

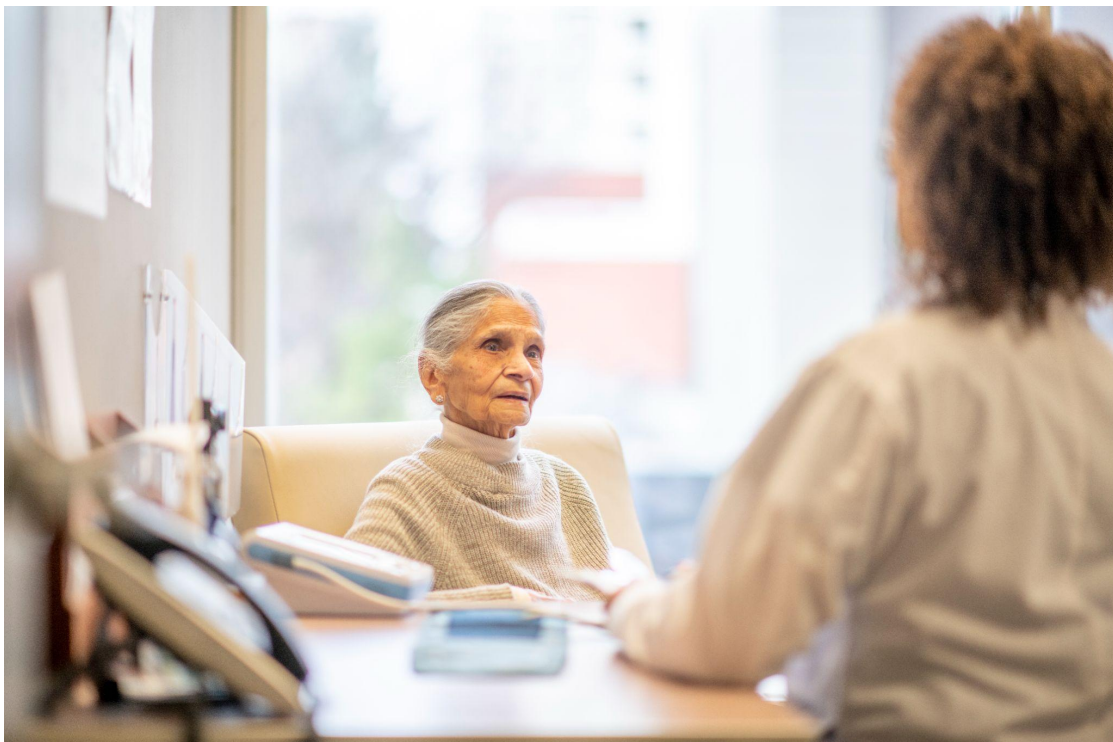
# Dementia in the South Asian Community: A Resource for Health and Social Care Providers

## 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.<sup>1</sup>
- This resource provides a summary of research focusing on the unique experiences of people living with dementia in the South Asian community, tailored for health and social care providers.

## How can I use this resource?

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



## Summary of Key Points

### Perceptions of Aging

- South Asian Canadians view “aging well” holistically.<sup>2</sup>
- Older South Asian adults often rely on their relatives for both healthcare and emotional needs as they age.<sup>2</sup>

### Perceptions of Dementia

- Perceptions of dementia vary – some members of the community believe dementia is a normal part of aging while others may identify the signs and symptoms of dementia and recognize the importance of seeking treatment.<sup>3,4</sup>
- For many, dementia is perceived through religious, magical, or supernatural lenses, leading to stigma and concealment of the condition.<sup>5,6</sup>

### Influences of Tradition, Culture, and Family Duties on Caregiving

- Many South Asian cultures emphasize the importance of caregiving.<sup>7</sup>
- It is customary for parents to live with their adult children, who assume the responsibility of providing care for them, and this duty typically falls to daughters and daughters-in-law.<sup>3</sup>

### Attitudes Towards Long-term Care

- Institutionalization is stigmatized and often viewed as a last resort.<sup>7</sup>
- South Asian Canadians worry their older relatives will require long-term care later in life and wish for more long-term care homes specifically for South Asian older adults.<sup>7</sup>

## Introduction and Key Characteristics

- In 2021, 2.6 million individuals in Canada, comprising 7.1% of the population, self-identified as South Asian.<sup>8</sup>
- South Asians form the largest visible minority population in Canada.<sup>8</sup>
- In the Canadian context, the term “South Asian” encompasses those who speak several languages with heritage from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.<sup>2,8</sup>
- 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.<sup>1</sup>

## Perceptions of Aging

- South Asian older adults view “aging well” holistically which means: (1) nurturing the body, (2) tending to the mind and heart, and (3) integrating the mind and body.<sup>2</sup>
- Family plays a significant role, as older South Asian adults often rely on their relatives for both healthcare and emotional needs as they age.<sup>2</sup>
- Immigrating to Canada introduces factors that impact the aging process, such as decreased opportunities to socialize.<sup>2</sup>

## Perceptions of Dementia

- Perceptions of dementia vary within South Asian communities.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Some believe dementia to be part of normal aging. It is sometimes difficult for members of this community to recognize dementia as a condition, which can lead to a delayed diagnosis and reluctance to seek professional support.<sup>3</sup>
- Others identify changes such as unusual forgetting and confusion as signs of dementia. These individuals recognize the importance of seeking medical advice, taking medication, and seeking support from friends and family. Younger members of the South Asian community cite the importance of social connection to help manage dementia.<sup>4</sup>
- Dementia is often perceived through religious, magical, or supernatural lenses, leading to stigmatization and concealment of the condition.<sup>5,6</sup>
- Many view declining cognitive function as a divine punishment from their God and resist medical interference.<sup>3,5,9</sup>
- However, religious communities can also support people living with dementia and have the potential to reduce stigma.<sup>5</sup>

## Influences of Tradition, Culture, and Family Duties on Caregiving

- South Asian Canadians value family, cultural social connections, and the preservation of ethnic traditions.<sup>3</sup>
- Multi-generational South Asian households are common. It is customary for parents to reside with their adult children, who assume the responsibility of providing care for them.<sup>3</sup>
- The role of providing care generally falls upon younger members of the household, particularly unmarried daughters and daughters-in-law.<sup>10</sup>
- Many South Asian cultures highlight caregiving as a fundamental aspect of social responsibility, rooted in religious beliefs emphasizing duty, respect, and honour.<sup>7</sup>

## Attitudes Towards Long-term Care

- For many South Asian communities, a move to a long-term care home is associated with uncertainty and stigma.<sup>7</sup>
- During the decision-making process, South Asians consider family dynamics, caregiver burden, income, and the availability of long-term care homes.<sup>7</sup>
- For South Asian Canadians, the probability of moving a relative into a long-term care home is significantly lower than for Caucasians, largely due to the cultural duty to care for older adults.<sup>7</sup>
- Oftentimes, South Asian caregivers view a move to a long-term care home as a last resort.<sup>7</sup>
- South Asians find that when a healthcare professional suggests moving their relative into long-term care, it softens the blow and helps to absolve the guilt and stigma associated with the decision.<sup>7</sup>
- Despite this, South Asian Canadian care providers wish for more culturally-specific, long-term care homes for South Asian older adults.<sup>7</sup>

## Where can I find more information?

Visit [forwardwithdementia.ca](https://forwardwithdementia.ca) to find more resources about dementia for the South Asian community (available in English, French, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu). These resources can be helpful for people living with dementia and family and friend caregivers that you serve in your practice.

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