

Ensuring North Simcoe Muskoka Seniors Remain Safe Amid COVID-19

January 10, 2022 - The North Simcoe Muskoka Specialized Geriatric Services program, Alzheimer Society Muskoka, Alzheimer Society Simcoe County, Prevention of Seniors Abuse Network Simcoe County and Barrie Police want to ensure that older adults and their caregivers remain safe amid continued COVID-19 restrictions.

With the Omicron variant causing COVID-19 cases to rise again in the region and province, restrictions will continue to isolate our older adults and their caregivers. Rising cases, fewer health care providers, renewed restrictions, shorter daylight hours and colder temperatures, can contribute to several key safety concerns for our older adults:

- **Wandering** – for older adults with dementia who may wander, their health and well-being is at risk if they wander from their homes without the knowledge of their caregivers;
- **Elder Abuse** – for caregivers, the burden of care can become stressful putting older adults at risk for intentional or unintentional elder abuse, including neglect.
- **Cyber-security** – for older adults and caregivers who are relying more on technology to stay connected with loved ones and to support contact with health care providers, cyber-security is a risk.

Across the region a variety of resources do exist to support older adults and caregivers reduce risk, like the Alzheimer Society of Ontario's Finding Your Way program, MedicAlert® Safely Home® program, Project Lifesaver, It's Not Right resources targeting elder abuse, and both Cyber-Seniors and Telus-Wise which promote cyber safety.

Be a good neighbour. If you know or suspect an older adult and/or caregiver is at risk, reach out to offer a hand. You can also encourage families and friends to access the resources available online. Together, we can ensure we keep our seniors as safe as possible during COVID-19!

For information on caring for seniors, please visit the NSM SGS website's [COVID-19 web page](#).

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RESOURCES

Finding Your Way Ontario

In 2014, the Alzheimer Society of Ontario, in partnership with the Ontario government and the Ontario Provincial Police, created a program entitled [Finding Your Way Ontario](#). The driving force was concern over deaths that have occurred as a result of missing incidents and the recognized need for awareness and prevention.

The program has three main goals – raise awareness of the risk of people with dementia going missing, help prevent missing incidents by the creation of a safe plan, and support the safe return of those missing.

More than 14,000 Simcoe Muskoka residents over the age of 65 are living with dementia. Statistics show that six out of ten of those 14,000 go missing. At least 75% of those that go missing are found less than half a kilometre away from home or where they were last seen. Being lost can be distressing and has the potential to be dangerous. A safety plan and/or locating device can shorten the time spent looking for a lost person with dementia.

Accessing the resources offered by [Finding Your Way](#) can assist families and caregivers in ensuring their loved ones remain safe. In addition, Finding Your Way works with [MedicAlert@SafelyHome®](#) in the provision of locating devices that contain critical information and a 24/7 Emergency Hotline engraved on the unique blue bracelet worn by each person with dementia.

Project Lifesaver Simcoe – Bringing Loved Ones Home

The Barrie Police and South Simcoe Police have recently joined the ranks of police services that offer the Project Lifesaver program. [Project Lifesaver Simcoe \(PLS\)](#) is a search and rescue program operated around the world by public safety agencies, and is strategically designed for “at risk” individuals who are prone to the life threatening behavior of wandering.

Project Lifesaver Simcoe uses a watch-sized bracelet that emits a unique FM radio frequency signal every second. When someone goes missing, police use a satellite receiver tuned to pick up their frequency. Using an FM frequency, not GPS, allows the bracelet to work even when a person is in a building or tunnel. Via a direct link to the [MedicAlert®](#) database, local emergency responders can instantly access descriptive information, up-to-date photo and data about past wandering tendencies. Secondly, if a local emergency responder comes across a MedicAlert® subscriber who appears lost and confused or unable to communicate, they can look for the MedicAlert® ID and directly access vital information needed to identify and return them home safely.

Caregivers need to register their loved ones through the [Project Lifesaver Simcoe](#). Volunteers will assist with the registration process and ensure individuals are added to the database.

Call 1-249-888-0249 to leave a message to speak with a PLS volunteer for more information or visit [projectlifesaversimcoe.ca](#).

Cyber-Seniors

[Cyber-Seniors](#) bridges the digital divide and connects generations through technology. It does so through the development and dissemination of resources that enable community organizations to provide tech-training for senior citizens using an intergenerational, youth volunteer model.

Youth are provided with lessons and learning activities to enable them to act as digital mentors. Senior citizens gain access to effective technology training and intergenerational communities that keep them socially connected and engaged.

Telus Wise

Free-of-charge, [TELUS Wise®](#) offers interactive and informative workshops and resources to help empower Canadians of all ages to have a positive experience online.

TELUS Wise® seniors' workshops engage Canadian seniors in a discussion about getting the most out of participating in our growing digital society, safely. Topics include Internet, social media, mobile device safety, protecting yourself from identity theft and common scams.

To learn more, access resources or book a workshop visit telus.com/WiseSeniors.

Elder Abuse

The [It's Not Right](#) website and resources represent the very best collective thinking in Canada for public education on abuse and neglect of older adults.

It's Not Right is a "train the trainer model" offering one day workshops for those who want to become presenters on how to prevent elder abuse. Once individuals have gone through the workshop, they can then make presentations to interested parties. The [Prevention of Senior Abuse Network Simcoe County \(PSAN-SC\)](#) has several trained presenters and anyone interested can book a one-hour presentation. Attendees learn to recognize the warning signs of abuse and small practical steps that help ensure seniors are safe and respected.

To learn more, access resources or book a workshop visit [It's Not Right](#) or [Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario](#).