

# Access to nature among top considerations when designing buildings for people with dementia

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Buildings designed for people living with dementia must prioritise unrestricted access to nature, support for wayfinding and navigation, and the safety of the environment, new research has found.

Academics at Birmingham City University have carried out the study examining how homes and houses should be designed in order to provide the best support and living environment for people with [dementia](#).

The research was carried out with residents and staff at one UK care home with the results revealing nearly 60 per cent of respondents were disappointed with a lack of access to the outdoors, believing it created an institutionalised environment.

The research also showed that a third of people believed it was important for buildings to include visual orientation clues - such as colour, memorabilia, objects or murals to help residents find their ways more easily.

More than 850,000 people in the UK were living with dementia in 2014 with that number predicted to rise to more than two million by 2050.

The study's responses allowed researchers Lee Fisher and Erika Pärn to identify the three major issues for consideration when building homes for people with dementia; safety, wayfinding and access to nature and

the outdoors.

Lee Fisher, a recently graduated Construction Management student from Birmingham City University who now works for the Orders of St John Care Trust, said: "This research has highlighted the value of engaging with both residents living with dementia and the operational staff responsible for their care to understand what effects their quality of life.

"I hope the publication of this work will serve as a spring board and inspiration for further research on new digital technologies in an unobtrusive manner to enhance the everyday life for residents living with dementia.

"Furthermore, I am excited and enthused about embarking on a further journey with the research team at Birmingham City University with the long term aim of achieving my PhD and making a real difference to the lives of people living with dementia."

The research findings have now been collated in a peer reviewed scientific research paper titled "Building Design for People with Dementia: A Case Study of a UK Care Home" published in *Facilities*.

Erika A. Pärn, Lecturer in Architectural Technology at Birmingham City University, said: "Optimising the design of care homes for residents with dementia is an area of growing importance because it provides positive, societal impact through improved design.

"The study's findings have highlighted noteworthy design considerations for both facilities managers and designers to improve upon care home facilities and provide a less institutionalised, yet still safe and functional, environment.

"As well as providing pragmatic design guidance, the work has also

sought to stimulate wider academic and practitioner debate and other urgently needed research work. Such future work will seek to combine new digital technologies in an unobtrusive manner to enhance the quality of life for residents living with dementia."

The research categorised the questions based on physical, sensory and cognitive triggers in a bid to assess measures which could help improve patient quality of life.

The academics also warned against adopting a one size fits all approach to building and that environments should be tailored to the needs of prospective residents.

Among the other key topics identified for consideration were:

- Optimise levels of stimulation
- Provide optimum lighting
- Consider colour contrast
- Ensure thermal comfort
- Provide a non-institutional scale and environment
- Promote engagement with friends, relatives and staff
- Promote privacy dignity and independence

**More information:** Building Design for People with Dementia: A Case Study of a UK Care Home: [www.researchgate.net/publication/321111111](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/321111111)  
[dy of a UK Care Home](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/321111111)

Provided by Birmingham City University

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