



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

CASES OF PERSONS LIVING WITH DEMENTIA WHO GET LOST AND GO MISSING IN CANADA

May 2025



Public Safety
Canada

Sécurité publique
Canada



3. A coffee shop visitor living with frontotemporal dementia goes missing while upset

Personal information

Name: Frank Jamieson.

Age: 66 years old.

Gender: Man, pronouns are he/him.

Living situation: Single-family home with partner in Calgary, Alberta.

Social support: Judy, his common-law partner of 10 years.

Health: Frontotemporal dementia, schizophrenia, chronic back pain, heart failure, trouble sleeping, and prostate enlargement. Takes medications for these conditions.

Interests: Walking his dog, fixing cars, watching TV, and gardening.



Background

Diagnosis and health management

Frank was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was 50. Frank manages his symptoms using medication and support from Judy and his doctor.

Recent changes in behaviour

Frank has become more outgoing lately, regularly going to coffee shops. Judy wonders if he wants to socialize because he is lonely or if his personality has changed. Sometimes, Frank acts without thinking about the results of his actions. Additionally, it is hard for Frank to speak, especially when tired or anxious. Judy worries about their limited money.



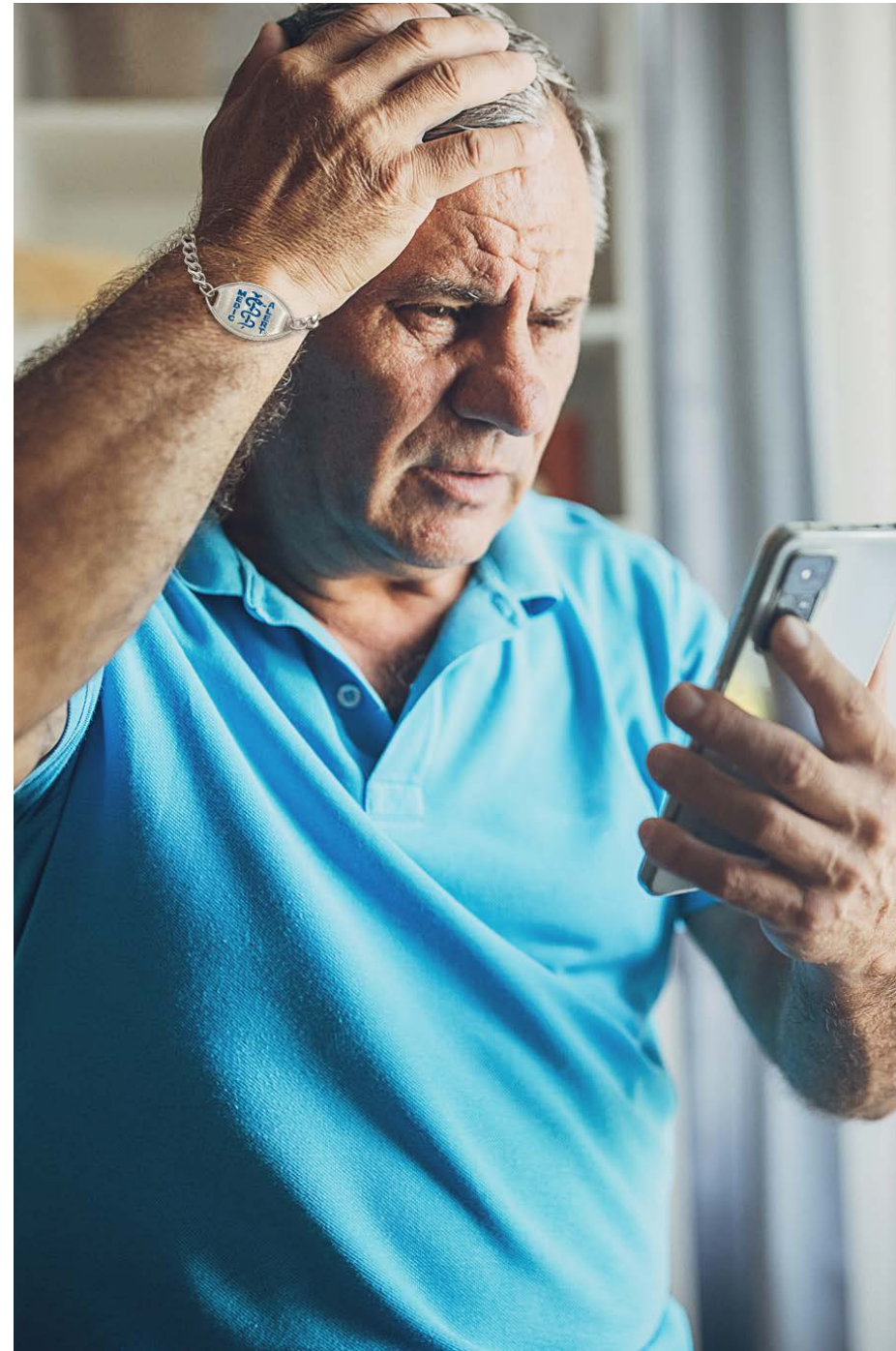
History of missing incidents

Previous incident

Two months ago, Frank got lost on a cold winter day. He kept walking until he was tired. A transit officer noticed something unusual at a train station and called the police. He called the phone number on Frank's MedicAlert® bracelet to help him.

Current ways Frank is managing the risk of getting lost

Judy thought about using locator devices, technology that tracks movements and locations. But she found them too costly. Frank has a cell phone now, but Judy worries he might not know how to use it when he feels confused. For this reason, Judy made an emergency contact card for Frank to keep in his wallet to help him share Judy's contact information in case of an emergency.



The day of the incident

– Getting lost

1. The argument

Frank's doctor tells him that he will not be able to drive as the dementia progresses. At the same time, Judy thinks it might be time to sell one of their cars to save money. Frank becomes upset because he does not want to stop driving. He shouts at Judy and goes outside to the garage where he always goes after an argument. Judy feels worried that he might hit her or hurt himself. She thinks it best to give him time alone to cool down, and she busies herself with housework. Before Judy realizes it, an hour has passed since she last saw Frank.

2. Frank is missing

Judy calls Frank, but he does not answer. She wonders if he is out walking the dog, but the dog is in the living room. Judy checks the garage, the yard, and the places Frank usually goes. She starts to feel scared. She calls the MedicAlert hotline to say that Frank is missing. Judy does not want to call the police and make Frank more upset.



The day of the incident

– Being found

1. A visit to the coffee shop

Frank walks to one of his usual coffee shops. A worker who knows him notices he looks upset. Frank orders his regular and sits down at the back of the coffee shop.

After two hours, the coffee shop worker looks over and sees that Frank is still at the table, looking tired and slumped over. She asks if Frank needs help. Frank's speech is hard to understand.

2. A police officer and staff member help

The staff member has assisted people from the community before when they needed help. She knows to look for a MedicAlert bracelet and that police should be contacted. She calls the MedicAlert hotline. The hotline operator calls Judy's number but that cellphone number is out of service.



Another patron who is an off-duty police officer comes over to help. He recognizes Frank from the neighbourhood. The police officer has another idea. He asks Frank for his wallet to try and find another phone number to call. He finds the “In Case of Emergency” identification card and get Judy’s phone number from it. She picks up right away. The police officer agrees to stay with Frank until Judy arrives.

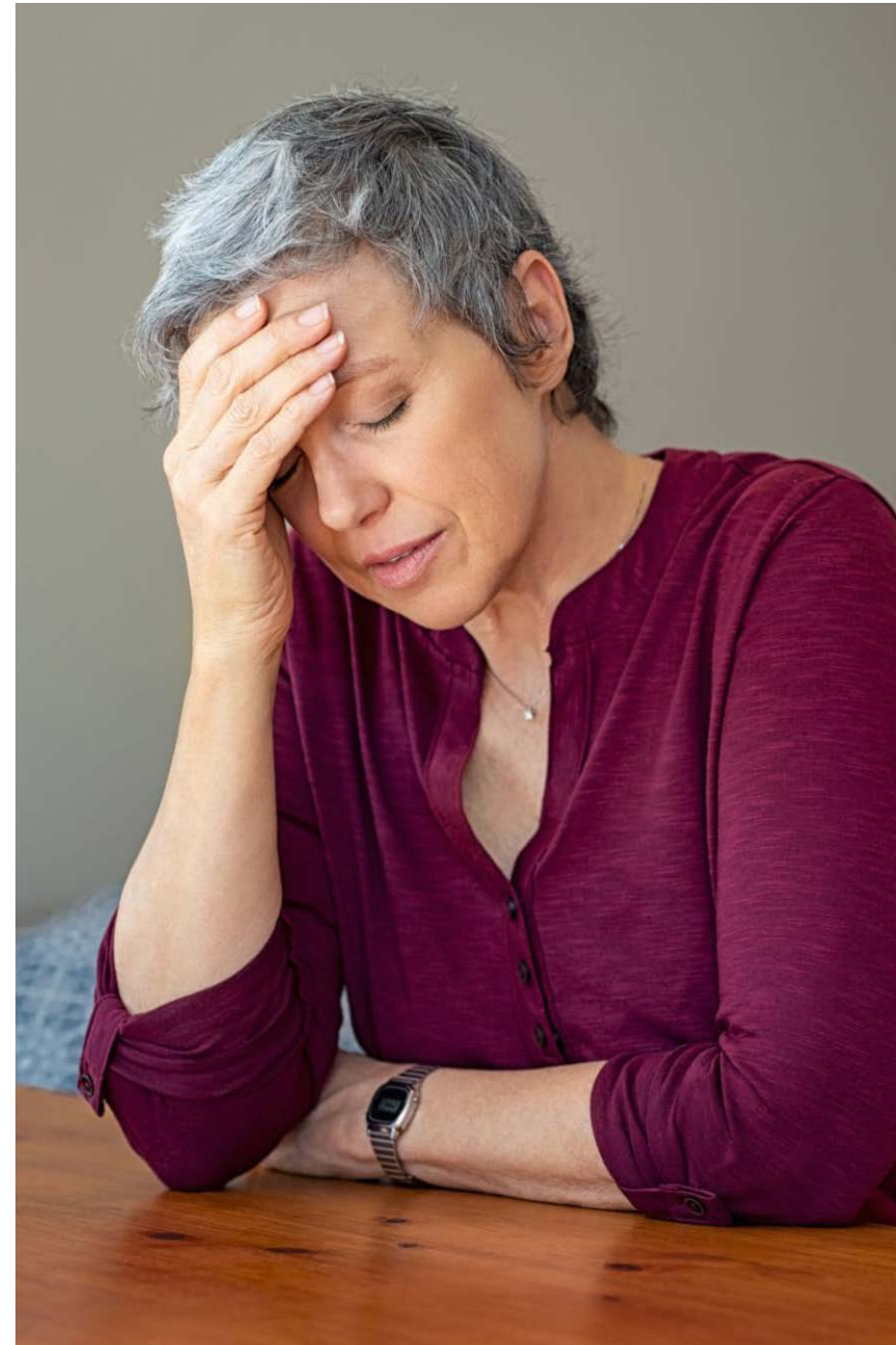
3. Judy picks up Frank

Shortly after, Judy arrives at the coffee shop and meets Frank. The MedicAlert hotline calls to check that they are back together, and that Frank is safe. Judy tells them she changed her cell phone number and that she had forgotten to update Frank’s MedicAlert file.



After the incident

Judy thinks about what will happen if she cannot look after Frank. She wonders about a public guardian, who helps with legal, money, and personal safeguarding for those who are unable. Judy knows that arguments with family members are common and nothing to be ashamed of. However, she wonders whether Frank's escalating anger means that he needs more support. She feels guilty for thinking this. Judy decides to get more help and makes an appointment with the Alzheimer Society. They help people with dementia and their families find support and plan for the future. She will get more information about in-home supports and look into other options for Frank's future care.



Resources

Caring for a person living with frontotemporal dementia can be challenging. It can put a strain on family and social relationships. For more information, please see:

- Understanding dementia: the-ria.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/UnderstandingDementia_Final.pdf.
- Frontotemporal dementia: alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/other-types-dementia/frontotemporal-dementia?gclid=CjwKCAjw3P0hBhBQEIwAqTCuBvmITOE151chYZxF6--sh15AHC4kXo-huCUVSJe_Nt5SIPT4doGOvx0CO_IQAvD_BwE.

A missing incident is an emergency. Call 911 right away and share any factors that may have contributed to the incident, such as arguments. These clues help police and other searchers plan their search.

- The Calgary Older Adult Resource Network has a helpful resource that describes what to do if someone goes missing: missingseniors.ca/someone-missing/

Consider creating an “In Case of Emergency card”. This card can be printed and placed in the wallet, purse, or clothing of the person at risk of going missing. Many versions are available. The version below was developed by the Calgary Missing Older Adult Resource Network. It can be retrieved on page 13 of the Resource Guide for People at Risk of Going Missing located here: missingseniors.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Resource-guide-for-people-at-risk-of-going-missing.pdf.



MedicAlert is a service that provides emergency medical information. The bracelet should be worn at all times so that first responders and medical personnel can access a person's emergency contacts and medical information.

In Case of Emergency	
Full Name	_____
Date of Birth	_____ Blood type _____
Address	_____
Cell	_____ Work _____ Home _____
Current Meds	_____
Conditions	_____
Physician	_____ Phone _____
Allergy/additional Info	_____
In Case of Emergency	
Emergency Contact #1	_____
Relationship	_____ Work Phone _____
Cell Phone	_____ Work Phone _____
Emergency Contact #1	_____
Relationship	_____ Work Phone _____
Cell Phone	_____ Work Phone _____
Additional Info	_____
_____ Last updated _____	



Resources

Toolkit to manage the risk of getting lost and going missing for people living with dementia.

This toolkit contains strategies to help with the common concerns of people living with dementia and their care partners regarding the risks of becoming lost.

Emergency card

People living with dementia can carry an “In Case of Emergency” card. It has important information to help them if they go missing. This card was made by the [Calgary Missing Older adult Resource Network](#), see page 16.

The Herbert Protocol

Important details about the person at risk can be gathered in The Herbert Protocol. This information can help first responders when someone is missing. Keep this information at home on your fridge and give it to care partners. Click this link to access the [‘Resource Guide for Older Adults at Risk of Going Missing’](#); fill out the form on pages 15-20.

Safety and leisure activities

Balancing leisure time with safety can be challenging. [The Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering](#) provides strategies to promote safe wandering and manage the risk of getting lost when doing leisure activities.

Driving with dementia

It can be challenging to drive a car when the driver has a hard time remembering, navigating, and attending to the environment. This [Driving and Dementia Roadmap](#) includes safety considerations related to driving with dementia.

In Case of Emergency	
Full Name	_____
Date of Birth	_____ Blood type _____
Address	_____
Cell	_____ Work _____ Home _____
Current Meds	_____
Conditions	_____
Physician	_____ Phone _____
Allergy/additional info	_____
In Case of Emergency	
Emergency Contact #1	_____
Relationship	_____ Work Phone _____
Cell Phone	_____ Work Phone _____
Emergency Contact #1	_____
Relationship	_____ Work Phone _____
Cell Phone	_____ Work Phone _____
Additional Info	_____
_____ Last updated _____	

Locator devices

Locator devices help people living with dementia share their location with family in case they are lost. They may also help the police find people should they go missing. The [Alzheimer Society of Canada](#) shares more information about the purposes of locator devices. The [University of Waterloo Aging and Innovation Research Program](#) outlines features of locator devices, including cost and battery life.

What to do if you find a missing person

A missing incident is an emergency. Call police and ask the operator or service how you can help. [A video from Dementia Network Calgary](#) outlines a missing incident involving a person living with dementia and how to help.

Links

- **Toolkit** to manage the risk of getting lost and going missing for people living with dementia, made by the University of Waterloo. <https://uwaterloo.ca/managing-risks-of-disappearance-in-persons-living-with-dementia/toolkit-0>
- **“In Case of Emergency” card** made by Calgary Missing Older Adult Resource Network. See page 14. <https://missingseniors.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Resource-guide-for-people-at-risk-of-going-missing.pdf>
- **The Herbert Protocol** described by Calgary Missing Older Adult Resource Network. See pages 15-20. <https://missingseniors.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Resource-guide-for-people-at-risk-of-going-missing.pdf>
- **The Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering.** https://canadiansafewandering.ca/#more_information
- **The Driving and Dementia Roadmap.** <https://www.drivinganddementia.ca/>
- **Locator device overview**, as described by the Alzheimer Society of Canada. <https://alzheimer.ca/en/help-support/im-caring-person-living-dementia/ensuring-safety-security/tracking-devices>
- **Locator device features**, as described by the University of Waterloo Aging and Innovation Research Program. <https://uwaterloo.ca/aging-innovation-research-program/locator-devices>
- **What to do if you find a missing person.** Dementia Network Calgary’s video dementianetworkcalgary.ca/



For more information

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