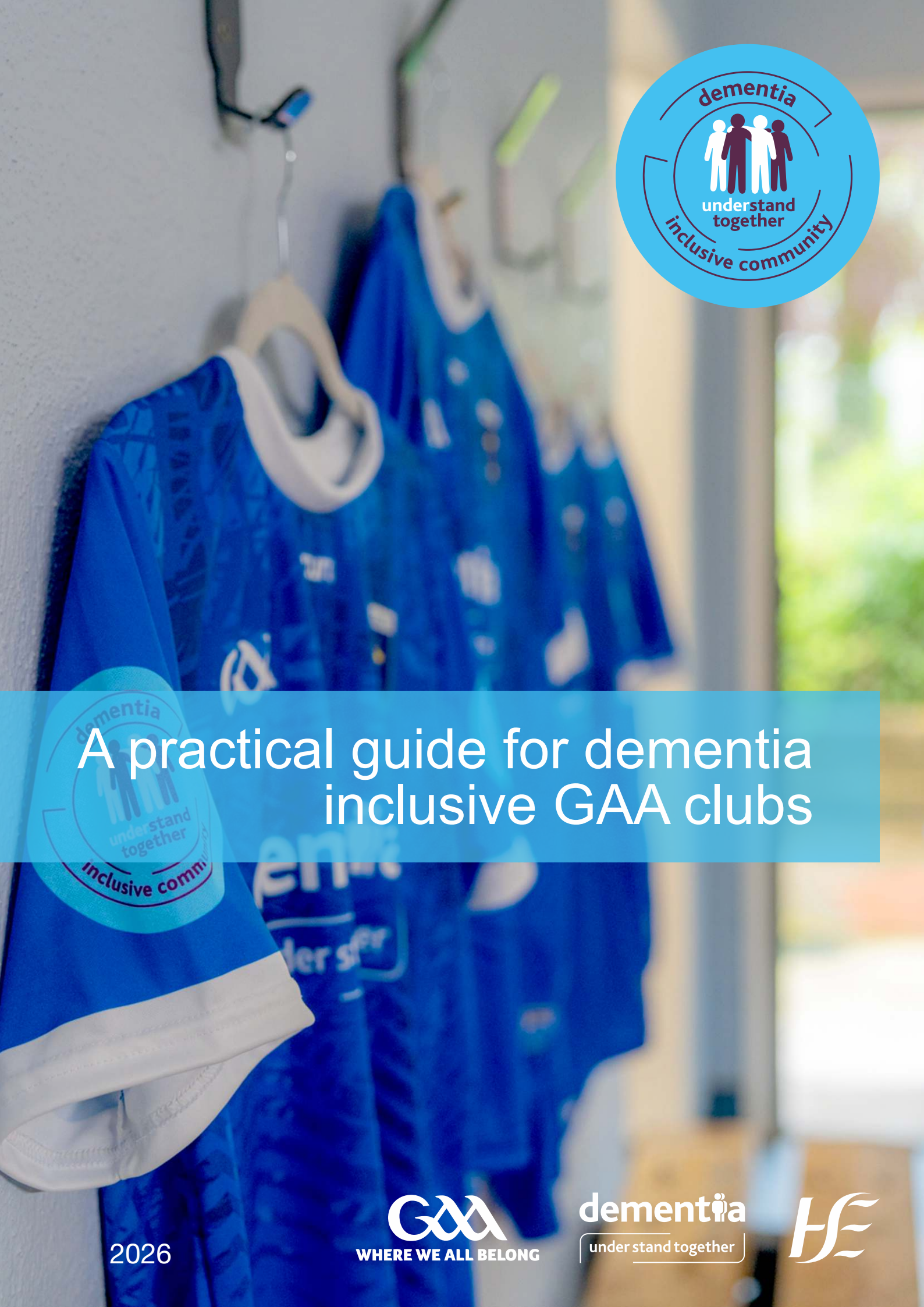
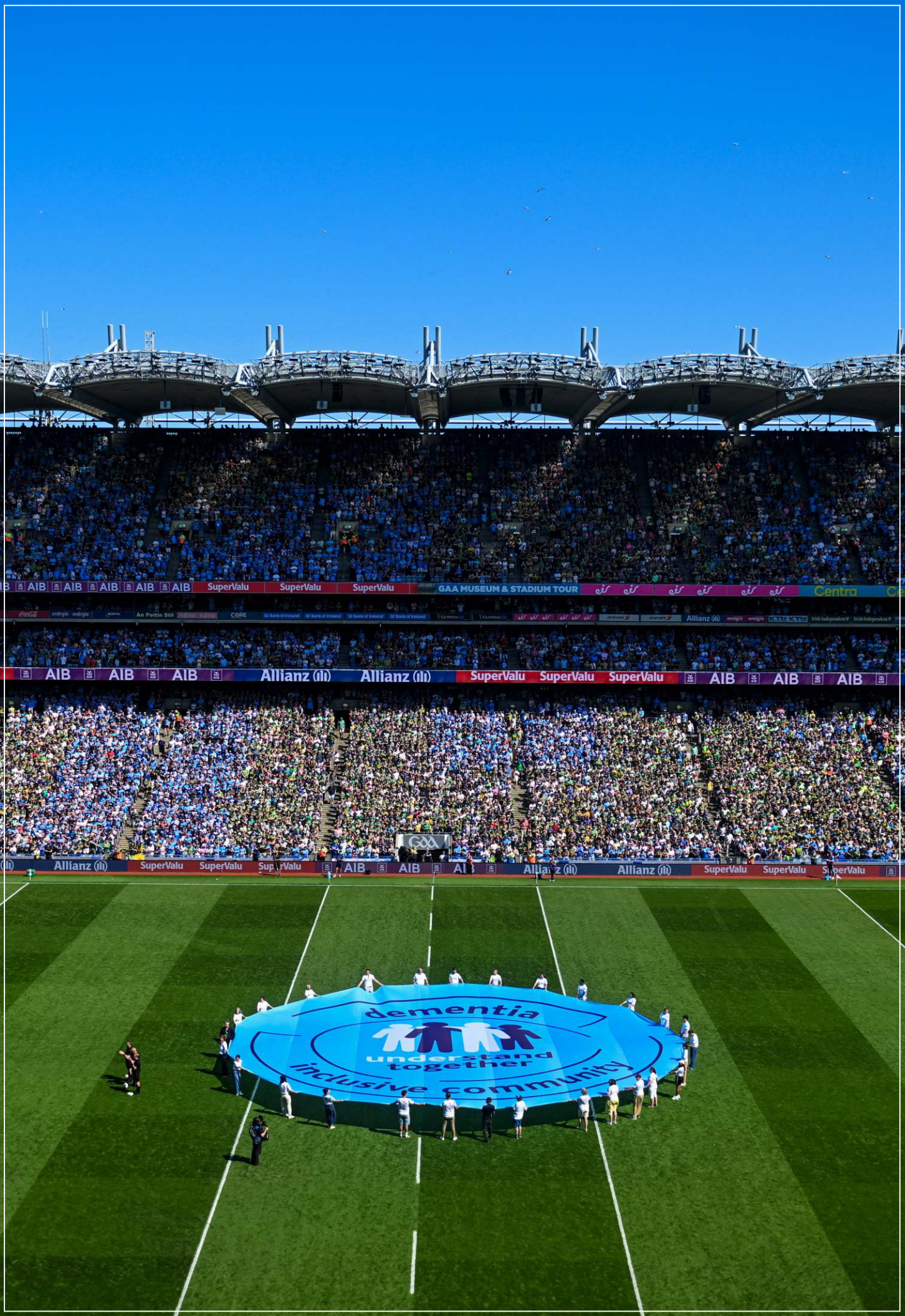


A practical guide for dementia inclusive GAA clubs

2026

WHERE WE ALL BELONG

dementia
under stand together


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SuperValu
GAA MUSEUM & STADIUM TOUR
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inclusive community

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Introduction

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is more than a sporting organisation. It is the social and cultural heartbeat of Irish communities. For many people, the local club is a place for friendship, involvement and connection with their community.

Dementia is affecting more and more families in Ireland. Within the GAA, we can play an important role in helping people living with dementia to remain part of club and community life.

This manual provides practical guidance on how we can create a welcoming and dementia inclusive environment for our members, volunteers, supporters and families affected by dementia.

For this no major changes are needed. Small adjustments, greater understanding and a welcoming culture can make a big difference.

The HSE's Dementia: Understand Together campaign aims to raise awareness of dementia, increase understanding, and inspire everyone to include and support people with dementia and their families in community life. The GAA has partnered with the campaign to ensure that all our clubs across the country have a better understanding of dementia and can take the small steps needed to become inclusive clubs for everyone.

The special importance of GAA for people living with dementia

GAA clubs hold special meaning for many people. We may have memories of outstanding matches, teammates or family get-togethers at games. We might recall volunteering in our local club and being involved in our GAA community.

This is no different for people living with dementia. They can find comfort and reassurance in familiar places, routines and relationships. Visiting the club, meeting familiar faces or following club activities can keep up their sense of connection.

By supporting dementia inclusion, clubs can ensure that people with dementia remain valued members of our GAA community, whatever their diagnosis. Every welcoming conversation, inclusive activity and offer of support helps strengthen our GAA's tradition of community, respect and lifelong membership. It makes the club a place where we truly all belong.

What's in the manual?

In this manual, we provide guidance on how to create a club. We set out:

- **The benefits of physical and social activity**
- **Facts about dementia**
- **How your club can support people living with dementia and their family members**

By offering friendship and support on a regular basis, everyone in a GAA club can help people with dementia to carry on doing things they enjoy.


dementia
understand together

1. Keeping active - why it matters

Regular physical activity and social interaction are important for people of all ages and abilities. For people living with dementia, staying active and connected can make a big difference to their overall health and wellbeing, confidence and quality of life.

For people living with dementia, GAA club activities can:

- Help maintain their physical fitness, strength, balance and mobility
- Support their emotional wellbeing, helping them feel less anxious or lonely
- Build up confidence and independence
- Provide structure and routine to their day
- Strengthen friendships and links with the community

Many GAA clubs already support wellbeing through the Healthy Club programme. Taking part could mean joining in with GAA walks, attending community or social events, watching matches or helping out as a volunteer. Even spending time in the clubhouse or meeting familiar faces can have a positive impact.

2. What is dementia?

Dementia is an umbrella term covering a range of conditions that affect memory, thinking, communication, problem-solving and the ability to carry out everyday activities. There are many different types of dementia, and a person may have more than one type at the same time. The most common types of dementia are:

- **Alzheimer's disease** - when certain proteins in the brain build up as plaques and tangles. These stop nerve cells sending signals to each other and cause the cells to die.

- **Vascular dementia** - caused by reduced blood flow in the brain. This damages brain cells. It can happen when the small blood vessels deep inside the brain become narrower due to general wear and tear and lifestyle choices such as smoking, alcohol and poor diet. It can also be caused by a single stroke or a series of mini strokes.

- **Lewy body dementia** - when clumps of abnormal protein form inside brain cells. They occur in specific areas of the brain and affect movement, thinking and behaviour.

- **Frontotemporal dementia** - involving damage to the front or sides (or both) of the brain: the frontal and temporal lobes. Symptoms often begin when people are in their 50s or 60s or sometimes earlier.

Dementia affects each person differently, and their abilities and needs will vary over time.

Common symptoms include:

- Memory difficulties
- Challenges with communication and finding words
- Changes in concentration and attention
- Difficulties with planning or decision-making
- Increased confusion in unfamiliar environments
- Changes in mood or behaviour
- Loss of confidence in social situations

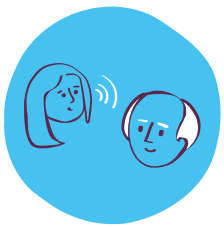
It is important to remember that a diagnosis of dementia does not change who a person is. Most people with dementia live in the community and want to continue doing so. We can support their health and wellbeing by ensuring they can carry on with social and physical activities. Focusing on a person's abilities rather than limitations is key.



See the person, not the dementia



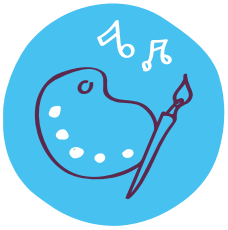
Talk about dementia



Stay in touch



Ask how you can help



Support people to keep up hobbies and interests



Make sure your service or space is easy to use

3. How GAA clubs can help

For people with dementia, their carers and family members, being part of the local GAA club can:

- Provide a sense of belonging
- Improve their quality of life
- Slow the progression of dementia

In particular, GAA clubs can:

- Help people maintain a sense of identity and belonging
- Reduce their isolation and loneliness
- Keep them involved in community life
- Provide meaningful social and physical activities
- Strengthen connections between generations
- Support family members and carers
- Promote awareness and understanding of dementia

Creating an inclusive environment benefits the wider club community as well as people living with dementia, their family and carers.



4. How to involve people living with dementia in your club

People living with dementia can continue to enjoy and contribute to club activities in a variety of ways. For example, they may like to:

- Attend matches, training sessions and social events
- Volunteer at club activities and fundraising events
- Take part in walking groups and wellbeing programmes
- Help with clubhouse or administrative tasks
- Share stories from their past experiences in the GAA
- Support younger members through mentoring and club heritage projects

Some people may need additional support, reminders or encouragement to stay involved. By being flexible and accommodating individual needs, we can help members remain active, connected and engaged for as long as possible.



5. Communication tips

Good communication helps create a positive experience for everyone. When speaking with a person living with dementia:

- Use clear, simple language
- Speak calmly and respectfully
- Maintain eye contact where appropriate
- Give one piece of information at a time
- Allow extra time for responses
- Listen carefully and patiently
- Reduce distractions
- Use visual cues and gestures where helpful
- Focus on the person rather than the condition

Remember that communication is about making a connection. A friendly greeting, familiar conversation or shared memory can often be more important to someone than getting detailed information.

6. Supporting family carers

Family carers provide essential support to people living with dementia. Carers may find it difficult to keep up their own social connections and participate in activities they used to enjoy. Our clubs can play a valuable role in supporting carers by creating welcoming opportunities to help them stay involved. We can:

- Offer a warm welcome and friendly atmosphere
- Check in regularly
- Provide information about club activities
- Encourage them to take part at a level that suits their circumstances
- Offer flexible opportunities for volunteering
- Organise coffee mornings and social events where all are welcome
- Be understanding when plans need to change

A supportive club environment can help carers feel less isolated and more connected to their community.

7. How to make the clubhouse dementia inclusive

People's surroundings can affect their confidence and comfort. A dementia inclusive clubhouse should be welcoming, safe, familiar and easy to move around.

Practical measures include:

- Clear directional signage
- Good lighting throughout
- Uncluttered hallways and entrances
- Clearly marked toilets and exits
- Easy-to-read notices and information boards
- Comfortable seating areas
- Quiet spaces for people who may become overwhelmed by noise or crowds

Small improvements can make the clubhouse more welcoming for everyone, including older members and visitors.



8. Match-day considerations

Match days are often the highlight of the week for supporters and members. However, crowds, noise and unfamiliar situations can be challenging for people living with dementia.



Check out:

- Does your club have volunteers who could support a person on match day?
- Is there a family member or someone they know well who could attend the match with them, guide them through the crowds and help as needed?

Ideas your club could consider:

- Offering help with ticket purchase
- Designating a contact person who can be available to assist as required
- Providing advance information about accessibility
- Offering support with navigation around the grounds
- Clearly identifying the parking areas, meeting points and exits
- Pointing out quieter spaces

Measures like these can help ensure that supporters living with dementia can continue enjoying the excitement and community spirit of match days.

9. Steps to becoming dementia inclusive

Principles

- **See the person, not the condition.**
- **Promote dignity, respect and choice.**
- **Support independence wherever possible.**
- **Encourage people to take part.**
- **Encourage other members to include them in activities.**
- **Welcome families and carers.**
- **Foster a sense of belonging and community.**

Where to start?

Every club can take practical steps towards becoming more dementia inclusive. Start by asking the following questions:



Plan for dementia inclusion - Is there a committee member or volunteer who will champion the club's dementia inclusion efforts?



Help people understand dementia - Can your club host dementia awareness training for stewards, coaches, members, volunteers and staff?



Review facilities - Is there clear, accessible signage throughout the club buildings and grounds? Signs should use easy-to-read text, with good colour contrast and clear symbols. Check that the signs are big enough, well positioned with good lighting, and easy to follow.



Make everyone welcome - Is your club a welcoming environment for people living with dementia, their family and carers? Make sure you provide easy-to-read communications on your notice boards or flyers, and inclusive activities that everyone can enjoy.



Get families involved - Is there a way for people affected by dementia to share their experiences of the club? Can you stay in touch with families of people living with dementia to find out how the club members can support them to stay involved.



Work in partnership - Can you link up with local health services, community groups, Age Friendly initiatives and dementia organisations to support dementia inclusive GAA activities?

Activities should focus on enjoyment, participation and opportunities for social engagement. You can find additional supports and guidance on how to begin an activity in the resource section.

10. Ideas for dementia inclusive club activities

Dementia inclusive activities should be enjoyable things that provide social connection and encourage meaningful participation. Your club could consider:

- Setting up a community walking group that supports people with dementia and others who may need assistance
- Hosting a weekly or monthly coffee morning where people can enjoy an easy-going get-together
- Running Healthy Club initiatives, such as intergenerational card games, music sessions
- Developing reminiscence sessions centred on club history, including stories of former players and members
- Looking at opportunities for volunteering
- Organising get-togethers to watch match videos



Resources

HSE Dementia: Understand Together: for dementia awareness training, guidance, promotional materials and further information on how clubs can get involved.
www.understandtogether.ie



The Replay: an online archive celebrating the iconic voice of Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh, the legendary commentator of Ireland's national games. You can use clips from the archive to get people talking about matches they have watched or played in - connecting with their past and with other people.
www.thereplay.ie

Dementia Cafe: a welcoming monthly meeting for anyone who is affected by dementia. The Irish Dementia Café Network connects dementia cafés all over Ireland and can help you start up a new café for your area.
www.dementiacafe.ie



Sporting Memories: a programme run by The Alzheimer Society of Ireland in partnership with the GAA. It aims to tackle isolation, depression and loneliness through safe, friendly sessions of reminiscence. Meetings re-awaken happy memories and build friendships among people affected by dementia.
www.alzheimer.ie/creating-change/awareness-raising/sporting-memories/

Further information

The following organisations provide information and advice.

- The Alzheimer Society of Ireland: **www.alzheimer.ie**
- Engaging Dementia: **www.engagingdementia.ie**
- Family Carers' Ireland: **www.familycarers.ie**
- Age Friendly Ireland: **www.agefriendlyireland.ie**
- Dementia Services Information and Development Centre: **www.dementia.ie**

Scan here for dementia inclusive club activities

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the GAA for partnering with the HSE Dementia: Understand Together campaign in raising awareness of dementia and encouraging all clubs across the country to include and support people with dementia and their families. Our partnership kicked off at the All-Ireland football semi-final match in Croke Park on 12 July 2026 between Dublin and Kerry. Together we can create more memories and changes for the better in the future.

Thank you also to Kerry GAA and all members of the Dementia Friendly Tralee Interagency Group (DFT) for permission to adapt and expand on their handbook 'Dementia Inclusive GAA Communities'. Dementia Friendly Tralee is a collaboration between the HSE and multiple community organisations, including the business sector, statutory agencies as well as financial and educational agencies in Tralee. The group was established in May 2019 and aims to raise awareness of dementia and to encourage everyone to ensure that people living with dementia feel understood, valued and able to go on contributing to their community. Kerry GAA are active members of Dementia Friendly Tralee Interagency group.



Notes


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