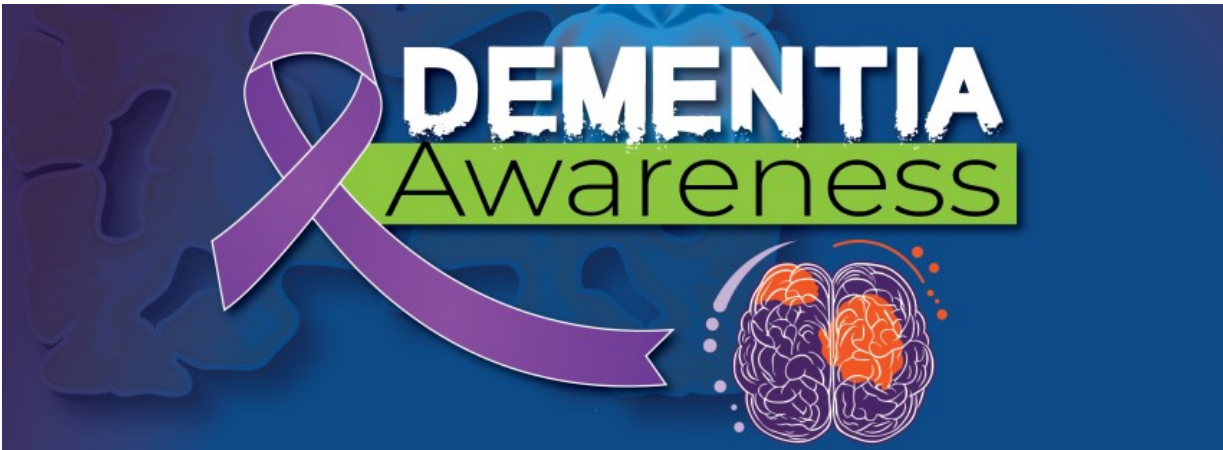

Early Detection Takes Center Stage on World Alzheimer's Day

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DEMENTIA
Awareness

○ NOTICE MEMORY CHANGES ○

- Changes in memory should not automatically be dismissed as a normal part of ageing.
- Early assessment can help individuals and families better understand what is happening and determine appropriate next steps.

The Social Development Department is encouraging residents to recognise the signs of dementia and seek medical advice early as the Territory observes World Alzheimer's Day under the theme, "The Earlier You Know, The More You Can Do."

National Health Insurance data indicates that 188 persons in the Territory have been diagnosed with dementia. However, dementia is often underdiagnosed, suggesting that other individuals and families may be experiencing symptoms without knowing the cause or receiving the support they need.

Minister for Health and Social Development Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley said memory loss and confusion should not automatically be dismissed as a normal part of ageing. "Dementia is not simply a normal part of ageing. We have to become comfortable talking about the changes we see and encouraging our loved ones to seek help rather than allowing fear or stigma to delay care," Honourable Wheatley said.

Residents are encouraged to pay attention to persistent changes in memory, thinking, communication, mood, behaviour and the ability to carry out everyday activities and to seek medical advice when there are concerns. Early detection can help healthcare professionals assess symptoms, identify or manage other health conditions and connect individuals and families with appropriate information and support.

The Ministry continues to strengthen prevention and early intervention through primary healthcare and chronic disease screening. Residents are also encouraged to protect their brain health by managing conditions such as hypertension and diabetes, remaining physically active, eating healthy and staying socially connected.

Programme Director of Aged Care Services within the Social Development Department, Mrs. Trisha Smith-Gomes, said World Alzheimer's Day also provides an important opportunity to recognise the individuals living with dementia, as well as the families, caregivers and loved ones who support them.

"As we recognise World Alzheimer's Day, we are reminded of the importance of compassion, understanding, dignity and respect for our older persons. We must

continue to raise awareness, challenge the stigma surrounding dementia and ensure that individuals and families have access to the support they need,” Mrs. Smith-Gomes said.

The Social Development Department provides support to older persons and their families through its Home Care Services and also maintains a referral database of community organisations that provide home care and other supportive services.

“Together, we can help create a caring and inclusive BVI where our older persons feel valued, respected and supported. Early recognition and access to appropriate care can make an important difference, not only for those living with dementia but also for the families and caregivers walking alongside them,” Mrs. Gomes said.

Honourable Wheatley is also encouraging families to speak openly about dementia and check in on older relatives and neighbours. “Do not wait until there is a crisis. Do not dismiss the signs. Do not allow stigma or fear to delay care. The earlier you know, the more you can do,” he said.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development remains committed to protecting and promoting the health and social well-being of the people of the Virgin Islands through effective policies, sustainable programmes, and strategic partnerships that support a safe, healthy, and resilient society.

For Additional Information Contact:

Natasha Lettsome-Humphrey
Public Health Communications Specialist
Ministry of Health and Social Development
Telephone: 468-2286

Email: nlettsome@gov.vg