

# COLORADO

DEPARTMENT of PUBLIC HEALTH and ENVIRONMENT

## CASE STUDY

# PREPARING FIRST RESPONDERS for INTERACTIONS with PEOPLE with DEMENTIA

## IMPLEMENTATION of the HEALTHY BRAIN INITIATIVE ROAD MAP

### PROBLEM

Emergency Medical Service (EMS) providers receive many calls to assist people living with Alzheimer's and other dementias. However, they have little or no formal training to prepare them for the unique physical, behavioral, and communication challenges related to dementia. This lack of training can lead to some hospitalizations and emergency department visits that could be averted if EMS providers better understand how to respond to people with Alzheimer's.

### SOLUTION

To develop a dementia-competent workforce throughout Colorado, which is a strategic goal of the *Healthy Brain Initiative Public Health Road Map*, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) partnered with the Alzheimer's Association Colorado Chapter to deliver its well-established *Approaching Alzheimer's: First Responder Training* program. CDPHE marketed the availability of the free, in-person training through its internal networks

and all 11 of Colorado's Regional Emergency and Trauma Advisory Councils. The department also created a *Tips for EMS Working with People with Alzheimer's* poster to leave with EMS providers following the *Approaching Alzheimer's* training course.

### INITIAL OUTCOMES

CDPHE arranged *Approaching Alzheimer's* training at three events for a total of 95 EMS providers, some of whom serve rural and frontier service areas.

The training helps first responders do their job quickly and effectively by knowing how to best serve people with Alzheimer's in situations involving:

- Wandering
- Disasters or other emergency situations
- Abuse or neglect
- "Shoplifting" because they forgot to pay
- Driving

EMS providers who receive this Alzheimer's first

#### KEY POINTS

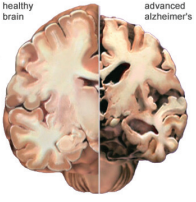
- EMS personnel are frequently the first to respond to people with dementia, but often have little or no dementia-specific training.
- In-person first responder training can educate EMS personnel to best ensure the safety and security of people living with dementia

responder training gain knowledge and skills that help de-escalate crisis situations involving people living with dementia, such as by trying alternative solutions to taking them to emergency departments if such care is not necessary.

### TIPS FOR EMS WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH ALZHEIMER'S


THERE ARE 67,000 PEOPLE AGE 65 AND OLDER WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE IN COLORADO. THAT NUMBER IS EXPECTED TO GROW TO 76,000 BY 2020.

**ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE AND OTHER RELATED DEMENTIAS** are progressive impairments of cognitive function that affects a person's thinking, emotions and behavior. Signs include: memory impairment, aphasia (language disturbance), apraxia (impaired motor function), agnosia (failure to recognize otherwise-familiar objects) and disturbance in executive function (failure to plan, organize and think abstractly). These are not mental illnesses.



---

WHEN ENCOUNTERING A PERSON WITH ALZHEIMER'S



#### COMMUNICATE

Use the **TALK** tactics:

- T**ake it slow
- A**sk simple questions
- L**imit reality checks
- K**eep eye contact

DO

DON'T

- Approach slowly and from the front
- Introduce yourself and explain you are there to help
- Remain calm, smile and use a friendly voice
- Speak slowly and allow time for response (15-30 seconds)
- Change the subject to something pleasant if the person becomes agitated

- Take comments personally
- Approach from behind without warning
- Argue or correct the person
- Touch without asking/ explaining
- Forget about co-morbidities

24/7 HELPLINE 800.272.3900  
ALZ.ORG/CO

Workplace flyer posted after completion of EMS training.

This brief is supported by Cooperative Agreement #5 NU58DP006115, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The findings and conclusions in this brief are those of the Alzheimer's Association and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.