

Serious Mental Illness Versus Dementia in Older Adults

Although on the surface, CLC residents with serious mental illnesses and dementia may look similar, they actually differ in important ways. Review the table below to learn more.

Serious Mental Illness	Dementia
Memory usually does not get worse over time.	Memory gets worse over time.
When a person loses contact with reality, thinking skills (like judgement and reasoning) can be negatively affected, but typically do not get worse over time.	Thinking skills (like judgement and reasoning) get worse over time.
Because symptoms can change from day to day, the person's ability to manage activities changes daily, as well. This means that the amount of help care providers must provide changes from day to day, too.	The ability to perform daily tasks can change slightly from day to day. But overall, the person's abilities decline over time requiring more care provider help.
The person remembers from one day to the next.	Short-term memory declines early in the disease, and long-term memory eventually fades, as well.
Hallucinations, delusions, or other thinking or mood problems come and go over time and can affect the person's ability to make good decisions.	A person with dementia can experience new symptoms like hallucinations or delusions, especially during the middle stage of the disease.
People with SMI can decline or improve over time based on their living conditions, the amount of support they have, whether they are involved in meaningful activities, their resilience, and if they are taking prescribed medication.	Despite the best efforts of care providers, people with dementia decline over time and eventually need total care. This decline happens relatively slowly over an average period of 8 years, but it ranges from 2 to 20 years.