

Care Partner vs. Caregiver

Preserving Dignity with Distinction

At Lumina, we are intentional with the language we use in shaping a dementia-friendly culture because we want that language to reflect what we deeply prioritize – dignity, autonomy, compassion, and care.

That's why we feel that the term **care partner** beautifully encompasses the relationship between a person with dementia diagnosis and the person providing their care. This does not eliminate or ignore the vital work of *caregiving*, but we believe this designation acknowledges that dementia-friendly support is about so much more than the completion of tasks – it's about building deep relationships, maintaining trust, and preserving dignity.



WHY LUMINA USES CARE PARTNER

Caregiving for an individual with dementia absolutely involves helping, supporting, and even sometimes protecting, however the word can subtly reinforce a one-directional dynamic in which the person living with dementia is viewed primarily through the lens of need or dependence.

At Lumina, we believe that the term **care partner** reflects something much more relational.

It acknowledges that:

- The person living with dementia still has preferences, abilities, emotions, and valuable contributions
- Care is often done with someone, not simply to someone
- Relationship remains central, even as abilities change
- Dignity can be preserved through partnership and shared experience

This mindset aligns closely with the Positive Approach to Care® (PAC) philosophy used within Lumina education and Champion Courses. PAC repeatedly emphasizes relationship before task. Relationship is at the heart of true compassionate care.

That's why PAC Champions are taught to:

- build relationships first
- seek permission before helping
- move from public space to personal connection
- support autonomy whenever possible
- remain flexible and responsive to changing abilities

The goal is not simply efficiency. The goal is much deeper and more meaningful than that – it is to preserve connection, dignity, and engagement throughout the interaction.

In this model, partnership and connection matters.

For example:

- inviting someone to participate in baking blueberry muffins, even if the process is unconventional and lengthy
- walking alongside someone rather than directing them from behind
- offering choices both visually and verbally
- identifying and encouraging a person's strengths instead of focusing on losses

These moments reflect more than merely just caregiving, but true partnership. Providing opportunities for participation, growth, and connection ensures that people living with dementia don't feel excluded from community life, but maintain their valuable status as seen, heard, loved, and known.

At Lumina, we believe it's essential to foster a sense of independence and engagement in order to preserve the dignity of those who are living with dementia.

WHEN CAREGIVER IS STILL APPROPRIATE

Lumina typically prefers **care partner** in relationship-centered contexts, but the word **caregiver** still has an important and appropriate place. Our stance is that in situations in which the work is more clinical, procedural, or task-oriented in nature, **caregiver** is the clearer and more accurate term.

Some examples of those situations could be administering medicine, caring for wounds, or providing other clinical interventions or procedures. We believe **caregiver** is a truly realistic term in these contexts because these are instances in which one person must carry the responsibility for the other person's health, safety, or physical care. This illustrates less of a relational partnership and more of a temporary *dependency*.

A DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY APPROACH

This shift in language is about more than just terminology – this is a foundational and cultural movement within not just Lumina but Landis Communities as a whole, a movement toward greater prioritization of a dementia-friendly focus and a committed pursuit to the preservation of the dignity of those living with dementia.

Being “dementia-friendly” is about so much more than our services, our resources, or our training modules. At its core, it's about how we see and support those who are living with dementia, how we build meaningful relationships with them, preserve their dignity, and help them flourish.

Using **caregiver** and **care partner** is not necessarily wrong, but at Lumina, we value each term for the different aspects of care that they emphasize. Simply put, **caregiver** emphasizes the work of providing the care itself; **care partner** emphasizes the relationship that exists within that care. These are two truths and two realities that can be held and acknowledged simultaneously.

