

# Health and safety tips

for caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias



Alzheimer's disease is the **sixth-leading cause of death** in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Alzheimer's disease and other dementias, though underreported in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations, is a growing problem.<sup>2</sup> With **approximately 90%** of family members providing long-term **caregiving to loved ones** in AI/AN families, it is important that caregivers offer a safe and culturally reflective environment for their loved ones.<sup>3</sup> Given the COVID-19 pandemic, health and safety factors are particularly critical.



## Major safety considerations<sup>4</sup>

### Avoid obvious risks.

- Hide and secure all lethal means and kitchen appliances
- Lock-up medication
- Disable stove when not in use
- Disable firearms and keep them securely stored in a gun safe

### To prevent wandering outside:

- Install locks on exterior doors that are hidden
- Use motion sensors to signal coming and going
- Have your loved one wear an ID bracelet or necklace



## COVID-19 guidance<sup>5, 6</sup>

- Increased confusion is often the first symptom of illness for people living with dementia
  - ◆ If your loved one shows rapidly increased confusion, call your health care provider for advice
- Call your health care provider if your loved one has COVID-19 symptoms
- If you get sick, have a backup caregiver for your loved one



## Stay engaged despite social distancing<sup>7</sup>

- Participate in virtual powwows via social media
- Engage in traditional crafts, such as making regalia or beading
- Engage in traditional medicine gathering, such as gathering sage, cedar, and nettle

### Practice other ceremonies

- Smudge
- Drum and Sing
- Pray with others over the phone or via video chat

### Virtual visits

- Plan video calls at a time when your loved one can best handle them

## Tips to improve communication<sup>8</sup>

Prepare a list of questions before speaking with health care providers. Conversations can be difficult with someone who has dementia. To improve communication with your loved one, use the following tips:

- Use simple and direct language
- Avoid sarcasm and figures of speech
- Speak respectfully
- Be mindful of body language and tone
- Make eye contact

## Feeling overwhelmed?

Call the Alzheimer's Association 24/7 helpline at 866-232-8484

## Sources

- <sup>1</sup> Hebert, L. E., Weuve, J., Scherr, P. A., & Evans, D. A. (2013). Alzheimer disease in the United States (2010-2050) estimated using the 2010 census. *Neurology*, 80(19), 1778-1783. doi:10.1212/WNL.0b013e31828726f5
- <sup>2</sup> CMS. (2016). *Emerging LTSS Issues in Indian Country: Alzheimer's and Dementia*. Retrieved from [https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/American-Indian-Alaska-Native/AIAN/LTSS-TA-Center/pdf/CMS-319\\_LR-BP-MiniTopics\\_Alzheimers-and-Dementia.pdf](https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/American-Indian-Alaska-Native/AIAN/LTSS-TA-Center/pdf/CMS-319_LR-BP-MiniTopics_Alzheimers-and-Dementia.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Institute of Medicine. (2008). *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce*. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12089>
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Rural Health. (2020). *Caregiver Video Series*. Retrieved from <https://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/vets/resources.asp#dem>
- <sup>5</sup> Alzheimer's Association. (2020). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Tips for Dementia Caregivers*. Retrieved from [https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)-tips-for-dementia-care](https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving/coronavirus-(covid-19)-tips-for-dementia-care)
- <sup>6</sup> CDC. (2020). *Additional COVID-19 Guidance for Caregivers of People Living with Dementia in Community Settings*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/caregivers-dementia.html>
- <sup>7</sup> CMS. (2020). *COVID-19 in Indian Country: Considerations and Resources for LTSS*. [Webinar]. Retrieved from <https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/American-Indian-Alaska-Native/AIAN/LTSS-TA-Center/LTSS-Webinars>
- <sup>8</sup> See Footnote 4