

RISK OF WANDERING: EARLY DETECTION, PREVENTION AND SAFEGUARDING

KEY MESSAGES FOR INFORMAL AND FAMILY CAREGIVERS



Background

Major neurocognitive disorders (MND), the most common being Alzheimer's disease, affect a growing proportion of Quebecers, given our ageing population. The risk of developing an MND increases rapidly with age, especially after the age of 65, and doubles every 5 years. By 2050, the number of cases in Quebec is projected to reach 360 200 (close to 1.5 million in Canada)¹.

People with an MND often wander and become lost. Thankfully, however, **nearly 95% are found within a perimeter of 400 m²**.

Reasons for wandering include...

- restlessness causing a desire to move;
- physical discomfort (e.g., hunger, need to use the toilet);
- a perceived need to find something or someone;
- longing to « go home » (not recognizing their current surroundings and wanting to go somewhere more familiar)

Early detection



Here are some warning signs to look out for:

- Forgetting the way to familiar places.
- A tendency to reproduce past routines, e.g., mentioning old obligations.
- Physical or verbal repetition (repetitive speech and actions), behaving differently or becoming nervous in public or crowded areas.
- Sleep disturbances: sleeping during the day; insomnia, wakefulness or agitation at night.
- Boredom due to a lack of appropriate activities or stimulation.
- Stress, agitation, confusion, disorientation or fear.
- Disorientation and anxiety at home.

1. Société Alzheimer Canada. (2022). Rapport 1 | Les troubles neurocognitifs au Canada : Quelle direction à l'avenir. Source : https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/Landmark-Study-Report-1-Path_Alzheimer-Society-Canada.pdf.

2. Office of the Premier. (2011). Watching Out For Ontario's Most Vulnerable Seniors. Source: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/18098/watching-out-for-ontarios-most-vulnerable-seniors>. Fédération québécoise des Sociétés Alzheimer. « La route vers des projets pilotes Silver », présentation PowerPoint.



Preventive strategies to reduce the risk of wandering³

Reach out for support and discuss your concerns with a counselor you trust. They can support you in implementing measures to safeguard your home and reduce the risk of your loved one becoming lost. A variety of resources and devices are available for this purpose.

Try to identify situations, routines, places and moments where your loved one tends to wander. Keeping a diary of when and where your loved one tends to wander may give you clues as to what is triggering the behaviour and help you find appropriate solutions.

Consider adapting your loved one's living environment to address specific needs. Try disguising doors by covering them with posters or wall hangings. Consider purchasing alarms which will alert you when a door is opened. Keep car keys out of sight. Ask a counselor to help identify technological devices that suit your needs, such as audio monitors to track your loved one's whereabouts.

Review your loved one's medication list with their pharmacist or physician, and discuss alternatives as needed. It may be possible to switch to drugs which are less likely to cause spatial and temporal disorientation.

Encourage your loved one to be physically active. Walking together is a great way to stay active. Regular physical activity can reduce agitation by releasing pent-up energy.

Ensure your loved one keeps regular sleeping hours and avoids long naps.

Make sure your loved one always carries identification (or wears a MedicAlert bracelet).

Create a plan to be prepared in case of an emergency. Here are some things you can do now:

- Keep a list of people you can contact for help, including their telephone numbers.
- Add your loved one to an information form, if one is available in your area. This expedites the process of locating vulnerable persons by making essential personal information readily available to responding officers.
- Keep a recent photo and updated medical information on hand to share with police.
- Keep a list of places where your loved one may wander.

What to do if your loved one is missing



The sooner you ask for help, the sooner your loved one is likely to be found.

- If possible, search the area where the person was last seen for about 15 minutes.
- Call 911 and report to the police that a person with an MND is missing. Police are trained to act swiftly and provide support.
- Alert friends and neighbours to the situation.
- Have someone stay at home in case your loved one returns.
- Contact someone who can support you and help you cope with the stress of the situation.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

- **911**
- [Alzheimer Society](#)
consult your area's Alzheimer Society for invaluable advice and support
- [Appui – Proches aidants](#)
contact the Caregiver Support Helpline for counselling, information and referrals, every day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., free of charge at 1-855-852-7784
- [Info-Santé 811](#)
free and confidential telephone consultation service



3. Tips from Canadian Alzheimer associations and medical professionals suggest the following.
Source: <https://www.bayshore.ca/resources/how-to-prevent-a-loved-one-with-dementia-from-wandering/>.