



Housing LIN

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Viewpoint 117

In conversation with Ali and Vanessa – housing and dementia matters

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Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Ali Rogan**, Hornsey Consulting Ltd, and **Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes**, Housing 21



Introduction

With almost one million people in the UK living with dementia, housing is becoming an increasingly important part of the conversation around care, independence and quality of life.

For this year's Dementia Awareness Week, Alma Sheren at Unlocked sat down with Ali Rogan and Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes to find out why dementia-friendly housing can no longer be treated as a specialist issue, and what the sector must do now to become future-ready.

With nearly one million people currently living with dementia across the UK and numbers continuing to grow, the conversation around dementia care is becoming increasingly urgent.

Although dementia is often discussed through the lens of health and social care, one of the most important aspects of the provision given to people living with dementia is frequently overlooked. The role housing plays in supporting people with dementia can be crucial to their experiences, often impacting the level of progression of their condition, and their quality of life, as well as how included they feel in society.

To find out more about the importance of housing's role in supporting and catering to people with dementia, Unlocked sat down with Ali Rogan, a strategic communications and external affairs expert, specialising in health, housing, care and digital tech who has long championed the role of housing in improving quality of life for people affected by the syndrome.

Together, they explain why dementia-friendly housing should no longer be viewed as a specialist concern, where the sector is making progress, and the realistic action housing can take today to become more inclusive.

In conversation

Could you tell us a little about your roles and why dementia-friendly housing and technology are such important areas for you?

Rogan:

The Dementia and Housing Working Group aims to promote and influence the contribution of the housing sector in improving the health, wellbeing and quality of life for people living with dementia. The group brings together volunteers and stakeholders from across housing, health, social care and technology, with a real focus on action and practical outcomes.

I've been involved since the group formed in 2009 and have led projects around dementia-friendly design and technology guidance, including work supporting recommendations from the Inquiry report into housing and dementia from the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Care for Older People¹, written by the Housing LIN.

(1) <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingandDementia/appg-inquiry-housing-and-dementia/>

I'm also chair of the Dementia Friendly Technology Group, which developed the Dementia Friendly Technology Charter² (the first initiative of its kind), with the aim of ensuring every person living with dementia has the opportunity to benefit from technology appropriate to their needs.

Professionally and personally, I've seen how deeply dementia affects not only the individual, but also families, friendships, independence and identity. That's why this work matters so much to me.

Pritchard-Wilkes:

I've been involved in the DHWG for over a decade. I've held the position of chair for the national group for several years, actively driving its initiatives in advocacy and research.

I initially joined Housing 21 as external affairs manager in 2014 and later transitioned to head of strategic influence, where I took on the strategic lead for the organisation's work around dementia. Throughout this time, the DHWG has continually updated and championed the Dementia-Friendly Housing Guide³ and launched the Dementia Information Hub⁴ to support housing professionals nationwide.

Over recent years, there has been growing recognition across the housing sector of the importance of dementia-friendly design and services, but there is still much more to do. The number of people living with dementia is forecast to increase significantly, and only a very small proportion of those affected live in specialist housing. That means most people are living in mainstream housing that may not meet their needs, so it's vital that housing organisations continue improving awareness, leadership and practice across the board.

Dementia is often discussed through a health and care lens, but less frequently through a housing lens. Why is housing such a critical part of the conversation?

Rogan:

I'm always amazed we still get asked this question because everyone lives somewhere, whether that's their own home, rented accommodation, supported housing, a care home or a hospital.

Housing shapes how people live every single day. It influences independence, confidence, safety, social connection and wellbeing. If we fail to get housing right, it impacts every other part of someone's life.

Recent research showed that some baristas receive more training than dementia care staff — that tells you something important about the scale of the challenge.

We also know that around 70 per cent of care home residents are living with dementia, while one in four hospital beds is occupied by someone with dementia. Many people are also staying in hospital far longer than necessary because appropriate housing or support simply isn't available.

(2) https://dementia.ripfa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Dementia_Friendly_Technology_Accessibility_18_06_2014.pdf

(3) https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/DHWG/38970_DHWG-Dementia-Friendly-Housing-Guide_v3.pdf

(4) <https://padlet.com/dementiaandhousingworkinggroup/dementia-information-hub-xjd8kjb88i2deg>

There's a real danger that dementia becomes viewed too narrowly through a clinical lens. We need integrated thinking that recognises housing as a fundamental part of prevention, support and quality of life.

How well do you think the housing sector currently understands the needs of people living with dementia?

Rogan:

It is definitely improving across the sector. From planners and developers to mainstream and specialist housing providers, there's greater awareness that housing has an important role to play.

But awareness and consistent practice are two different things, and there are still significant gaps. Only a small proportion of local authorities currently reference dementia within their housing assistance policies, and millions of older people are living in homes that negatively affect their health and wellbeing.

Training also remains a major issue. There was recent research that showed baristas receive more training than dementia care staff.⁵ That tells you something about the scale of the challenge.

Pritchard-Wilkes:

Awareness has certainly grown in recent years and there are more resources available to organisations now. However, translating awareness into practical change is often slower.

There's still inconsistency in how dementia-friendly design principles are incorporated into housing, and leadership remains critical; organisations need senior leaders and champions who continue pushing this agenda forward.

Where are the biggest gaps within the sector?

Rogan:

Training is still one of the biggest gaps, particularly for housing professionals who may not feel confident understanding dementia or recognising the barriers people experience.

But it also extends to design, development and systems. We still see processes that are overly complicated, inaccessible communication, environments that create confusion or distress, and homes that simply are not designed with ageing and cognitive change in mind.

There also isn't enough support for people navigating housing decisions after a diagnosis. Many families don't know what options exist or where to seek advice.

One of the key messages from the DHWG is that dementia-friendly housing is not just about specialist provision: it's about making mainstream housing and services more inclusive.

(5) <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2026-04-29/baristas-are-better-trained-dementia-staff>

Do you think dementia is still too often treated as a specialist issue, rather than something all housing providers should be planning for?

Rogan:

Yes, I do think that still happens. Dementia is recognised as a disability under the Equality Act, which means organisations have responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments and ensure people can access services appropriately.

That's not only about physical adaptations like handrails or ramps. It also includes communication, signage, quieter environments, accessible information and giving people choices about how they engage with services.

With an ageing population, this cannot sit solely within specialist housing or care services. Every housing provider should be thinking about how their homes, systems and services work for people living with dementia.

What does genuinely dementia-friendly housing look like in practice?

Rogan:

Good dementia-friendly housing starts with design. That includes things like good lighting, clear signage, reducing unnecessary noise, avoiding confusing layouts and creating environments that feel familiar, calm and navigable.

But it's equally about service delivery. Staff need training and confidence. Organisations need processes that are easier to understand and more supportive. Emergency systems need simplifying. Support should be personalised and flexible.

Dementia-friendly design benefits everybody. The principle we often return to is: if it works well for people living with dementia, it usually works better for everyone.

What are the key messages housing providers should be paying attention to now?

Rogan:

The main message I'd say is that housing must become dementia-ready. The recent Older People's Housing Taskforce Report⁶ made it very clear that housing for an ageing population must be both age-friendly and dementia-inclusive from the outset.

That means we need to think differently about how homes are planned, designed, built and managed. Dementia cannot be treated as an afterthought.

We've updated the Dementia-Friendly Housing Guide for 2026 to help organisations translate those principles into practical action, because providers often want to improve but aren't always sure where to begin.

(6) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-older-peoples-housing-taskforce-report>

The APPG recommendations highlighted the importance of dementia champions at executive level. Why is leadership buy-in so important?

Rogan:

Because meaningful change rarely happens without leadership commitment. Having a board-level dementia champion helps demonstrate that this is an organisational priority rather than a side issue. It creates accountability and helps ensure dementia awareness is considered within strategy, services and decision-making.

For organisations that feel overwhelmed, the important thing is simply to start somewhere. Review your communication. Look at your environment. Speak to residents and carers. Assess staff confidence and training needs. Even small changes can have a significant impact on someone's experience.

Ali, as chair of the Dementia Friendly Technology Group, how do you see technology helping people living with dementia maintain independence and quality of life?

Rogan:

I'm passionate about the role technology can play, but the key word is 'appropriate'. Technology is not a solution for everyone, and it should never replace human connection. But it can provide huge benefits when used thoughtfully.

This could mean reminders for medication, tools that support safety and wellbeing, devices that help people stay socially connected, or familiar everyday technology like televisions, phones or voice assistants.

One positive outcome from the pandemic was that many older people became more confident using digital tools — from online shopping to video calls. But housing providers also need to think about the infrastructure behind technology — things like connectivity, maintenance, support and emergency response. Housing is almost always part of the solution.

What misconceptions around technology and dementia still need challenging?

Rogan:

One of the biggest is ageism — the assumption that older people are not interested in technology or incapable of learning how to use it. That simply isn't true. Voice-activated devices have made many forms of technology far more accessible, and millions of older adults are online and using digital tools every day.

At the same time, we should be careful not to become distracted by 'shiny' technology at the expense of what really matters to people. Technology should support independence and quality of life, not create additional barriers or isolation.

How important is it that technology is designed with people living with dementia, rather than simply for them?

Rogan:

It's incredibly important. Historically, technology was often designed by engineers without enough involvement from the people actually using it. Thankfully, user-centred design is now much more widely recognised.

When you involve people living with dementia and their carers in shaping services and products, you create solutions that are more accessible, effective and meaningful. It also recognises people living with dementia as active participants in shaping their own lives, rather than passive recipients of support.

Looking ahead, what changes would you most like to see from the housing sector over the next five years?

Rogan:

Greater awareness remains essential, but beyond that I'd like to see organisations consistently embedding dementia inclusion into everyday decision-making.

That means reviewing policies, communication, planned works, service changes, design decisions and customer experience through the perspective of someone living with dementia.

Whether it's flooring, lighting, signage, noise levels, written communication or technology, housing providers need to continually ask: 'Would this work for someone experiencing cognitive change?' If we start from that perspective, we create better environments for everybody.

Pritchard-Wilkes:

Housing providers should really be designing new-builds and adapting existing properties with the expectation that many residents may develop dementia

I think Ali has hit the nail on the head. We need proactive dementia-friendly design, which is fundamentally good design for older people. Housing providers should really be designing new-builds and adapting existing properties with the expectation that many residents may develop dementia. This includes incorporating features that enhance independence.

We need sector-wide training and integrated support and partnerships. There is a critical need to invest in housing professionals, ensuring they are educated and aware of dementia so they can appropriately support affected residents to live at home longer.

We also need to forge stronger strategic partnerships within the care, health, and prevention sectors. This means treating housing as a fundamental pillar of social care and recognising its contribution rather than just bricks and mortar.

For this year's Dementia Awareness Week, what message would you most like housing professionals and leaders to take away?

Rogan:

Remember the principle that if it's good for people living with dementia, it's good for everyone.

Nearly one million people in the UK are living with dementia, and most live within our communities, not specialist settings. Housing therefore has a huge role to play in helping people live independently, safely and with dignity.

The sector has made progress, but there is still much more to do, and housing providers have the opportunity to make a genuinely life-changing difference.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About the Authors

Ali Rogan is also the founder and director of Hornsey Consulting Ltd and communications lead for the [Dementia and Housing Working Group](#) (DHWG), the only national group focussed specifically on housing and dementia; and chair of the Dementia Friendly Technology Group.

Joining the conversation was **Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes**, chair of the DHWG and head of strategic engagement at Housing 21.



(L) Ali Rogan, (R) Vanessa Pritchard-Wilkes

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 15,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently
- provide access to intelligence on the latest funding, research, policy and practice
- raise the profile of specialist and supported housing with developers, commissioners and operators, and
- attract business to help and support clients plan, design and operate aspirational housing and developments operators, and services for people of all ages.

If you found this Viewpoint of interest, the Housing LIN curates a dedicated webpages on housing and dementia at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingandDementia/>

We are also proud to host the DHWG pages on our platform at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/housing-networks/dementia-and-housing-working-group/>

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