

# Ensuring Quality Emergency Care for People Living with Dementia

## AB 453 (Assemblymember Ed Chau)

AB 453 will improve emergency care for people living with cognitive impairment by mandating that all Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) receive training on how to effectively communicate with a person living with dementia and how to engage family caregivers in their certification and recertification.

Currently, EMTs education includes a basic overview of Alzheimer's and other dementias. This knowledge is valuable in understanding the disease. Alzheimer's is a disease of the brain that slowly destroys memory and thinking skills and, eventually, the ability to carry out simple tasks. Alzheimer's affects people's ability to communicate, think, problem-solve, behave and function physically. In situations of medical emergency, people living with dementia may not be able to make sound medical decisions.

Training for EMTs would ensure that providers understand a patient's limits including an inability to accurately communicate, answer questions appropriate, report their needs, or make sound decisions. EMTs would also learn to work in partnership with formal and informal caregivers to gather information and communicate.

Mary\* lives in a residential care facility and has Alzheimer's disease. She has a medical emergency and the facility calls 911. Paramedics arrive and after treating her, ask if she wants to go to the hospital. The care facility alerts the paramedics that she has Alzheimer's and insist that she be taken to the hospital. Mary refuses further treatment, so the paramedics prepare to leave. Mary codes again, and only after further insistence from the facility staff, is she taken to the hospital for further treatment.

\* name has been changed

## BACKGROUND

650,000 people in California are currently living with Alzheimer's and related dementias. The proportion of adults aged 65 and above is estimated to increase from 14% (in 2016) to 23% (2036). Because age is the biggest risk factor, the number of people living with dementia is expected to increase exponentially.

There is a growing global movement to prepare our society of the growing older adult population. The World Health Organization's Age Friendly Initiative seeks to improve the quality of life of older adults in all sectors of society—from businesses, to government, health care providers and transportation. Counties such as Los Angeles and San Diego are taking the WHO initiative and applying them in their communities—creating and implementing age friendly action plans. Many of these action plans include a dementia friendly lens, focused on building understanding, awareness and systems that can support individuals and families living with dementia.

The growing incidences of natural disasters in our state also highlight the need for emergency services that are prepared to serve people living with Alzheimer's.