AFP AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

MISSING PERSONS

dementia australia

National Missing Persons Coordination Centre

MISSING PERSONS AND DEMENTIA **FACT SHEET**

Those living with dementia or memory loss have a higher risk of going missing

Dementia is the term used to describe the symptoms of a large group of illnesses which cause a progressive decline in a person's mental functioning. It is a broad term, which describes a loss of memory, intellect, rationality, social skills and normal emotional reactions.

A missing person is defined as anyone who is reported missing to police, whose whereabouts is unknown and there are fears for the safety or welfare of that person. As the Australian population ages, people missing as a result of dementia will be a growing concern.

FACTS ABOUT DEMENTIA

Dementia usually has an insidious onset, with most people developing symptoms gradually over a period of years. How and what symptoms develop depends on which parts of the brain are affected by which illness, and the unique characteristics of each individual.

People with dementia may experience confusion, distress, mood changes and aggression as they struggle with the frustrations of everyday life.

There are many different forms of dementia and each has its own causes. The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease.

WHAT ARE THE EARLY SIGNS OF DEMENTIA?

The early signs of dementia are very subtle and vague and may not be immediately obvious.

Some common symptoms are:

- Progressive and frequent memory loss
- Confusion
- Personality changes
- Apathy and withdrawal
- Loss of ability to perform everyday tasks.

MEMORY LOSS

One of the main symptoms of dementia is memory loss. It is persistent and progressive, not just occasional. It may affect the ability to continue to work and to carry out familiar tasks. It may mean having difficulty finding the way home, therefore at risk of being a missing person.

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Alzheimer's disease affects up to 70 per cent of all people with dementia. It is a progressive, degenerative illness that attacks the brain. As brain cells shrink or disappear abnormal material builds up in the centre of the brain cells, and 'plaques' outside the brain cells. This disrupts messages within the brain, damaging connections between brain cells. The brain cells eventually die which means that information cannot be recalled or assimilated. Certain functions or abilities are lost.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Alzheimer's disease often begins with lapses in memory and difficulty in finding the right words for everyday objects. Memory of recent events is the first to be affected, but as the disease progresses, long-term memory is also lost. Symptoms that may cause someone to go missing include forgetting well-known people or places, an inability to process questions and instructions, and emotional unpredictability.

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MISSING PERSONS STATISTICS

- 38,000 people are reported missing each year in Australia – one every 14 minutes.
- There are three groups most at risk of going missing; those living with a mental illness, young people and older people with dementia or memory loss.
- 99.5 per cent of missing persons are located, however; there are approximately 2,000 long-term missing persons in Australia. (missing for more than three months).
- Long-term missing persons tend to be adult males.
- Approximately one third of missing persons go missing more than once – this is particularly the case with young people and for those people with dementia.
- For every missing person reported, at least 12 others are affected whether it is emotionally, psychologically, physically or financially.

DEMENTIA STATISTICS

- Approximately 320,000 Australians have dementia.
- The average rate of moderate to severe dementia among Australians is one in 15 for people aged 65+.
- Dementia affects the lives of more than one million Australians who care for a family member or friend with dementia.
- Dementia can also affect younger people; around 24,700 Australians under the age of 65 have younger onset dementia.
- Between 2000 and 2050, the number of people with dementia in Australia is expected to increase by 327 per cent to 731,000.

Dementia content provided by Dimentia Australia.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

NATIONAL MISSING PERSONS COORDINATION CENTRE

The NMPCC, Australian Federal Police, provides a national leadership and coordination approach to the Australian Government's response to missing persons. Its mission is to reduce the incidence and impact of missing persons.

The NMPCC works within the PLEASE policy principles of Prevention, Location, Education, Awareness, Support and Evaluation.

Find out more by visiting our website.

www.missingpersons.gov.au

DEMENTIA AUSTRALIA

Dementia Australia is the unified, national peak body for people, of all ages, living with all forms of dementia, their families and carers. It provides a voice for people impacted by dementia.

National Dementia Helpline:
1800 100 500

www.dementia.org.au

missingpersons.gov.au
FREECALL 1800 000 634

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