

# Dementia Resource Toolkit for First Responders

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**Healthy Brain Initiative**  
**Los Angeles**

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## Introduction

In 2019 there were more than 177,000 Los Angeles residents aged 55 years and older living with Alzheimer’s disease (Ross, et al., 2021). Among this population, the prevalence of Alzheimer’s disease cases is projected to increase 135% by the year 2040. With this rapid increase, first responders—such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), and paramedics—are more likely to interact with individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias and be called upon to respond to dementia-related incidents such as:

- Critical Missing Persons
- House Calls involving Falls
- Driving Violations and Auto Accidents
- Shoplifting
- Abuse

By gaining a better understanding about dementia, first responders will be in a better position to communicate and assist individuals with dementia in the community.

*It’s not a question of **whether** law enforcement will be dealing with Alzheimer’s disease, but rather **when** we’ll encounter Alzheimer’s disease, and **how** we’ll respond.*

International Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d.

Dementia is a syndrome in which there is deterioration in cognitive function, affecting parts of the brain that control memory, judgment, thinking, and personality causing an individual to behave adversely to emergency situations (National Institute on Aging, 2021). Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia. However, Alzheimer’s is only one of hundreds of types of dementia.

Although age is the most significant risk factor for developing dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, there are forms of dementia like early-onset Alzheimer’s that can impact people in their forties. (Mendez, 2017)

Especially in early stages of the disease, it may not be immediately obvious that an individual has dementia. The following symptoms and behaviors are common signs of dementia first responders can look for:

- Aggression, easily agitated, frustrated, or overwhelmed
- Confusion
- Difficulty remembering
- Inability to follow instructions
- Refusing help or fearfulness of those attempting to help
- Repetition
- Sensory impairments (vision and hearing)

*Dementia is a physical disease of the brain – it is NOT a mental illness or a psychiatric condition.”*

Joseph Herrera, MSW, Rancho Los Amigos/USC  
California Alzheimer’s Disease Center

## About Toolkit

This digital toolkit is designed to increase awareness among first responders—such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMTs, and paramedics—of the special needs of individuals with dementia and their caregivers. Included materials provide information and tips related to the following:

1. Common scenarios and behaviors
2. Recognizing symptoms and behaviors
3. Effective communication tips
4. Online trainings
5. Locally available resources for older adults and their caregivers

## Education and Training

### Common Scenarios and Behaviors

First responders might interact with individuals with Alzheimer’s or another form of dementia who may exhibit disruptive, uncooperative, disoriented, or confused behavior. As the disease progresses, this population may also have difficulty communicating and understanding what is happening – or that their safety is at risk.

Below are some common scenarios and behaviors you might encounter as a first responder among individuals experiencing dementia (Arbor Company, 2016).

### **Due to problems with memory, forgetfulness, and confusion...**

an individual with dementia who is found **wandering**

- may be lost in familiar places
- may appear disheveled or disoriented
- may have an inconsistent or conflicting account of events

### **Due to difficulty communicating or understanding and impaired judgment...**

an individual with dementia who is a **victim or a perpetrator of a crime**

- may be at risk for fraud or abuse
- may forget to pay or believe that they already paid for items at the store
- may be unaware of the situation and/or unable to recall what happened
- may wander away from the scene of an accident or an unsafe situation

an individual with dementia who is **hallucinating or experiencing delusions**

- may be disruptive or suspicious of others
- may report false accounts of abuse, burglary, or stealing
- may deny that they called 911 or asked for help

an individual with dementia who is receiving a **welfare check**

- may be experiencing self-neglect or abuse in the home
- may be at risk for falls or in need of medical attention
- may be unable to be left unsupervised

an individual with dementia who is **pulled over for a traffic violation**

- may be lost and disoriented
- may appear intoxicated or have slurred speech
- may have difficulty locating their license and proof of insurance
- may be at much greater risk of unsafe driving














“Recognizing and understanding the mental state of others, particularly when it differs from that of the officer, can **enhance interactions and guide decision-making** for an optimal, mutually beneficial outcome.”

International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2021

## Communication Tips

Individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias experience changes in language, ability to understand words, and the ability to follow instructions. Refer to these communication tips if an individual has difficulty understanding what you are saying and needs help during crisis situations (Arbor Company, 2016).

### ***Remember: Adapting Your Approach is Vital***

<b>Dos</b>	<b>Don'ts</b>
 <b>Introduce yourself</b> and address them by their preferred name.	 <b>Don't expect</b> them to conform to present day reality.
 <b>Meet at eye level</b> , even if they are seated or wheelchair bound.	 <b>Don't exclude</b> the person from conversations.
 <b>Keep it simple</b> , use basic words, simple sentences, and a friendly tone.	 <b>Don't correct</b> , argue, or use negative words like “no,” “don’t” or “can’t.”
 <b>Ask one question</b> at a time.	 <b>Don't counter</b> aggressive behavior.
 <b>Offer reassurance</b> that they are safe and in good hands.	 <b>Don't restrain</b> unless necessary.
 <b>Be patient</b> , wait 10-20 seconds for a response, and repeat back if necessary.	 <b>Don't make assumptions</b> , the disease affects each person differently.
 <b>Listen</b> if the caregiver or companion is trying to give you important information.	

### Additional Tips



- **Understand their reality** may be based on long term memories of past.
- **Redirect** the person’s focus if they become agitated or emotional.
- **Use physical cues** to show them what you want them to do.
- **It's okay to laugh** to lighten the mood and make communication easier.

## Online Trainings

First responders are increasingly called to assist individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementias in crisis situations and therefore, you should be familiar with the types of incidents that are likely to occur when interacting with these individuals.

The following table provides a list of free, self-paced training videos designed for first responders to enhance existing dementia knowledge.

Free Online Training	Description	Duration
<p><a href="#"><u>Approaching Alzheimer’s: First Responder Training</u></a> Alzheimer’s Association</p>	<p>Access an online course with 6 videos and quizzes. You will receive a certification after course completion. Topics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An overview of dementia</li> <li>● Wandering</li> <li>● Driving</li> <li>● Abuse and neglect</li> <li>● Shoplifting</li> <li>● Disaster response</li> </ul>	2 hrs
<p><a href="#"><u>First Responder Dementia Training</u></a> The Arkansas Geriatric Education Collaborative</p>	<p>Access an online course with 6 modules and quizzes. You will receive a certification after course completion. Topics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding the signs and symptoms of dementia and Alzheimer's disease</li> <li>● Communications and feelings</li> <li>● Wandering, elopement, and aggressive behaviors</li> <li>● Elder justice training</li> <li>● Delusions, hallucinations, and hoarding</li> <li>● Natural disasters and repetitive behaviors</li> </ul>	2 hrs
<p><a href="#"><u>Training Videos for First Responders</u></a> Alzheimer’s Los Angeles</p>	<p>Watch 4 short videos of common scenarios when encountering individuals who may have Alzheimer’s disease or memory loss. Topics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Traffic stops</li> <li>● Wandering</li> <li>● Home confrontation</li> <li>● House call</li> </ul>	15 min
<p><a href="#"><u>Alzheimer's Disease &amp; Memory Loss</u></a> San Diego County Office of Emergency Services</p>	<p>Watch this video to learn about visual cues, mannerisms and sensitivities that you might notice when responding to house calls involving individuals with Alzheimer’s disease or memory loss.</p>	10 min

<p><b><u>3 Stages of Alzheimer’s</u></b></p> <p>International Association of Chiefs of Police</p>	<p>Watch this short presentation for a quick summary on the signs, symptoms, and behaviors that law enforcement might observe across the early, middle, and late stage of Alzheimer's Disease.</p>	<p>10 min</p>
<p><b><u>L.A. Found Program</u></b></p> <p>Los Angeles County Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services</p>	<p>Watch this video to learn about the L.A. Found program and wearable technology used in Los Angeles County to return wandering individuals to their home.</p>	<p>5 min</p>

### Other Action Steps I Can Take...



Request additional training. Collaborate with a local organization like **Alzheimer’s Los Angeles** or **Alzheimer’s Association, Southland Chapter** for more dementia-specific resources, and to request in-person first responder dementia training.



Promote awareness of wearable identification such as **MedicAlert**, tracking technology programs such as **L.A. Found**, and voluntary registries like **Special Alert** which assists with identifying and reuniting a wandering, missing or lost individual with their loved ones.

### Additional Information

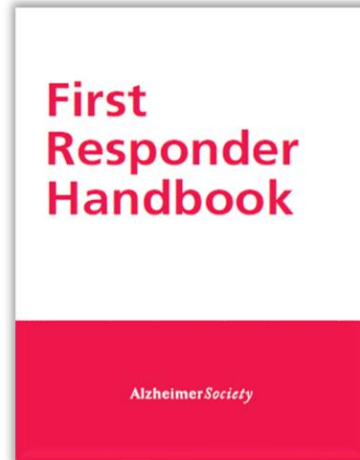
Learn new skills and gain ideas around dementia communication and approaches that can be adapted and applied in your own community to better serve this population. The following reading materials provide best practices and tools for first responders engaging with individuals with dementia.



**First Responder Handbook**

*This handbook includes tips on how to recognize, communicate with, and respond to someone with Alzheimer’s disease or other dementias.*

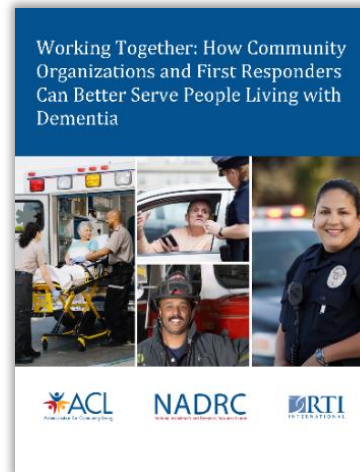
Alzheimer’s Society of Canada, 2021



**Working Together: How Community Organizations and First Responders Can Better Serve People Living with Dementia**

*This guide includes common scenarios on keeping individuals with dementia safe and best practices for a community approach to serving this population.*

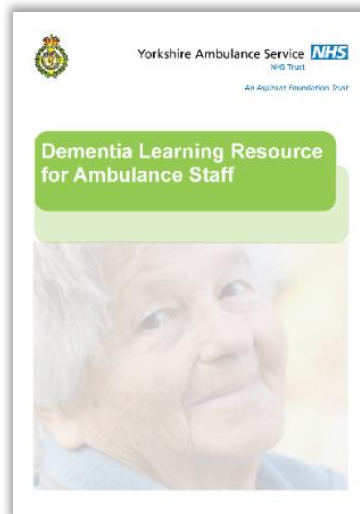
Administration for Community Living and National Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center, 2018



**Dementia Learning Resource for Ambulance Staff**

*This guidebook discusses person-centered communication tips and effective strategies for working with individuals with dementia.*

Yorkshire Ambulance Service, National Health Service, n.d.



## Responding to People with Dementia

This tip sheet describes dementia and provides information and communication strategies for encountering someone with dementia and information on wandering.

Alzheimer's Los Angeles, 2019

**Responding to People with Dementia**  
Tips for Law Enforcement

**What is Dementia?**  
The term "dementia" describes a group of symptoms that affect memory, language, thinking, judgment, personality and behavior. When changes caused by dementia become severe, a person's ability to do things they used to do declines and they may get lost or wander.

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The term "dementia" describes a group of symptoms that affect memory, language, thinking, judgment, personality and behavior. When changes caused by dementia become severe, a person's ability to do things they used to do declines and they may get lost or wander.

**Encountering Someone with Dementia**  
Learn changes caused by dementia can impact persons that do not have memory or know or the community. There are a number of factors to consider when law enforcement encounters a person with dementia, including traffic accidents, domestic violence or medical emergencies. Be alert for the following information:

- Do not be startled or alarmed by the person's behavior.
- Do not respond when the person is not speaking to you.
- Do not argue with the person or try to correct them.
- Do not touch the person without their permission.
- Do not use force or physical restraint unless absolutely necessary.
- Do not use physical force or physical restraint unless absolutely necessary.
- Do not use physical force or physical restraint unless absolutely necessary.

Alzheimer's Los Angeles | 646.HELPAAL | AlzheimerLA.org

## Quick Tips for First Responders

This brochure includes communication tips for responding to dementia-related incidents like, driving, wandering, shoplifting, abuse and more.

Alzheimer's Association, 2020

**alzheimer's association**  
Quick Tips for First Responders

**WANDERING CALLS**  
Recognize Wandering  
Look for someone who is...  
• Acting confused, disoriented  
• Inappropriate behavior  
• Not recognizing family members  
• Acting in a way that is unusual for them  
• Acting in a way that is dangerous to themselves or others

**DRIVING CALLS**  
If you receive a call about a person driving...  
• Do not attempt to stop the person from driving unless you are trained to do so.  
• Do not attempt to stop the person from driving unless you are trained to do so.

**SHOPLIFTING CALLS**  
If a store employee reports a person who is...  
• Acting confused, disoriented  
• Inappropriate behavior  
• Not recognizing family members  
• Acting in a way that is unusual for them  
• Acting in a way that is dangerous to themselves or others

**DISASTER RESPONSE**  
If you are responding to a disaster...  
• Do not attempt to stop the person from driving unless you are trained to do so.  
• Do not attempt to stop the person from driving unless you are trained to do so.

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION RESOURCES  
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## File of Life

This emergency preparedness tool is a resource you can provide in the community. Individuals can document critical medical information helpful for first responders. You can contact the Department of Aging for copies at no-cost at 213-482-7252.

City of Los Angeles Department of Aging, n.d.

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**  
NAME/Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ SEX: Female  
ADDRESS/Direccion: \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE/Telefono: \_\_\_\_\_  
DOCTOR: \_\_\_\_\_  
DOCTOR PHONE/Telefono de doctor: \_\_\_\_\_  
NATIVE LANGUAGE (if not English) Idioma Materno (si no habla ingles): \_\_\_\_\_

**EMERGENCY CONTACT**  
NAME/Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS/Direccion: \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE/Telefono: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEDICAL DATA**  
CHECK ALL THAT APPLY - ANOTAR SI SE APLICA DE ALGUNAS DE LAS SIGUIENTES:  

<input type="checkbox"/> No known medical conditions	<input type="checkbox"/> Hearing impaired
<input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes	<input type="checkbox"/> High cholesterol
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Penicillin	<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Aspirin
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Shellfish	<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Eggs
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Latex	<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Medication
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Anesthetics	<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Blood Products
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Contrast Dye	<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to X-ray Contrast
<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Allergic to Other

**RECENT SURGERY/Cirujias recientes**  
DATE/FECHA: \_\_\_\_\_ SURGERY/CIRUJIA: \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you have a completed POLST?  Yes  No  
¿Tiene ordenes de resuscitación POLST?  SI  NO

## Supporting Caregivers

As first responders, you will likely interact with families and caregivers experiencing high levels of stress from caregiving responsibilities.

During house calls or calls for service, you can support caregivers in the following ways:



**1. Check-In with the Caregiver**

Encourage caregivers to practice self-care and seek respite, and professional advice for any questions they may have



**2. Promote Early Detection**

If you feel someone is experiencing unusual brain changes or has undiagnosed dementia suggest they talk to their primary care provider or see a specialist to receive a cognitive assessment or a neuro-psychological evaluation



**3. Refer to Local Resources**

Share the resources listed below with families, and caregivers for additional information related to older adults and caregivers.



## Resources for First Responders

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Interacting with individuals with dementia can be overwhelming, especially during crisis situations. Resources are available to assist with de-escalation strategies, information, geriatric, and psychiatric evaluations and reporting abuse and neglect.

Below is a list of technical support resources you can access 24/7.

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### REPORTING ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT

1. **Los Angeles County Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services** offers Adult Protective Services (APS) program. APS is a system of in person response to reports of abuse and neglect among adults 60 years or older. To report suspected abuse, complete this <https://bit.ly/APS-Intake> or contact APS by phone immediately.

**Contact Information**

Call: (877) 477-3646

Website: <https://bit.ly/WDACS-APS>

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### GERIATRIC AND PSYCHIATRIC MEDICAL CARE

2. **USC Verdugo Hills Hospital Mobile Crisis Evaluation Team** provides geriatric and psychiatric (5150) evaluations for adults 50 years or older who may be a danger to self, danger to others, gravely disabled, agitated, aggressive, suicidal. If someone you encounter someone in this scenario, contact the Mobile Crisis Team and they will send a clinician to conduct an evaluation.

**Contact Information**

Call: (818) 952-2270

Website: <https://bit.ly/USCVHH>

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### ALZHEIMER'S ORGANIZATIONS

3. **Alzheimer's Los Angeles** provides free programs and services including care counseling and provides technical assistance, education, and training for first responders.

**Contact Information**

Call: (844) 435-7259

Email: [professionaltraining@alzla.org](mailto:professionaltraining@alzla.org)

Website: <https://bit.ly/AlzLA-Prof>

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4. **Alzheimer's Association** offers a 24/7 Helpline that is available in over 200 languages and staffed by dementia experts to assist first responders in crisis management, de-escalation tips, emotional support and creation of action plans.

**Contact Information**

Call: (800) 272-3900

Website: <https://bit.ly/Alz-SoCal>

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## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

5. **Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health** provides 24/7 mental health assessments and referrals to a variety of services and support to mitigate stress and promote wellbeing.

**Contact Information**

Call: (800) 854-7771

Website: <https://bit.ly/LACDMH>

6. **Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services** provides crisis support and suicide prevention services.

**Contact Information**

Call: (888) 807-7250

Website: <https://bit.ly/DIDIHIRSCH>

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## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

7. **City of Los Angeles Department of Aging** offers the File of Life (FOL) program at no cost. You can download a FOL or request free copies and distribute this tool in the community. The FOL allows individual to document critical information that can support first responders during medical emergency house calls.

**Contact Information**

Call: 213-482-7252

Website: <https://bit.ly/DOA-FOL>

## Resources for Older Adults and Caregivers

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Below is a list of resources for older adults, families, and caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's disease or related dementias. The information is specific to:

- Community Referrals
- Caregiver Support
- Alzheimer's Organizations
- Emergency Preparedness
- Reporting Elder Abuse and Neglect
- Legal Services
- Mental Health, Crisis Support, Suicide Prevention

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### COMMUNITY REFERRALS

1. **City of Los Angeles** offers MyLA311, and it provides information about community and program services including emergency alert response systems, care management and multipurpose senior centers in the City of Los Angeles.

**Contact Information**

Call: 311 or (213) 473-3221

Website: <https://bit.ly/MYLA-311>

2. **Los Angeles County** offers 211LA, and it provides information about programs and resources such as healthcare, transportation, housing, and food needs for individuals living in Los Angeles County.

**Contact Information**

Call: 211

Website: <https://bit.ly/211-LAC>

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### CAREGIVER SUPPORT

3. **USC Family Caregiver Support Center** provides assessments, consultations, respite, education, and training specifically for family caregivers.

**Contact Information**

Call: (800) 540-4442

Email: [fcscgero@usc.edu](mailto:fcscgero@usc.edu)

Website: <https://bit.ly/FCSC-USC>

4. **L.A. Found** helps families and caregivers of individuals living with Alzheimer's, dementia, autism and other cognitive impairments by providing trackable technology (free of charge) to Los Angeles County residents who are prone to wandering or getting lost.

**Contact Information**

Call: (833) 569-7651

Email: [LAFound@wdacs.lacounty.gov](mailto:LAFound@wdacs.lacounty.gov)

Website: <https://bit.ly/LAFOUND>

5. **Geriatric Evaluation Networks Encompassing Services Intervention Support Programs (GENESIS Program)** offers individual and family counseling, medication services, education and support for older adults ages 60 and above who are homebound with mobility, frailty, or other limitations.

**Contact Information**

Call: (213) 351-7284 or the 24/7 Helpline at (800) 854-7771

Website: <https://bit.ly/DMH-GENESIS>

6. **USC Verdugo Hills Community Resource Center for Aging** offers support for family caregivers including legal and financial help, food and medication delivery, and end of life and grief support.

**Contact Information**

Call: (818) 949-4033

Email: [aging-resources@med.usc.edu](mailto:aging-resources@med.usc.edu)

Website: <https://bit.ly/AgingResources>

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## ALZHEIMER'S ORGANIZATIONS

7. **Alzheimer's Los Angeles** provides free care counseling, community education and support programs to individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders and their family caregivers.

**Contact Information**

Call: (844) 435-7259

Email: [help@alzheimersla.org](mailto:help@alzheimersla.org)

Website: <https://bit.ly/Alz-LA>

8. **Alzheimer's Association** provides education, information, and planning tools for individuals living with dementia and their caregivers. The Alzheimer's Association's 24/7 Helpline is available in over 200 languages and staffed by dementia experts to assist in crisis management, emotional support, and creation of action plans.

**Contact Information**

Call: (800) 272-3900

Website: <https://bit.ly/Alz-SoCal>

9. **Rancho Los Amigos/USC California Alzheimer's Disease Center (CADC)** conducts cognitive assessments and provides support for individuals and families living with a dementia diagnosis in addition to treatment and education.

**Contact Information**

Call: (562) 385-8130

Website: <https://bit.ly/Rancho-CADC>

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## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

10. **City of Los Angeles Department of Aging** offers the File of Life (FOL) program at no cost. The FOL can provide critical information to first responders during medical emergency house calls. You can download a FOL on their website or contact the Department of Aging for copies.

**Contact Information**

Call: 213-482-7252

Website: <https://bit.ly/DOA-FOL>

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## REPORTING ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT

11. **Los Angeles County Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services** offers the Adult Protective Services (APS) program. APS provides a system of in person response to reports of abuse and neglect among adults 60 years or older. To report suspected abuse, complete this <https://bit.ly/APS-Intake> form or contact APS by phone immediately.

**Contact Information**

Call: (877) 477-3646

Website: <https://bit.ly/WDACS-APS>

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## LEGAL SERVICES

12. **Bet Tzedek** offers free legal services such as advanced care planning, housing protection, and elder abuse education for low-income seniors.

**Contact Information**

Call: (323) 939-0506

Website: <https://bit.ly/Bet-Tzedek>

13. **Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles** provides help with legal planning, rent assistance, and applying for benefits such as Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and In Home Supportive Services for veterans and older adults.

**Contact Information**

Call: (800) 399-4529

Website: <https://bit.ly/LA-FLA>

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## **MENTAL HEALTH, CRISIS SUPPORT, SUICIDE PREVENTION**

14. **Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Helpline** provides mental health screening and assessments, help with developing a care plan after a diagnosis, and referrals to additional services.

**Contact Information**

Call: (800) 854-7771

Website: <https://bit.ly/LACDMH>

15. **Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services** provide crisis support, substance abuse and suicide prevention services.

**Contact Information**

Call: (888) 807-7250

Website: <https://bit.ly/DIDIHIRSCH>

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