



CANADIAN STROKE BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Vascular Cognitive Impairment Seventh Edition, 2024

**Appendix 5: Heart & Stroke heart-brain associations map—All
cardiovascular conditions can lead to vascular cognitive impairment**

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Canadian Stroke Consortium and CanStroke Recovery Clinical Trials Platform.*

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APPENDIX FIVE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF VASCULAR COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT JOURNEY MAP

(Swartz et al. 2025)

	Symptom onset	Pre-diagnosis	Diagnosis	Management	Living with VCI				
Symptoms	 Pre-existing, sudden experience, evolving, accumulative and/or increasing symptoms of vascular condition	 Identification (by self, family and/or caregiver) of cognitive changes	 Experiencing a significant event leading to seeking healthcare involvement	 Access to diagnostic testing	 Confirmation of diagnosis, explanation of cognitive changes and management	 Need for follow up, management plan, goals, next steps	 Ongoing adaptations to changing needs		
Navigating care		 Lack of awareness of when, where and how to access care	 Limited access to HCPs and services	 Need recognition from HCPs about cognitive changes/concerns	 Long process with multiple referrals and investigations	 Access to rehabilitation, community resources and living accommodations	 Lack of appropriate services and information (e.g., life stage, current abilities & goals, age)	 Education and information on "what to expect" for the person and their family	 Peer support for the person, family and/or caregiver
Managing daily activities	 Challenges with managing daily activities and roles	 Attributing changes to lifestyle factors (e.g., aging, hearing loss, stress)	 Limiting challenges by using compensation	 Developing and using strategies to manage daily activities	 Accommodations and guidance on returning to work, school and community participation	 Support for returning to leisure activities	 Financial considerations and support	 Maintaining or re-establishing person-hood and identity	
Emotions and mental health	 Uncertainty	 Grieving losses and changes		 Need for mental health support (e.g., depression)	 Developing and using coping strategies to support mental health (for the person, family and caregivers)	 Finding meaning, purpose and quality of life for the person, family and/or caregiver			
Relationship to self and others		 Changes to roles and relationships, assistance from family	 Diagnosis has impact on identity, consent and autonomy	 Family support and advocacy	 Begin to discuss wishes and plan for future	 Relationships with HCPs and client-centered care	 Establishing a supportive network to promote self-management and advocacy		

Each journey is unique to the person (person living with VCI, family or caregiver). This Journey Map has been created to support people living with VCI, families, caregivers and healthcare providers (HCP) in understanding elements of the experience of living with VCI. A person's journey may be impacted by many intersecting factors such as: life stage, current abilities, goals, geographic location,

sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, indigeneity, culture, age and other **social determinants of health**. While this journey map is an example of an experience of VCI, individuals may experience any of these elements at multiple times or throughout their personal journey. There also may be other important elements within a person's journey that are not included on this map which should be respected, using a person

centred approach. The journey map was developed in consultation with a Heart & Stroke Community Consultation and Review Panel, as well as extensive consultation with external stakeholders including but not limited to: people with lived experience of VCI, caregivers, researchers and healthcare providers.