>
7. Statistics Canada. (2023, January 23). Chinese New Year and quality of life among Chinese in Canada.
<https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/2816-chinese-new-year-and-quality-life-among-chinese-canada>
8. Chan, A. B. (2023). Chinese Canadians. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Retrieved December 9, 2023, from
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-canadians>
9. Lou, C., Lou, K., & Ridley, J. (2021). Exploring the meaning of dignity at end of life for Chinese Canadians caregivers: A qualitative cross-cultural study. *Palliative Medicine*, 35(1), 142–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269216320956809>