



CAREGIVER RESOURCE

When a Vulnerable Person Goes Missing

A Resource Guide for Caregivers and Families · Indigo Alert Canada · September 2026

In an emergency, always call 911 first.

There is no required waiting period before reporting a missing vulnerable person to police in Canada. Act immediately.

IMMEDIATE STEPS

1 Call 911 immediately

- Tell the dispatcher the person has a cognitive condition such as autism, dementia, or an intellectual disability.
- Use the word "wanders" or "elopement" — this signals to police the person may not respond to their name or understand danger.
- Request the missing person be flagged as a vulnerable individual in the police database.
- Ask about any local alerts or notifications that can be activated in your area.

2 Have this information ready

- Full legal name, date of birth, physical description (height, weight, hair colour, eye colour).
- Recent photograph — ideally taken within the last 30 days.
- What they were wearing when last seen.
- Diagnosis and how it affects their behaviour (e.g., non-verbal, attracted to water).
- Any medications and how long they can safely go without them.
- Favourite places, routes, or destinations they are drawn to.

3 Mobilize your network

- Contact family members, neighbours, and anyone who knows the person.
- Post on local Facebook community groups with a clear photo and description.
- Contact local businesses near where they were last seen.
- Check any tracking devices they may wear (GPS watch, AirTag, etc.).

- **Check water first** — ponds, rivers, pools, drainage areas. Individuals who wander are disproportionately drawn to water.
- Check enclosed spaces: sheds, garages, vehicles, under porches.
- Search familiar routes and places the person has visited before.
- Do not assume they have travelled far — many are found within 1.5 km of where they went missing.
- Keep your phone on and stay in contact with the search coordinator.

PREPARE BEFORE IT HAPPENS

- **Register with police** as a vulnerable person — many services maintain voluntary registries (e.g., RCMP Vulnerable Persons Registry).
- **Use GPS tracking** — GPS watches, shoe inserts, or sewn-in tags.
- **Create ID** — a medical alert bracelet or card with the person's name, diagnosis, and an emergency contact number.
- **Keep a current photo on file** — take one monthly.
- **Inform neighbours and nearby businesses** — brief your community on the risk.
- **Install door and window alarms** — simple chime alarms are inexpensive and effective.
- **Register with MedicAlert SafetyNet** — provides 24/7 emergency response linked to a medical ID bracelet.
- **Create a written emergency plan** — share it with all caregivers, schools, and care facilities.

THE ALERT GAP IN CANADA

Canada's Amber Alert system was designed for child abductions and requires evidence of an abduction to activate. A non-verbal child with autism or a senior with dementia who walks away from home does not qualify — no matter how serious the risk.

Indigo Alert Canada is working to change this by establishing a new emergency alert category for vulnerable missing persons across all Canadian provinces and territories. Learn more at indigoalertcanada.com.

This resource is provided for informational purposes. In an emergency, always call 911.