



Dementia-Friendly Law Enforcement and First Responders

Law enforcement and first responders have a strong and vital role in serving people with dementia. Community members with dementia have special needs, requiring additional support to keep them and others safe. Interactions with people with dementia may occur anywhere from rarely to daily, but every officer and first responder is likely to serve someone with dementia in the course of their work. In fact, 70 percent of people with dementia live within their community rather than in an adult care facility. As dementia-friendly professionals, you and your team can provide a higher level of safety and security to all community residents.

WHAT IS DEMENTIA?

Dementia is a term used to describe the symptoms of more than 100 conditions that are characterized by a decline in memory or other thinking skills that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities.

SIGNS OF DEMENTIA

Many dementias are progressive, with signs and symptoms starting out slowly and gradually getting worse. While symptoms of dementia can vary greatly, at least two of the following core mental functions must be significantly impaired to be considered dementia:

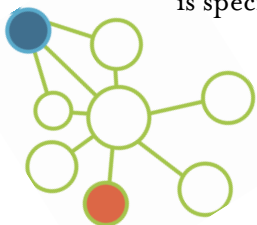
- Judgment
- Perception
- Reasoning
- Organizational abilities
- Memory
- Abstract thinking
- Communication and language
- Ability to focus and pay attention
- Orientation to time and place
- Awareness of socially appropriate norms
- Ability to filter emotional response

WHAT IS A DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY DEPARTMENT?

Dementia-friendly departments recognize the challenges that accompany dementia and help enable people with dementia to have a good quality of life. Their personnel are able to recognize the signs of dementia, communicate with people with dementia, and locate resources and assistance for themselves and for the people they serve.

DEMENTIA-FRIENDLY GUIDELINES

- Train 100 percent of professionals, management, and front-line staff.
- Designate a team leader to speak on behalf of the department.
- Share all training materials with new hires and those unable to attend the in-person trainings.
- Take advantage of the online dementia training found at www.uwosh.edu/dementia, listed under "Generalist Courses" in the left navigation. This training is titled "Dementia Crisis Response" and is specifically designed for first responders and law enforcement.



DEMENTIA IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

People with dementia can easily become lost and unable to remember how to get home on foot, using public transportation, or driving in a car. When people with dementia are lost, they may become anxious, afraid, agitated, and aggressive toward anyone unfamiliar who approaches them. People with dementia may leave a place of business and forget to pay for their items. Store security or employees may detain them or call law enforcement to report theft. Upon arrival, a professional may have difficulty determining whether or not someone has dementia or a related condition. This can make it difficult to respond appropriately to the situation or behaviors.

When arriving on the scene of an emergency, first responders should not only pay attention to imperiled persons, but also to anyone accompanying them. A person requiring assistance may have dementia or may be a caregiver for a person with dementia. Those with dementia may not be able to be left alone, or may be unable to go to the hospital unattended. It is up to the department to discuss internal guidelines on how to handle these situations.

Law enforcement officers and other first responders should be encouraged to receive dementia-specific training. Opportunities for professionals seeking training on dementia are offered by local dementia agencies, online programs, and through law enforcement groups. To prevent recurring incidents, communities should encourage the use of Silver Alert and connect with the Aging and Disability Resource Center, Adult Protective Services agency, and county crisis response agency to determine follow-up guidelines once a person with dementia has been located and returned home. A voluntary registry for people with dementia could be implemented in your community, along with programs such as those offered by Project Lifesaver, Project Safe Return, and File of Life.

RESOURCES

For more information on dementia and how to become dementia-friendly, visit:

- A Toolkit for Building Dementia-Friendly Communities
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/pOIOOO.pdf>
- Dementia Care Specialist
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/dementia-care-specialist-program.htm>
- Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/consumer/index.htm>
- Is It Dementia: A Resource for Recognizing the Signs of Dementia
<http://isitdementia.com.au>
- Law Enforcement Training from the Alzheimer's Association
www.alz.org/care/alzheimers-dementia-safety.asp
- Silver Alert
<http://www.wisconsincrimealert.gov/silveralert.html>
- Project Lifesaver Home Page
www.projectlifesaver.org
- Safe Return Program
www.alz.org/care/dementia-medic-alert-safe-return.asp
- File of Life
www.folife.org/about.htm

