

Dementia safeguarding scheme to reduce missing person cases

The dementia safeguarding scheme reduces missing person incidents and safeguards people living with dementia, by utilising radio frequency identification technology (RFID), near-field communication (NFC), Bluetooth, and global positioning systems (GPS).

First published

30 July 2025

Updated

11 September 2025

Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Avon and Somerset Police
Contact	Stuart King
Email address	stuart.king@avonandsomerset.police.uk
Region	South West
Partners	Police Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2015

Key details

Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Disability

Aim

The intervention aims to safeguard those living with dementia, by reducing wandering episodes that become missing person searches.

The scheme aims to introduce additional safeguarding measures to policing by utilising technology to assist with keeping people safe and preventing missing person incidents. The scheme aims to follow the Herbert Protocol to ensure that vital information about a person living with dementia is collected. Once recorded, the information is instantly accessible to assist in a search in the event of a person being reported as missing.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the dementia safeguarding scheme are to:

- improve safeguarding of people living with dementia and reduce the risk of them become a missing person
- reduce the number of those registered with the dementia safeguarding scheme being reported as missing
- reduce the number of 101 and 999 calls related to missing persons incidents

Description

The dementia safeguarding scheme was introduced in Avon and Somerset Police in 2015. The scheme was created in response to an increase in missing persons and concern for welfare incidents involving people living with dementia.

The scheme allocates a variety of technical RFID equipment to people living with dementia. These range from GPS tracking devices and Bluetooth tracking devices, to near field communication (NFC) wearable passive devices.

The dementia safeguarding scheme's registration incorporates the nationally recognised Herbert Protocol. This protocol records information about vulnerable individuals and can be used to support a search if they are reported missing. The following information can be captured:

- medication
- mobile numbers
- previous addresses and employer details
- places previously located
- photograph of the individual

As part of the scheme the following devices can be requested:

- NFC assistance devices – NFC devices consist of hang tags, wristbands and lanyards that are provided to the public, dementia support groups, hospitals, GP surgeries and care homes. NFC devices can be obtained by completing the online Herbert Protocol form. NFC devices are not trackable, however, they can be programmed and updated with information about the wearer and their next of kin. The information is instantly accessible when the device is scanned or tapped by a phone.
- Bluetooth tracking devices – 1,500 Bluetooth trackers are available for existing and new users of the dementia safeguarding scheme. The Bluetooth trackers cost around £24.99 each, however, the devices come at no cost to Avon and Somerset Police as Tile by Life360 provided them to the force free of charge.

The trackers are small devices can be worn by a person or attached to an item they have with them, for example, a walker, handbag or keys. The tracker uses Life360's (a location sharing app) global network of more than 76 million smartphones to assist in locating the individual's tracker when it comes into range, helping pinpoint the person when they go missing. Most importantly, the location of the tracker remains private and only visible to authorised family or carers.

Each tracker includes a QR code, which can be easily programmed, and when scanned displays details about the wearer and their next of kin. Apart from the initial set-up, the tracker requires no maintenance, and the battery lasts for up to three years without any charge.

- GPS tracking pendant – GPS tracking pendants are allocated by missing person coordinators on a referral basis to people living with dementia and most at risk of becoming a missing person. The assessment for allocation is made by utilising police data held by the missing person unit, identifying those living with dementia who have already gone missing and are at risk of going missing again. GPS tracking pendants are only allocated based on assessment of the individual due to a limited number of devices being available.

Cost for users

NFC and Bluetooth devices can be requested and provided free of charge. GPS devices are also free of charge but cannot be requested and are allocated on an assessment basis.

Additional support

One of the key support services is the Avon and Somerset dementia forum on Facebook which run by volunteers. The forum is a platform for the sharing of initiatives, ideas, and information.

Evaluation

An [evaluation](#) has been completed by Avon and Somerset police in conjunction with the University of East Anglia assessing the impact of the intervention.

Research questions included:

- does the dementia safeguarding scheme improve safeguarding by reducing the number of missing incidences?
- does the dementia safeguarding scheme reduce the length of time of missing incidents?
- does the dementia safeguarding scheme reduce the risk of missing incidents in high-risk individuals?
- does the dementia safeguarding scheme influence the location of missing incidents?
- are different dementia diagnosis associated with the likelihood of repeated missing incidents?

The evaluation relied on statistical evidence based on police held data against those registered for the scheme and whether they had gone missing before or after being registered. At the time of the evaluation, 846 individuals with a diagnosis of dementia were registered for the scheme and therefore part of this evaluation. This evaluation showed that over 78% (663 of the 846) of people who were registered for the dementia safeguarding scheme did not get reported as missing. Cost analysis was conducted which estimated a potential financial saving of up to £1,657,500 for the 663 people who did not go missing (out of the 846 total).

Post-enrolment analysis of the Dementia Safeguarding Scheme indicates a meaningful reduction in repeat missing incidents among high-risk individuals (those who had previously been reported missing). Of the overall 846 participants, 180 (21.28%) had a documented history of going missing prior to joining. Following enrolment, only 60 of these individuals (33.33%) went missing again, representing a 66.67% reduction in repeat incidents within this particular high risk group who had a history of missing episodes. This outcome highlights the scheme's effectiveness in mitigating risk among those who have already been reported missing.

Additional evaluations have been conducted internally on the use of GPS devices. The most recent evaluation in 2022 showed that there was a 96% success rate of the wearer of the GPS device not being reported as missing. It is important to note that GPS devices are only allocated to a maximum of 30 people at a time.

Overall impact

The dementia safeguarding scheme has since been adopted by police forces and other organisations across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and in the United States of America. The inspector leading this initiative has been able to assist organisations adopt all or part of the dementia safeguarding scheme.

The results of the evaluation have shown that this scheme is making a meaningful difference to the lives of individuals living with dementia and their families, all while reducing the demand on policing resources.

Over 2,300 people have now registered for the dementia safeguarding scheme, helping to protect some of the most vulnerable members of society.

When the scheme was established in 2015, the aim was to provide a solution to help safeguarding people living with dementia from becoming a missing person. Ten years on from the scheme's inception, both statistical and anecdotal evidence shows that the scheme has and continues to help safeguard people living with dementia and reduce the likelihood of them becoming a missing person.

Learning

The on-going challenges have been predominantly financial due to there being no internal funding available. The funding has come from external companies such as water and power, as well as local dementia charities who have purchased the devices on behalf of the scheme.

The force has been able to raise awareness through high profile media outlets, including BBC Crimewatch, BBC News, Sky News tabloid newspapers and local media outlets. However, individuals and their families and caregivers despite coverage in the media still don't know that the scheme exists.

Presentations have also been delivered to internal and external stakeholders. A key positive to increasing demand has been working in partnership with public and private care providers who have identified the scheme as a key safeguarding measure which can be introduced.

The force recognises that additional work is still needed to point people towards these services.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.