

## COVID-19 Hot Topics in Independent Living: How to Help People Living with Dementia in IL Navigate Coronavirus?

In various independent living settings for older adults, there are people who are living with dementia and struggling to understand and practice the prevention measures necessary during the coronavirus crisis. To help people living with dementia navigate the 'new reality' of coronavirus, here are a few "Hot Topics" from your fellow LeadingAge Members:

- **How are Members Managing the “Information Overload?”** During a time of crisis, it is normal for anyone to feel overwhelmed by the volume of information to consume and retain. LeadingAge LPC members are helping their residents – including those with dementia – get information in these ways:
  - **Communicating frequently, at predictable intervals.** Routine is a key component of managing memory loss. LeadingAge members are communicating frequently, and at predictable times, so that a routine is established that residents can trust and follow.
  - **Placing information where people naturally look to find it.** Some members have established areas where printed or online materials can be easily found. Others are including flyers or memos with key information along with meals and other deliveries each day.
  - **Offering communication in print as well as virtually/ verbally.** Printed materials are tremendously helpful to those with memory loss; members are offering printed materials to ensure everyone gets the message – and can review it repeatedly if needed.
  - **Posting signs and reminders everywhere people go.** Signs posted that remind people to wash their hands, wear PPE, practice social distancing, and other key reminders from CDC are now commonplace in many member organizations. Common areas can be hallways, elevators, mail boxes – anywhere people are still moving through routinely.
  - **Using “robo-calls” or automated messages that people can record and replay.** Some LPC members have phone-call systems that enable them to do a phone broadcast to all residents; others have call-in lines with recorded messages that residents can listen to. These are being used to give updates and reminders that people can access and record, if needed.
  - **Turning OFF the News:** To avoid overwhelming residents, especially those who live with memory loss, some LPC communities are turning public TVs to channels that do not feature a constant news stream on the current crisis. This approach not only avoids confusion, but it helps redirect people from anxiety-producing news or editorial commentary.
  
- **How are Members Managing Residents’ Support Networks?** LPC members are supporting people living with dementia by supporting the people who care for them. Here are a few examples:
  - **Calm repetition by staff:** LPC members have prepared their staff members to calmly repeat current information to residents, and some have special training programs to identify and address residents known to be living with dementia in IL. Front desk staff, for example, are trained by member communities to recognize and repeat key information at request to those who struggle with memory loss.
  - **Collaboration with Family:** LPC members are involving the family of residents known to have memory challenges even more than before, due to the current crisis. Encouraging family to check in more by phone, or working with therapeutic recreation staff, for

example, to host virtual visits or “FaceTime” calls are a couple ways members are doing this.

- **Education of Companions and Caregivers.** For residents known to be reliant on companions or caregivers for activities of daily living, some LPC members have reached out to these important individuals. They are offered education and connection with credible resources, such as the CDC or the Alzheimer’s Association, for tips on how to best support their client/ loved one in preventing the spread of the virus.
- **How are Members Managing the Environment and Safety?** In many LPC communities, residents living with dementia in IL are known and followed by an interdisciplinary team, social worker, or Chaplain. Residents who may present a risk of wandering are of especial concern. Members are addressing this risk during coronavirus by:
  - **Actively reviewing those at risk with staff.** LPC members review frequently with key staff members – such as front desk staff, gatehouse staff, security guards, and those doing deliveries – which residents are at risk for wandering, and how to respond if they do wander or are unable to be found.
  - **Encouraging family members to use wearable tracking devices.** LPC members are encouraging families or responsible parties to consider having their loved one wear a tracking device, such as bracelets, watches, or shoes designed for that purpose.

As the coronavirus pandemic and response continues to evolve, new and updated resources for all aging services providers will be posted to [www.leadingage.org/COVID19](http://www.leadingage.org/COVID19). Please visit frequently to get the latest news and updates.