

Scientific evidence on the use of museum visits as a non-pharmacological therapy for dementia

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People with dementia (PwD) often experience isolation due to a loss of communication skills or a lack of societal understanding of their condition (Xu et al., 2025). Research into non-pharmacological therapies (NPTs) for PwD has emphasized the therapeutic potential of art. Programs developed in museums have been shown to provide accessible, safe and stimulating environments that encourage the participation of people with Alzheimer's disease (AD) and other forms of dementia, alongside their caregivers (Hu et al., 2026). Such interventions can improve participants' quality of life and help to challenge the stigmas associated with dementia (Beauchet et al., 2020).

Evidence suggests that these spaces can facilitate memory, social interaction and meaningful participation, thereby contributing to the well-being and quality of life of participants. The main benefits described in the literature are as follows (Flatt et al., 2015; López-Méndez, 2017):

- They improve the quality of life, self-esteem, and care systems for PwD and their family caregivers.
- They foster connections with participants' past, present and future life experiences by using art and the aesthetic experience of the works of art selected by each museum.
- They encourage participants to engage with and communicate about cultural production by offering guided tours.
- They preserve participants' cognitive, functional, and emotional abilities for as long as possible.

- They raise public awareness by eradicating stigmas associated with the disease, as participants are seen enjoying their visits to the museum.

In line with this evidence, various initiatives have been developed both internationally and in Spain over the past few decades. One of the most notable programmes is *'Meet Me at MoMA'*, which was developed by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York between 2007 and 2014. It offered guided tours tailored to PwD as well as their caregivers. The tours focused on observation and dialogue about contemporary art (The Museum of Modern Art, n.d.). Another notable example is the *'Thursdays at the Museum'* program implemented at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA, Montreal, Quebec, Canada). This initiative comprises weekly participatory art activities over a three-month period and has been shown to significantly improve participants' levels of frailty, well-being, and quality of life (Beauchet et al., 2021).

In Spain, several pioneering initiatives have established museums as places where PwD can engage with art and culture. One such initiative is the **MuBAM Alzheimer's Project** in Murcia, which uses a multidisciplinary approach focused on cognitive stimulation, emotional expression, and social participation to offer adapted tours, art workshops, and cultural activities for PwD and their caregivers (Más Museo Picasso, n.d.). Similarly, the **Alzheimer's Program** at the Barcelona Centre for Contemporary Culture (CCCB) uses adapted tours to bring contemporary art to people in the early stages of the disease and their families. It also promotes the **'Museum and Alzheimer's Map'**, a resource that compiles active programmes on Alzheimer's and dementia at around twenty Spanish cultural centres, reflecting the expansion and consolidation of this type of initiative (CCCB, 2018).

In conclusion, the available evidence supports the idea that museums can be spaces that foster inclusion and promote well-being for people with dementia (Johnson et al., 2017). However, these programs must be adequately planned and include specific training for professionals and the design of accessible, safe and truly person-centered cultural experiences to reach their full potential (Fares et al., 2025).

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