



San Francisco's patients with dementia need – and deserve – more in-home and day care support. A proven model already exists to make it happen.

By Dr. Jay Luxenberg, Chief Medical Officer, On Lok, Inc. San Francisco, CA

SAN FRANCISCO (June 11, 2019) - In 2008, then-Mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, convened an Alzheimer's/Dementia Expert Panel, charged with developing [San Francisco's Strategy For Excellence In Dementia Care](#) and a [roadmap for the next 10 years](#). I co-chaired this panel and learned many valuable insights. June is National Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month, so it's an appropriate time to assess our accomplishments – and begin tackling what still remains to be done.

Let's start with a few successes, as some of the goals set by the panel have shown admirable progress. Dementia training for San Francisco's first responders (police, firefighters and ambulance staff) has improved over the last 10 years. Additionally, and although the issue is far from being solved, necessary improvements to shared electronic medical records systems have also been made. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) is addressing the dementia challenge from a macro perspective. Just last month, WHO issued a first-ever set of [evidence-based guidelines](#) for reducing dementia risk.

With that said, many challenges remain. Since 2009, the number of San Francisco residents with dementia has increased. (The silver lining? This figure didn't increase as much as anticipated.) In addition, the availability of assisted living housing for people with dementia – such as residential care facilities for the elderly – is increasingly limited to the upper end of the income spectrum. Rising real estate and labor costs have made small residential facilities that have traditionally served lower income individuals less viable as businesses. San Francisco lost almost 10 percent of these facilities between 2012 and 2018. For people living on Supplemental Social Security (SSI), accessing this supportive housing is financially insurmountable.

One alternative solution to permanent supportive housing is to give people living with dementia the opportunity to safely live in their own homes for as long as possible. A growing body of evidence show that this is, in most cases, the healthiest solution for all seniors. Although some supervision and care can be provided to dementia patients by in-home caregivers, the expense of such services for all-day care – not to mention the isolation associated with remaining all day and night in one's own home – makes dementia-specific day care an attractive alternative.

Just last month, for example, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg On Lok Memory Care Center opened in North Beach to offer an innovative day care approach within On Lok's Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (or PACE) model of care. In a safe and comfortable environment, dementia friendly activities and companionship are provided every day: from close supervision to nutritional meals to skillful management



of challenging dementia-associated behaviors. Simply put, expansion of dementia day care to other populations is a strong, positive and necessary step forward in achieving dementia care excellence.

San Francisco's spirit of innovation and experimentation has driven many advances in dementia care. These successes include the creation of the nation's first adult day health center associated with a teaching hospital at Mount Zion Hospital in the mid-1970s, as well as the creation of On Lok's PACE model of all-inclusive care that's now been replicated in 31 states by 126 PACE organizations that operate more than 260 PACE Centers. In addition, The [Family Caregiver Alliance \(FCA\)](#), founded in San Francisco more than 40 years ago, serves as the national model for caregiver support and education. We can do it again.

In 2009, we accepted the challenge of providing excellence in dementia care. Now a decade later, we're ready to take on new challenges by creating – and implementing – new solutions to support those living with dementia and their families. It's time to provide them with the best of care and the opportunity to live in the most independent and home-like settings as possible.

Earlier this year, Governor Newsom prioritized Alzheimer's prevention and research in his first State of the State address and included in his proposed budget funding for an Alzheimer's Prevention and Preparedness task force to be led by Maria Shriver. This coupled with the Alzheimer's Association's Healthy Brain Initiative to increase public awareness for early diagnosis are important steps for the future. So please – educate yourself and let your voice be heard. The Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org) has a variety of information on how you can get involved in advocacy and provides a wealth of information on services and supports for people with dementia and their caregivers including the benefits of day centers.

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