



## People Living with Dementia are at Risk for Abuse

Older adults who live alone, are socially isolated, or who are in fragile health may be more susceptible to experiencing abuse. A person living with dementia can be especially vulnerable to someone who takes advantage of them. Legal professionals can help by being alert to indicators of abuse or neglect:

- Physical injury, such as bruises, burns, skin tears, or broken bones
- Appearance of being malnourished or dehydrated, or unusual weight loss
- Signs of anxiety, depression, or confusion
- Care partner shows anger or indifference toward the person with dementia
- Hesitation or fear to talk openly in the presence of a care partner
- Clothing that is inappropriate for the weather, dirty/torn, or ill-fitting
- Strained or tense relationships or frequent arguments between the care partner and person with dementia
- Appear unsure or do not understand the documents they are signing
- Person experiencing abuse fears loss of independence, abandonment, or placement in a nursing home

## How to Help

Legal professionals can help those living with dementia by implementing dementia-friendly practices and by reporting suspected elder or dependent adult abuse to Adult Protective Services (APS). APS is a program administered by Aging & Independence Services (AIS), a department of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency.

APS serves older adults aged 60 and older, as well as dependent adults aged 18-59, who are being harmed, or threatened with harm, to ensure their right to safety and dignity.

Contact APS (see below) if you observe, suspect, or have knowledge of physical abuse, financial abuse, abduction, isolation, abandonment, neglect by others, or self-neglect. Anyone can report suspected abuse, not just legally mandated reporters.

## Make a Report

**Call AIS at (800) 339-4661**

Members of the public can make an anonymous report through this 24-hour reporting line for suspected elder or dependent adult abuse.

Mandated reporters, including legal professionals, are required to file a report by phone or online at

**[www.sandiego.leapsportal.net/LEAPSIntake](http://www.sandiego.leapsportal.net/LEAPSIntake)**

To learn more, visit:

- **National Center on Elder Abuse**  
**[www.ncea.acl.gov](http://www.ncea.acl.gov)**



## Dementia-Friendly Tips and Elder Abuse Prevention for Legal Professionals

For more resources and information for older adults, call (800) 339-4661 or visit **[www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov](http://www.aging.sandiegocounty.gov)**



**Legal matters can be complex and overwhelming for people with dementia and their care partners, but planning is key. Dementia-friendly legal and advance care planning services can help. These services can bring peace of mind by helping vulnerable clients express their wishes early, such as who they would like to appoint as a future guardian. They also can prevent problems in the future, such as unpaid expenses, squandered resources, financial abuse, neglect, or exploitation.**



## 10 Signs and Symptoms of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD)

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life
2. Challenges in planning or solving problems
3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks
4. Confusion with dates, time, or place
5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships
6. New problems with words
7. Misplacing objects; unable to retrace steps
8. Decreased or poor judgment
9. Withdrawal from work or social activities
10. Changes in mood or personality

To learn more, visit [alz.org/10signs](https://alz.org/10signs) for a detailed overview of the signs and symptoms.



## Guidelines to Addressing Legal and Advance Care Planning Challenges

- Meet with clients in a private setting.
- Include the care partners who will be assuming greater responsibility over decision-making as the dementia progresses (as appropriate).
- Utilize the American Bar Association's (ABA) *Assessment of Older Adults with Diminished Capacities: Handbook for Lawyers* to assess client capacity.
- Utilize the PRACTICAL Tool (ABA) which helps lawyers identify and implement decision-making options that are less restrictive than guardianship.
- Ensure that the client's preferences are captured in writing.
- Involve other parties in legal and advance planning discussions when possible, including the client's healthcare provider or geriatric care manager.
- Plan funeral and burial arrangements in advance, if possible, to provide peace and reduce anxiety for the person with dementia and their family.

# Making Your Legal Practice Dementia Friendly

## Legal & Financial Planning

- Recognize changing abilities when planning to reduce the risk of abuse, fraud, neglect, or exploitation.
- Encourage advance care planning, such as the completion of Advance Healthcare Directives and POLST forms, to document values, wishes, and decision-makers.
- Encourage financial planning, such as estate planning, revocable living trusts, and power of attorney (established with capacity). Early, person-centered planning can often prevent the need for guardianship.
- Develop a plan for long-term care in the client's preferred setting.
- Include the person living with dementia in discussions and decisions when possible.

## Support Services

- Learn about local dementia resources and help families connect to care and support.
- Contact the County of San Diego Public Guardian Team at **(800) 339-4661** to explore if a case should be investigated.

## Education & Resources

- Share lessons learned and best practices to promote dementia-friendly principles within the field and community.
- Request a free Dementia Friends session for your staff or community to learn practical ways to support individuals living with dementia and their care partners:

☎ **(858) 495-5500**

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