

Canadians need to be vigilant about this disease

Toronto, ON, January 17, 2011 -- Wandering, one of most dangerous side effects of Alzheimer's disease, recently took the life of a 66-year-old woman who was found frozen to death near her Scarborough home.

Sadly, this is a grim reality of Alzheimer's disease that, as it progresses, causes people to become increasingly disoriented and confused.

"The person with Alzheimer's disease may not recognize what you and I see as potentially dangerous," explains Mary Schulz, national education director, Alzheimer Society. "They may leave the house in frigid temperatures wearing only a nightdress and slippers, or get trapped in some bushes or a ditch and may not know how to get out. Manifestations of the disease can also occur without prior warning. The pressure on caregivers, family and friends is enormous, just keeping up with the constant change in signs and symptoms as the disease advances. While we can't comment on the details of this case, we extend our condolences to the family. This is a heartbreaking situation that, sadly, happens all too often. Families need tremendous practical support to prevent these tragedies from happening in the first place."

One such practical program is the Alzheimer Society's national registry called [Safely Home](#)[®]. Run in collaboration with the RCMP, the program helps police find individuals with dementia so they can be returned to the safety of their home. While no one strategy will guarantee a person's security, [Safely Home](#)[®] serves as an important component of a family's overall plan to better manage the disease and keep the person affected as safe as possible.

More importantly, a national dementia strategy can mitigate these types of occurrences which will increase with the soaring prevalence of Alzheimer's disease. The Alzheimer Society is working with governments at all levels to initiate such a plan that, among other issues, would address the need for wider education and improved dementia training and preparedness across all community and health sectors, from emergency care settings to long-term care homes.

Alzheimer's disease is the leading form of dementia accounting for 64 per cent of all dementia cases in Canada. It is a fatal progressive disease of the brain that robs memory and steals the ability to reason, communicate and perform daily tasks. Changes in the brain can begin to appear decades before diagnosis and progression can last up to 10 years. Eventually, the person affected will require 24-hour care and supervision. Age is the single biggest risk factor but the disease can also strike as early as 40. Currently, a Canadian is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia every five minutes. In less than 25 years, this figure will accelerate to one every two minutes.

About the Alzheimer Society

The Alzheimer Society is the leading nationwide health organization for people affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias in Canada. The Society is a principal funder of Alzheimer research and training, provides enhanced care and support to people with the disease, their families and their caregivers, and is a prominent voice within all levels of government. Active in more than 150 communities across Canada, the Society is also a founding and key member of Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI), an organization at the forefront of worldwide efforts to put an end to the disease.

For more information about Alzheimer's disease or to learn about [Safely Home[®]](#), visit www.alzheimer.ca.

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