

**CHANGING MINDS**  
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**TRANSFORMING LIVES**

**UISG-LCWR**  
**COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT**  
**SUPPORT INITIATIVE (CISI)**



**As we grow older as women religious, we desire to live the richness and depth of our spirituality as fully and as humanly possible despite any cognitive limitations or dementia.**

## What is dementia?

“Dementia is a shift in the way a person experiences the world around her or him.” (G. Allen Power, MD)

**The World Health Organization (WHO) and Alzheimer’s Disease International (ADI) consider dementia to be a group of symptoms that occur due to a disease and that impact memory, behavior, thinking, and social abilities to the extent that it interferes with one’s activities of daily living and social autonomy.**

- In many cultures, dementia is also deeply associated with stigma and negative stereotypes that often prevent people with dementia and their care partners from seeking help.
- Globally it is one of the major causes of disability and dependency among older people.
- In many cases people with dementia are denied basic human rights or freedoms.

## Why is this initiative important for Sisters?

**As communities age and a large percentage of us will eventually develop some form of dementia, it is more important than ever to ensure that each sister is able to live her spirituality despite any impairment.**

A 2022 study by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found that among participating congregations of nearly 150,000 sisters, more than 13,400 had a possible or formal diagnosed cognitive impairment. However, probably three quarters of dementia patients are undiagnosed. And since an estimated 10% of a country's population over the age of 65 is living with dementia, it is likely that at least the same percentage of the congregational members are also living with dementia, with the number of sisters affected increasing.

### How will this initiative be helpful to congregations?

**The initiative aims to make a difference not only for sisters with dementia, but also for the entire community by helping to build dementia-inclusive religious institutes.**

- This is critical to improving the quality of life for sisters with dementia, optimizing opportunities for participation, and remaining part of their congregation, for example, by engaging sisters with dementia in daily activities and spiritual exercises in ways that support and nourish them.
- And it is also about making sure that lay care partners understand the culture of religious life generally.
- Another important aspect is to ensure that Congregational Leaders, sisters and staff have a comprehensive and updated knowledge of dementia with its subsequent principles of supportive care. Therefore, there needs to be an ongoing education program about dementia and dementia risk prevention, especially since the early stages of dementia are often overlooked because the onset is gradual.

## What is the vision and mission of the initiative?

“Changing minds and transforming lives” means reframing our minds and hearts so that we develop new ways of walking with our sisters who are living with dementia, personally and communally.

### VISION

**Creating religious communities in which sisters with dementia receive the care and support that they need to live their religious lives with meaning and dignity and in which dementia is understood and treated as one of many realities of religious life.**

### MISSION

**To provide ongoing formation, education, and resources for Congregational Leaders and all members of religious institutes, family members, staff members and professional care partners so that they can ensure that religious communities are dementia-inclusive, that Sisters living with cognitive impairment will experience the highest possible quality of care and quality of life for sisters living with cognitive impairment, and that dementia is understood within the context of religious life.**

## What will be done concretely?

- The scriptural, theological, and spiritual foundations of religious life are re-framed to be inclusive of sisters living with dementia.
- A number of sisters will be professionally trained in dementia care to serve as resource persons for specific geographical areas.
- Regional care teams will be developed to provide care particularly in the global south.
- Templates will be developed for early diagnosis, personalized and integrated treatment, in order to provide the pastoral care and spiritual support needed.
- Inter congregational initiatives will be promoted and supported.
- Dementia-friendly physical, social and spiritual environments will be promoted, including chapels and prayer spaces, so that sisters with dementia feel safe and welcome, respected and supported.
- Existing formation and education programs are identified, and new online training and programs developed that are consistent with the vision of the initiative.
- Cultural approaches to persons with dementia will be developed in order to combat cultural stereotypes.
- A dementia-inclusive facility in an African context will be developed as a pilot program.

## Who is behind the initiative?

This is an initiative of International Union of Superiors General (UISG) and Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. An advisory committee with experts and practitioners in the field of aged care – especially those with experience of accompanying sisters living with some type of cognitive impairment – and sisters in leadership positions are creating this initiative Cognitive Impairment Support Initiative (CISI).

## How to connect?

If your congregation is interested in participating in this initiative, please speak with other congregational leaders in your area and together make a common approach to the LCWR and UISG CISI platform using the following email [alzheimersinitiative@uisg.org](mailto:alzheimersinitiative@uisg.org)

### Sources:

- World Health Organization
- Alzheimer's Disease International
- Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate: Catholic Sisters with Cognitive Impairment: Congregational Responses A Report to International Union of Superiors General