



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



## 6. An outdoor enthusiast with undiagnosed memory changes gets lost while hiking

### Personal information

**Name:** Janice Brown.

**Age:** 84 years old.

**Gender:** Woman, pronouns are she/her.

**Living situation:** Lives in Kelowna, British Columbia with her adult child, Louis, and his spouse.

**Social support:** Louis, Janice's 50-year-old son; Bernice, Janice's younger sister.

**Health:** Some memory decline, hyperthyroidism, high blood pressure, fractured wrist in 2010. Takes antithyroid medications, high blood pressure medication, and pain relievers.

**Interests:** Spending time outdoors, canoeing, hiking, cross-country skiing, and gardening.





## Background

### Janice's life and family

Janice lives with her son Louis and his spouse. They moved in with her after Louis noticed Janice becoming forgetful. Recently, Louis found her keys in the fridge. Janice could not remember putting the keys there. Janice attributes her memory decline to normal aging.

### Louis buys a locator device

Louis recently got a locator wristband for his mom. He hopes the tracking device's GPS can be used to find his mother if she gets lost. He asked her to wear it in case she ever got lost, but Janice refuses.

### Camping trip with Bernice

Janice has spent many of her adult years camping with her friends and family. At 84, she still enjoys being out in nature. Janice planned her annual camping trip with her sister Bernice for a weekend in June. The plan was to camp for one night. Janice had not told Bernice about her memory changes and periods of disorientation.



## The day of the incident

### – Getting lost

#### 1. Getting ready for the trip

As they pack, Janice offers to make coffee but suddenly cannot operate the coffee maker and asks Bernice to take over. Bernice finds it odd but does not think much of it.

#### 2. Setting up camp

Once they arrive at the campsite at 5:00 pm, Bernice and Janice set up a campfire. Janice is having a great time until the campfire smell becomes too strong for her. She tells Bernice she will get some fresh air and that she will be back soon.

#### 3. Exploring a trail

While walking, Janice recognizes a familiar trail. She decides to explore it but gets hungry and decides to go back to the campsite.

#### 4. Lost on the trail

Janice realizes she does not know where she is, and that the temperature is getting colder. She knows she's camping with her sister but does not know why she is alone. She sits on a rock, trying to retrace her steps, but starts to cry from fear.





## The day of the incident

### – Being found

#### 1. Bernice calls 911

Bernice becomes worried when Janice does not return. The campsite does not have cellular service, so she drives to the visitor centre to call 911. Police arrive 30 minutes later and through questioning Bernice, find out that Janice might be living with dementia. They call the local volunteer search and rescue (SAR) team.

#### 2. A formal search begins

The SAR search manager receives a call from the police. The search manager dispatches 12 volunteers while they prepare the command truck and the equipment. It will take at least an hour before the volunteers arrive at the campsite. They canvas the area and begin their search 30 minutes later. The volunteers are assigned to search connected trails. Searchers have radios, GPS navigators, and backpacks containing first aid and search equipment.

Some use e-bikes and others search on foot. They call Janice's name, use whistles, and look for evidence such as foot prints. They search within tall bushes located off-trail. They check in with the search manager at the command post using their radios. The search manager knows what part of the area has been checked by using GPS tracking on the searchers. They continue planning their next steps.



### 3. Janice is located

After searching for about 50 minutes, two searchers, Sandra and Hafiz, find Janice sitting on a rock by a footbridge. They ask her name and she tells them that it is Janice. She appears uninjured and can walk, but is cold, hungry, and very tired. She is also confused and disoriented. Sandra and Hafiz radio the command post to let them know Janice had been found. The search manager dispatches an all-terrain vehicle with a wheeled stretcher to Janice's location.

### 4. Waiting for help to come

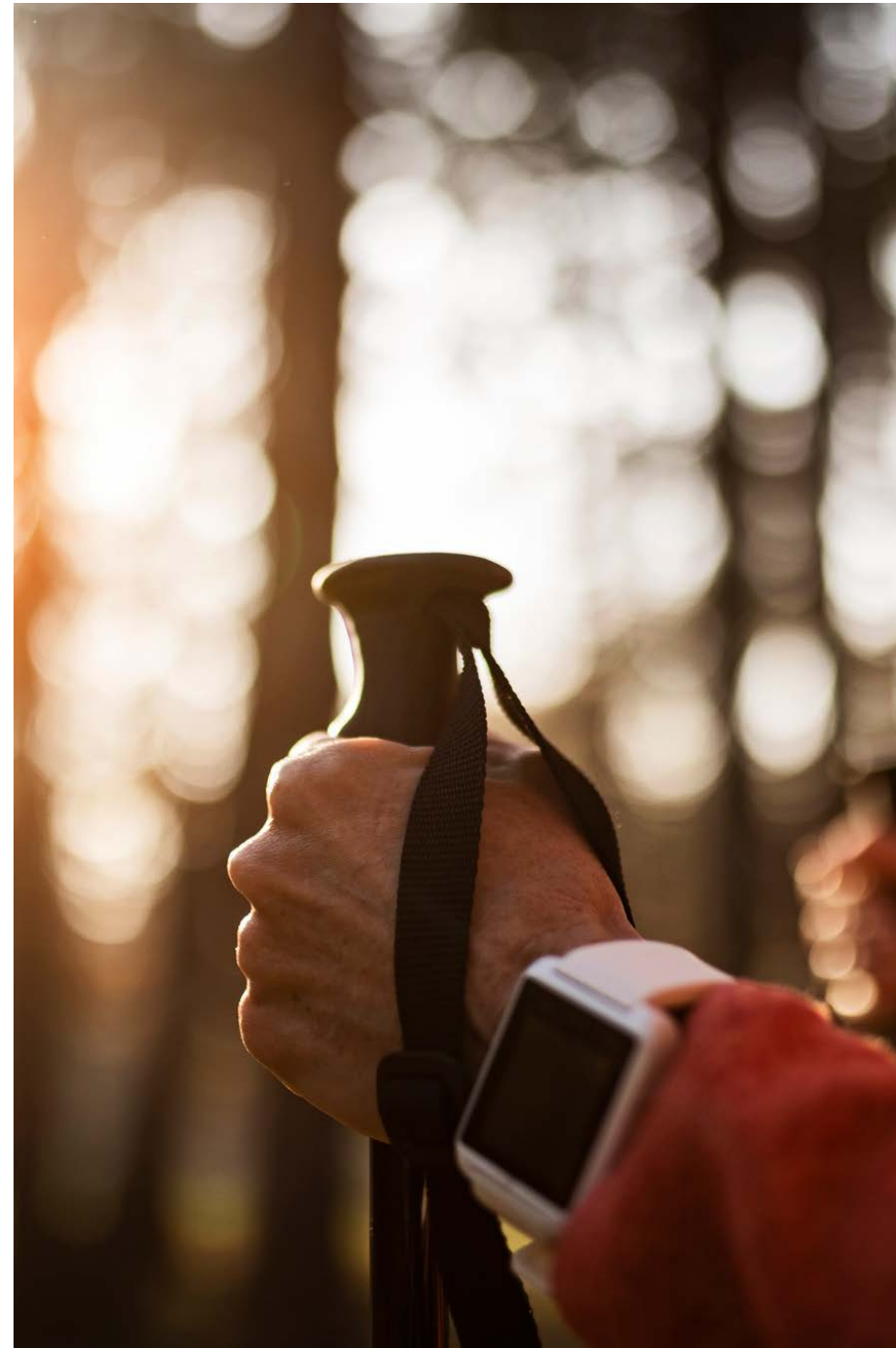
While they wait for help to arrive, they give Janice a survival blanket, a snack, and they make her a warm cup of tea. About 20 minutes later, the team with the stretcher arrives in an all-terrain vehicle. They secure Janice on the stretcher to ensure that she makes it back to the campsite safely, and upon their return, the ambulance meets them. The paramedics give Janice clearance to return home with Bernice.



## After the incident

### Janice agrees to wear the locator device

Bernice and Janice drive home, deciding not to continue the camping trip. Louis and Bernice talk to Janice about her memory issues and safety. Janice agrees to wear her locator device when outdoors and to see her doctor about her memory decline. Janice's family is relieved she is safe.





## Resources

Participating in leisure activities that contribute to one's quality of life while maintaining safety can be challenging. The Canadian Guideline for Safe Wandering is a tool that can be used to explore a person's level of risk of going missing and identify strategies to maintain safety. This website can be found here: [canadiansafewandering.ca/#more\\_information](https://canadiansafewandering.ca/#more_information).

There are differences between normal aging and dementia. The following resource published by the Alzheimer Society of Canada explains these differences: [alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/do-i-have-dementia/differences-between-normal-aging-dementia](https://alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/do-i-have-dementia/differences-between-normal-aging-dementia).

Getting a dementia diagnosis can be a long process. The following resource explains testing for dementia: [alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/do-i-have-dementia/how-get-tested-dementia-tips-individuals-families-friends#:~:text=If%20you%27ve%20determined%20that,an%20official%20diagnosis%20of%20dementia](https://alzheimer.ca/en/about-dementia/do-i-have-dementia/how-get-tested-dementia-tips-individuals-families-friends#:~:text=If%20you%27ve%20determined%20that,an%20official%20diagnosis%20of%20dementia).







## 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](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/](https://dementianetworkcalgary.ca/)



# For more information

## Please contact:

**Lili Liu, PhD, OT Reg (Ont.)**

Professor, School of Public Health Sciences  
Dean, Faculty of Health  
University of Waterloo

**519-888-4567 ext. 42126**

**[lili.liu@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:lili.liu@uwaterloo.ca)**

**Christine Daum, PhD, OT Reg (AB)**

Research Assistant Professor,  
University of Waterloo  
**[cdaum@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:cdaum@uwaterloo.ca)**



Public Safety  
Canada

Sécurité publique  
Canada