

Emergency preparedness for persons with dementia: Governmental action in a time of crisis

Public health response to COVID-19 for persons living with dementia in communities, acute care, and long-term care settings

Lisa C McGuire¹ | John Shean² | Molly French²

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA, USA

² Alzheimer's Association, Washington, DC, USA

Correspondence

Lisa C McGuire, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA, USA.
Email: cqu6@cdc.gov

Abstract

Background: Emergencies and disasters can exacerbate or complicate unique vulnerabilities associated with dementia. The Healthy Brain Initiative's State and Local Public Health Partnerships to Address Dementia: The 2018-2023 Road Map calls for addressing the special needs of people with dementia and caregivers in emergency preparedness/response.

Method: During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, public health professionals play a critical role in protecting people living with dementia, their caregivers and families. The Alzheimer's Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) educated public health professionals and partners about the unique challenges associated with dementia during the pandemic and steps to tailor the emergency response. Homes in the community, acute care and long-term care are three settings that require unique public health responses.

Result: Challenges encountered vary by setting. In homes and the community, people living with dementia and their caregivers have been affected by the suspension of adult day services, social events, congregate meals, respite care, peer support groups, community education, physical activity classes and more, including virtual delivery of non-urgent primary care, case management and behavioral health. Many emergency departments and hospitals adopted no-visitor policies to reduce transmission of COVID-19; however, caregivers for people living with dementia provide essential medical and emotional support that aids diagnosis and treatment. Long-term care (LTC) facilities are especially prone to COVID-19 outbreaks due to the concentration of vulnerable older adults, many with some form of cognitive impairment. Provision of person-centered dementia care is hampered by no-visitor policies without caregiver allowances and limited training of professionals working in LTC facilities during the crisis.

Conclusion: Taking immediate public health actions will not only help minimize the negative impacts of COVID-19 on people living with dementia and their caregivers, but also support effective, efficient delivery of person-centered care. Through this session, public health professionals will quickly learn about challenges posed by dementia in these settings, immediate steps to better protect health and safety for this population, and resources their departments can use. Disclaimer: The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the CDC.