



Memory Cafes:

A PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGY TO SUPPORT DEMENTIA CAREGIVERS



Prepared by the BOLD
Public Health Center of
Excellence on Dementia
Caregiving (PHCOE-DC)



Table of Contents

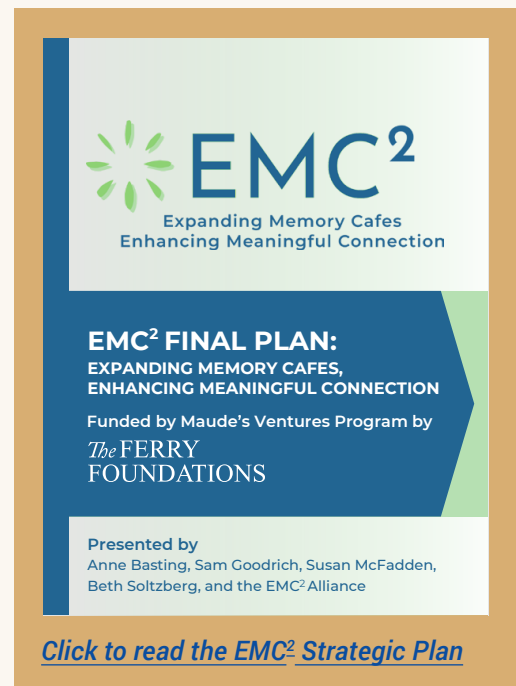
SECTION 1: FOR PUBLIC HEALTH	3
Introduction	3
About Memory Cafe Alliance	3
About Memory Cafes	4
Alignment with Public Health	5
Five actions public health can undertake to promote Memory Cafes	5
Social Prescribing	7
SECTION 2: FOR MEMORY CAFE LEADERS	9
Step 1: Join the Memory Cafe Alliance (MCA)	9
Step 2: Complete online training	10
Step 3: Add your Memory Cafe to the online Memory Cafe Directory	11
Step 4: Explore Additional Resources	11
BIBLIOGRAPHY	12

SECTION 1: For Public Health

Introduction

This toolkit was developed in partnership with Anne Basting, Susan McFadden, Sam Goodrich and Beth Soltzberg, leaders of the national strategic planning process to grow Memory Cafes across the U.S., the Expanding Memory Cafes and Enhancing Meaningful Connections (EMC²) Project, and founders of the Memory Cafe Alliance. The content of this toolkit was informed by their research and work and draws from the EMC² bold [strategic plan](#) to grow the number of Memory Cafes in the U.S. tenfold in the next decade.

The purpose of this toolkit is to raise awareness about Memory Cafes and support public health agencies as they help launch and sustain Memory Cafes in their communities.



About Memory Cafe Alliance

The Memory Cafe Alliance (MCA) is a new national initiative—not an independent organization—to sustainably and equitably grow the network of Memory Cafes in the U.S. Partners include the four leaders of the EMC² Project, 27 allied experts in the fields of dementia, aging, caregiving, and social

services who met monthly over the course of a year to develop and refine the EMC² project, and the network of Memory Cafe leaders currently coordinated by the [JF&CS Memory Cafe Percolator](#). Dementia-Friendly America (DFA) hosts the MCA Directory, the three free MCA training modules, a Memory



Cafe Dissemination Kit, and other information people can use to start, promote and sustain Memory Cafes.

About Memory Cafes

Memory Cafes (MC) seek to reduce the social isolation often associated with the experience of dementia. They are welcoming environments where people living with cognitive impairment or dementia at any stage and their care partners can connect with others who are going through similar experiences. Together, they participate in enjoyable activities. Memory Cafes are social gathering places where people have fun together, create community, share stories, and feel accepted.

Memory Cafes originated in the Netherlands in the late 1990's, and have since spread to other countries as a grass-roots movement. In the U.S. today, there are approximately 500 MCs serving 45,000 people with dementia and their partners. However, with over 7 million Americans affected by Alzheimer's Disease and other types of dementia, and nearly 12 million unpaid dementia caregivers in our country¹, access to these vital community spaces remains limited. There is a clear opportunity for public health leadership to accelerate the MC movement and make MCs available and accessible to millions of families, caregivers and people living with dementia across the U.S.



Memory Cafes are...



inclusive of *people living with cognitive changes or at any stage of dementia* and their care partners.



held in accessible *community spaces*, such as libraries, cultural centers, museums or cafes.



responsive to the interests, needs, language and culture of the *local* community.



held in person *or* virtually.

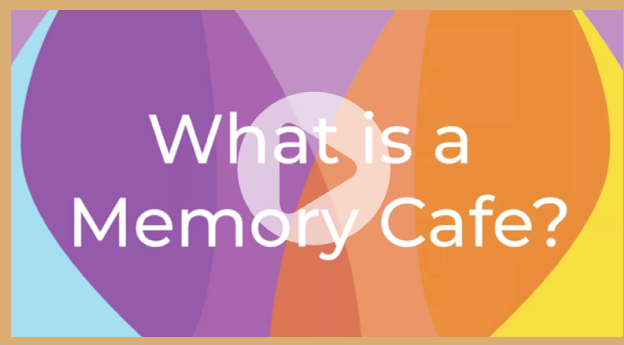


include interactive *and* engaging activities.



expanding the *social support network* for people with dementia and their care partners.

What is a Memory Cafe? (01:12 minutes)



Alignment with Public Health

Strengthening the social support network so that people with dementia and their care partners can continue to live, participate, provide and receive care in the community is a priority for public health. Memory Cafes make this possible by **leveraging existing community assets** and partnerships. They are held in shared **public spaces**, are designed to meet the unique needs and preferences of the **local community** and often engage **trusted** professionals and community members in their programming. The welcoming and inclusive environment of MCs helps **reduce dementia stigma** and creates a space for people living with dementia and their care partners to enjoy time together and meet others.

There is growing evidence showing the positive effects of Memory Cafes. Research has found that MCs help lower depression and contribute to emotional wellbeing²; increase sense of belonging³ and reduce the sense of stigma experienced by caregivers and people with dementia, among others⁴. As with other programs that are backed by research evidence, public health agencies can trust that MCs will deliver positive outcomes when carried out with fidelity-following best practices.

For these reasons, increasing access to MCs is a promising public health strategy to expand community-based networks of supports and resources for individuals, caregivers and families living with dementia.

Research shows that Memory Cafes:²⁻¹⁰



Enhance **social engagement**



Reduce **loneliness**



Increase **belonging**



Improve **care relationships**



Reduce caregiver **stress**



Reduce caregiver **burden**



Increase **wellbeing** for caregiver and person with dementia



Improve **communication** for both caregiver and person with dementia



Five actions public health can undertake to promote Memory Cafes

1 Promotion	• <i>Raise awareness</i> about Memory Cafes via newsletters, social media, and direct outreach to local libraries, cultural centers, faith-based organizations and other partners serving older adults and their families. • <i>Distribute informational materials and lists of locations</i> of existing Memory Cafes during community outreach and education events. The Memory Cafe Directory provides downloadable information on locations of MCs, days and times they meet, and contact information for Cafe leaders.
2 Funding and sustainability	• Promote existing funding opportunities and <i>provide seed money</i> grants for launching Memory Cafes. • <i>Develop grants specifically for MCs</i>, and/or include MCs as a suggested program in state grants related to social isolation and/or dementia. • <i>Leverage community partnerships</i> to integrate MCs into established local organizations that have experience with volunteer programs, fundraising and promotion, such as culture institutions, public libraries, faith-based organizations and aging service providers, among others. • Partner with foundations and/or other funding partners interested in supporting <i>social prescribing</i> pilots.
3 Training	• Engage local partner organizations to <i>become a Training Hub</i>. Identify and train at least 2–3 agency staff or staff members at a partner organization to become local expert trainers for MCs. • Host a <i>local MC Learning Community</i> to share best practices, resources and stimulate peer learning.
4 Referrals	• Collaborate with local healthcare systems, professional organizations and training institutions to <i>educate care providers and their teams about social prescribing</i> and encourage them to refer their patients with dementia and their families to a MC as part of regular dementia care. Learn more about social prescribing in the next section. • Develop a process to identify and <i>refer clients with dementia</i> participating in other state and local public programs to MCs.
5 Evaluation	• In partnership with the MCA and local partners, help develop tools and processes to <i>gather evaluation data</i> about Memory Cafes, collect and analyze the data, and make recommendations <i>for program improvement</i>.



Social Prescribing

Social prescribing is an approach medical providers can use to refer individuals to non-medical services and activities in their communities such as art or nature programs, or volunteer opportunities to address physical, emotional, and social needs. While long established in countries with national health systems like the UK, the concept is gaining interest in the U.S. as an affordable way to improve health and quality of life. Social prescribing has potential to support programs like Memory Cafes through increased referrals and potential funding pathways.¹¹

Social prescribing may be organized and funded in various ways, with different potential benefits for local MCs:

- **Unfunded Prescribing:** A medical provider recommends a community-based service without the assistance of a navigator (sometimes called a “link worker”) or supplying financial support. Most MCs encourage this practice already through outreach to local medical providers. However, no financial support is provided to MCs and the absence of a “link worker” makes this

time-consuming for both MC leaders and medical providers.

- Benefits MCs through increased referrals.
- Can be time consuming for MC leaders and medical providers.
- The new [CMS Guiding an Improved Dementia Experience \(GUIDE\) model](#) for comprehensive, coordinated dementia care may encourage referrals. [Find a participating GUIDE provider in your state](#) and work together to start connecting patients with dementia and caregivers with a local Memory Cafe!

- **Philanthropy Funded Prescribing:** Philanthropy supports a structure that encourages medical providers to make referrals to community-based services, and may also provide funding for participating community organizations. Memory Cafes have not yet received referrals through these initiatives, but are prepared to participate.

continued on next page

- Has been tested for defined periods of time with specific populations in a few parts of the country.
- Could increase referrals to MCs and support financial viability during the grant period, but unlikely to create long-term sustainability after philanthropic funding ends.
- Examples:
 - ◆ [CultureRx program](#) in Massachusetts (2020–2023).
 - ◆ [ArtsRx](#) at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) with philanthropic funding from Blue Cross Blue Shield New Jersey. Has received [NEA funding](#) to expand.
- **Integrated Funded Prescribing:** Health insurers or health systems provide funding to follow the prescription. This is considered the most sustainable funding model. Memory Cafes have not yet received referrals through these initiatives, but are prepared to participate.
 - Includes a “link-worker” who matches patients with programs based on their needs and preferences.
 - Once well-established, this option could offer MCs greatest potential increase in referrals *and* financial stability.
 - During a pilot period while insurers are testing the financial viability of social prescribing, referrals may be limited to their highest-need members.
- As this is a new model in the US, questions remain as to how many referrals MCs will see, the pay rate, and the administrative requirements of working with health insurers.
- Examples:
 - ◆ [Art Pharmacy](#)
 - ◆ [UniteUs](#) (for veterans and families)

Learn more about Social Prescribing in the U.S.

[Social Prescribing USA](#)

[A Path Toward Universal Social Prescribing in the U.S.](#) (Generations, ASA)

[Social Prescribing in the US: emerging learning and opportunities](#) (the Lancet)

[Social Prescribing: A Geriatrician’s Perspective](#) (Generations, ASA)

[Establishing internationally accepted conceptual and operational definitions of social prescribing through expert consensus: a Delphi study](#) (BMJ)

[Arts on Prescription: A Field Guide for US Communities](#) (University of Florida, Center for Arts in Medicine)

Models:

- [Massachusetts Cultural Council CultureRx](#) (Philanthropy-funded, Ran from 2020-2023)
- [NJPAC ArtsRx](#) (Philanthropy-funded; Ongoing)
- [Art Pharmacy](#) (Integrated Social Prescribing Intermediary)
- [UniteUs](#) (Integrated Social Prescribing Intermediary)

SECTION 2: For Memory Cafe Leaders

Public health agencies can support local leaders and organizations in establishing Memory Cafes by guiding them through the registration and training process. Whether they are experienced MC leaders, or brand new to the concept, Memory Cafe Alliance has created a process to support them.



STEP 1: Join the [Memory Cafe Alliance](#) (MCA)

The MCA is the national organizing network of all Memory Cafes across the U.S. In collaboration with Dementia Friendly America, it oversees the national directory of Memory Cafes, the online training and peer-learning community, and a range of resources and materials to start, sustain and promote Memory Cafes. Registered members gain free access to all MCA resources.

1. Agree to core principles and terms in the sign up form. The MCA aims to encourage a high standard of quality Memory Cafes. While each MC may look a little different, a collaborative group of Memory Cafe Leaders in the US agreed to these principles that we believe all Memory Cafes should uphold.

Agree to Memory Cafe Directory Terms & Register

1 Step 1: Agree to our core principles 2 Step 2: Register for an account

To best serve people living with dementia and their care partners:

We are committed to a directory that is reliable. Therefore: *(required)*

- I agree to keep my listing up-to-date with any changes.
- I agree to confirm / update my listing annually.
- I confirm that all information I share on my listing is truthful.
- I understand that if I do not update my listing annually, that my listing may be automatically deleted.

☐ I agree.

I acknowledge that our Memory Cafe will: *(required)*

- be for people with changes in memory or thinking, cognitive decline or dementia. It is also for their family, friends, or professional care partner if they have one.
- meet in an accessible community space.
- not require participants to have a medical diagnosis.

☐ I agree.

[Next](#)

2. Make an account. Once you have created your personal account, you will be able to update your listings on the directory with ease, and access all of our resources from your profile.

Agree to Memory Cafe Directory Terms & Register

1 Step 1: Agree to our core principles 2 Step 2: Register for an account

Once you have submitted this form, you will be redirected to a login page.

Please complete the form below to register. You will be redirected to a login page after this. You will be able to log in to update your profile and listings at any point.

Name *(required)*

First Last

Organization *(required)*

Phone *(required)*

Email *(required)*

Enter Email Confirm Email

Username *(required)*

Password *(required)*

Enter Password Confirm Password

[Previous](#) [Submit](#)

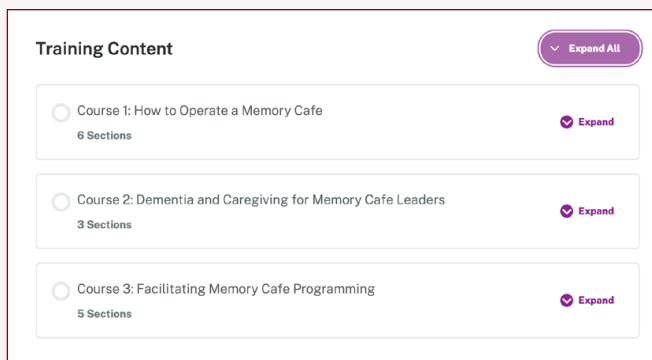
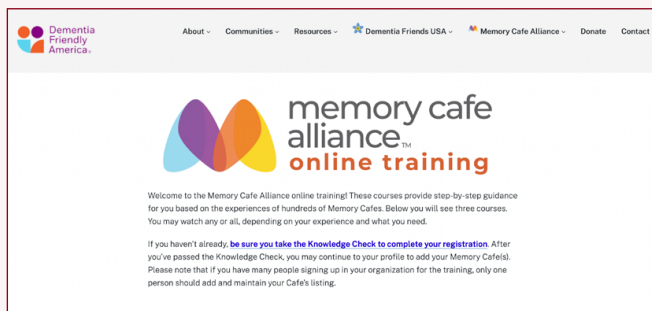
STEP 2: Complete online training

For years, no formal training system existed and Cafe leaders and coordinators generously shared their learnings and best practices with each other through an informal peer-learning network. In 2024, recognizing the need for a common training and education system to accelerate the growth of MCs, the MCA created and launched a national training system with support from The Brookdale Foundation. The system has a set of foundational training curricula to equip MC leaders with essential knowledge and skills to start and sustain a MC, and ensure consistency and high quality programming across Cafes.

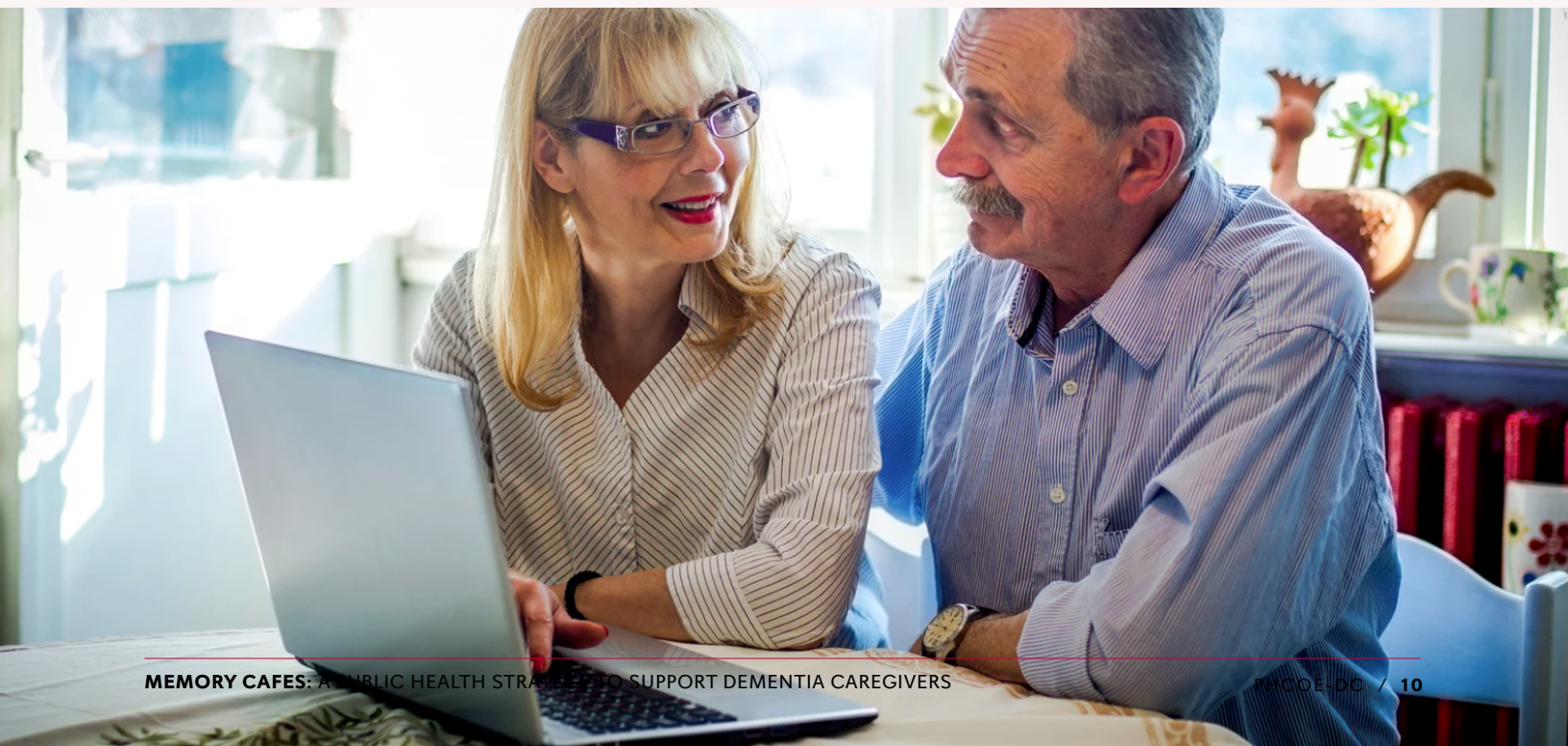
The **training curriculum** includes three foundational modules:

1. How to Start and Operate a Memory Cafe
2. What Cafe Leaders Need to Know about Dementia Caregiving
3. How to Facilitate Welcoming Programming

As MCs expand and discover what approaches work best in their own communities, these insights may inform future additions to the curriculum. An important feature of the curriculum is its flexibility, as it allows individual MC leaders to be creative and incorporate programming that is responsive to the interests and needs of their local community.

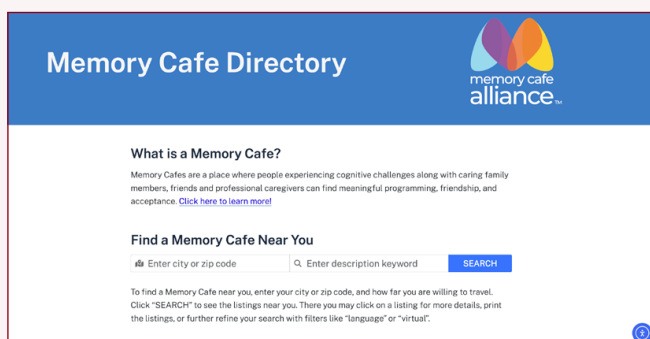


Once you open your account, access and complete the three foundational training modules. Everyone is encouraged to complete all three modules, but experienced MC leaders can skip directly to the "Knowledge check".



STEP 3: Add your Memory Cafe to the online [Memory Cafe Directory](#)

The Memory Cafe Directory gives visibility to MCs and allows community members to search and find a Cafe near them. It can also help identify areas without a Memory Cafe and help inform local programming and resource allocation. Adding your local Memory Cafe will make it easier for your community to find it. Only one person per Cafe should manage the listing on the directory.



The screenshot shows the 'Memory Cafe Directory' website. At the top, there's a blue header with the 'memory cafe alliance' logo. Below the header, a section titled 'What is a Memory Cafe?' explains that these are places for people with cognitive challenges to connect with family, friends, and professionals. A 'Find a Memory Cafe Near You' section features a search bar with fields for 'Enter city or zip code' and 'Enter description keyword', and a 'SEARCH' button. A small note below the search bar states: 'To find a Memory Cafe near you, enter your city or zip code, and how far you are willing to travel. Click "SEARCH" to see the listings near you. There you may click on a listing for more details, print the listings, or further refine your search with filters like "language" or "virtual".'

STEP 4: Explore Additional Resources

Take advantage of the many resources and tools the MCA has to offer. To support the spread of Memory Cafes and facilitate knowledge sharing and peer-learning, the MCA houses an online collection of tools to assist with starting, promoting and facilitating MCs.

Resources for Memory Cafe Leaders:

The MCA [Resource](#) Web Page- includes resources for:

- Memory Cafe Operations
- Memory Cafe Facilitation
- Dementia and Caregiving

[Memory Cafe Dissemination kit](#): a very helpful document that includes links to resources, videos and promotional materials to help you promote and grow Memory Cafes in your local community.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Alzheimer's Association. 2025 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures. *Alzheimers Dement* 2025;21(5).
2. Delfa-Lobato L, Guàrdia-Olmos J, Feliu-Torruella M. Benefits of Cultural Activities on People With Cognitive Impairment: A Systematic Review. *Front Psychol.* 2021;12. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.762392
3. Masoud SS, Meyer KN, Martin Sweet L, Prado PJ, White CL. "We Don't Feel so Alone": A Qualitative Study of Virtual Memory Cafés to Support Social Connectedness Among Individuals Living With Dementia and Care Partners During COVID-19. *Frontiers in public health.* 2021;9:660144-660144. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2021.660144
4. Teahan Á, Fitzgerald C, O'Shea E. Family carers' perspectives of the Alzheimer Café in Ireland. *HRB open research.* 2020;3:18-18. doi:10.12688/hrbopenres.13040.2
5. Zhuo X, Yan Y, Lin R, et al. Effects of an art-based intervention in older adults with dementia: a randomized controlled trial. *Scientific reports.* 2025;15(1):10406-10413. doi:10.1038/s41598-025-95051-5
6. Wang S, Molassiotis A, Guo C, Leung ISH, Leung AYM. Association between social integration and risk of dementia: A systematic review and meta analysis of longitudinal studies. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (JAGS).* 2023;71(2):632-645. doi:10.1111/jgs.18094
7. Protoolis HA, Burton J, Riley L, Jancey J. More than memory: A qualitative analysis of carer-reported psychosocial benefits of memory cafes. *Health promotion journal of Australia.* 2022;33(S1):358-366. doi:10.1002/hpja.573
8. Penninkilampi R, Casey AN, Singh MF, Brodaty H. The Association between Social Engagement, Loneliness, and Risk of Dementia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Alzheimer's disease.* 2018;66(4):1619-1633. doi:10.3233/JAD-180439
9. Innes A, Chesterton L, Morris L, Smith SK, Bushell S. Perspectives of people living with dementia and their care partners about the impact on social health when participating in a co designed Dementia café. *Health & social care in the community.* 2022;30(4):e1375-e1383. doi:10.1111/hsc.13545
10. Amano T, Park S, Morrow-Howell N, Carpenter B. The Association Between Patterns of Social Engagement and Conversion From Mild Cognitive Impairment to Dementia: Evidence From the Health and Retirement Study. *Alzheimer disease and associated disorders.* Published online 2022. doi:10.1097/WAD.0000000000000486
11. Muhl C, Mulligan K, Bayoumi I, Ashcroft R, Godfrey C. Establishing internationally accepted conceptual and operational definitions of social prescribing through expert consensus: a Delphi study. *BMJ open.* 2023;13(7):e070184-e070184. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-070184

Contributor Acknowledgement

The BOLD Public Health Center of Excellence on Dementia Caregiving is grateful to Dr. Anne Basting, Ms. Sam Goodrich, Dr. Susan McFadden and Ms. Beth Soltzberg for generously sharing their expertise, guidance and support in the development of this toolkit.

The following materials were used in the development of this toolkit.

- [EMC² Final Plan: Expanding Memory Cafes, Enhancing Meaningful Connection](#)
- [Memory Cafe Alliance website](#)

Funding acknowledgement

This guide is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$2,275,060 with 100 percent funded by CDC/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CDC/HHS, or the U.S. Government.