**SENIORS IN SENIOR HOMES CAN WANDER AROUND AND HAVE DEADLY ENDINGS.**

**The Washington Post recently conducted a research effort to ascertain the capability of assisted-living homes to care for their senior residents.**

The Washington Post survey of assisted-living homes (senior homes) disclosed that many seniors with memory problems (that includes most of us) have had unfortunate fates when they could wander off on their own.

Since 2018 more than 2000 seniors have wandered away at all times of the day, and more than 100 have perished. Data on these deaths are not collected by anyone, so we can assume that there are a few more than were noted in this Post investigation.

Including victims of Alzheimer’s disease, dementia is a threat to almost all seniors. Most people assume that once they place their elders in a senior home, that they would be safe and there would be precautions to protect their elders from danger.

Unfortunately, when seniors are mobile, it isn’t easy to track everyone 24 hours a day.

Placing a senior in an assisted living facility is only possible for families who are wealthy, or have saved for years, and can cover the cost of moving in which can be more than $50,000 and cost $5,000 – 10,000 a month. If the senior owns a home, the sale of the home is often necessary to cover the cost of moving into an assisted living facility.

And after all that gruesome reality, these facilities do not have an adequate security staff and procedures to protect ambulatory seniors from wandering away from their residence.

Public laws must be written to provide standards and guidance for the management of all facilities that care for seniors.

If not done, who wants to move into an assisted living facility, or any other senior home?

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**SOURCE:**

**DOZENS OF ASSISTED-LIVING RESIDENTS DIED AFTER WANDERING AWAY UNNOTICED**

**By**[**Christopher Rowland**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/christopher-rowland/)**,**[**Todd C. Frankel**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/todd-c-frankel/)**,**[**Yeganeh Torbati**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/yeganeh-torbati/)**,**[**Julie Zauzmer Weil**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/julie-z-weil/)**,**[**Peter Whoriskey**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/peter-whoriskey/)**and**[**Steven Rich**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/people/steven-rich/)**, *Washington Post*, Dec. 17, 2023.**

**T**he alarms went off at 9:34 p.m. inside Courtyard Estates at Hawthorne Crossing, an assisted-living facility near Des Moines catering to people with dementia. A resident had wandered through an exit door, a routine event in America’s growingseniorassisted-living industry.

Automated texts pinged the iPads of the two caretakers working the night shift, and the phones of an on-call nurse and the facility’s director. The warnings repeated every few minutes.

Though local temperatures were plunging toward minus-11, no one responded. The on-call nurse told investigators she ignored the door alerts because she was with her family. The caretakers said they didn’t see them on their iPads. And they never followed through with hourly safety checks on memory-care residents.

At 6 a.m. — more than eight hours later — staff finally went looking for Lynne Stewart, a 77-year-old Alzheimer’s patient with a history of wandering. They found her collapsed on the frozen ground near the exit, ice covering her body. She soon died at a nearby hospital from prolonged exposure.

“The thing I grieve the most is I tried everything I could for her to be safe,” said Stewart’s granddaughter, Kaylynne Van Rooy. “That’s why she was there.”

Stewart’s death in January 2022 was not an isolated tragedy. **Patients with Alzheimer’s disease and other cognitive problems walk away from assisted-living facilities just about every day in America, a pattern of neglect by an industry that charges families an average of $6,000 a month for the explicit promise of safeguarding their loved ones, a Washington Post investigation has found.**

**Since 2018, more than 2,000 people have wandered away from assisted-living and dementia-care units or been left unattended outside, according to The Post’s exhaustive search of inspection results, incident reports and media accounts nationwide.**[**Nearly 100 people died**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/12/17/assisted-living-walk-away-deaths-facilities-by-state/?itid=lk_inline_enhanced-template)**— though the exact number is unknowable because no one is counting.**

For many, the difference between life and death was simply the weather. In cases where a cause of death could be determined, The Post found that 61 percent died after exposure to extreme heat or cold.

Others died after wandering into ditches, drowning in nearby bodies of water or being hit by cars. Joseph Matthews, 77, perished from multiple organ failure after being found covered in fire ants and yellow jacket stings 20 hours after walking away from his North Carolina facility, his second disappearance. Jack Tribble, 79, wandered the woods near his South Carolina facility for nearly two weeks before dying in a pool of shallow water, according to a coroner’s report provided to his widow.

The federal government does not regulate the nation’s roughly 30,000assisted-care facilities, as it does nursing homes. Instead, [regulation falls to individual states](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/12/17/assisted-living-laws-rules-states/?itid=lk_inline_enhanced-template), few of which have adopted strong staffing and training requirements even as the industry estimates residents nationwide have climbed to more than 1 million, approaching the nursing home population of 1.2 million.

**Memory Inc.**

Patients with memory problems walk away from assisted-living facilities just about every day in America; many die. The Post examines a pattern of neglect in America’s [booming assisted-living industry](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/12/17/assisted-living-industry-real-estate/?itid=cb_box_D2XE5ATAIFEDDN4ZT3LQS5KEB4_1).

See [how your state regulates these facilities](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/12/17/assisted-living-laws-rules-states/?itid=cb_box_D2XE5ATAIFEDDN4ZT3LQS5KEB4_2) and read the [full investigation](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/interactive/2023/assisted-living-wander-patient-deaths/?itid=cb_box_D2XE5ATAIFEDDN4ZT3LQS5KEB4_3).

End of carousel

Recent growth in the $34 billion industry has been driven in large part by demand for secure housing for the growing number of people suffering from dementia, a fragile population that now accounts for almost half of all residents in assisted living. These are also the residents at greatest risk of walking away:They can be confused but highly mobile, and some object to living in an institutional setting.

Many live in pricey “memory-care” units that pledge in marketing materials to maintain “safety systems and a well-trained staff” for “peace of mind”; “engaging programming” that “eliminates the desire to wander”; and staff “specifically trained to deal with this disease.”

But state inspectors reviewing walkaway deaths have repeatedly found failures by administrators and front-line caregivers. In case after case examined by The Post, inspectors cited evidence of too few people on duty to care for the number of residents, of staff ignoring alarms, of skipped bed checks and staff sleeping on the job, of general neglect and, in a few cases, falsified records.

These “elopements,” the industry termfor when a resident leavesunnoticed and unsupervised, were repeated events at even some of the most luxurious facilities and continued to happen even after residents died or suffered catastrophic injuries.

Relatives of the dead and injured said they were unaware of the problem and had no idea [how to investigate the safety records of individual facilities](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2023/12/17/assisted-living-consumer-guide/?itid=lk_inline_enhanced-template). Only 29 states make complete and up-to-dateinspection and violation reports available online, often on websites that are hard to find and difficult to use. In other states, residents seeking safety records have to file a public records request or contact the state’s long-term care ombudsman.

Some families were not told the truth about what happened to their own relatives, according to authorities and interviews. After Hazel Place, 86, was ignored for six hours in a sweltering Colorado courtyard in June 2021, for example, police records show her family was told she had “passed outside watching the sun set, an activity that she loved.”