

Managing Finances

Suggested strategies for caregivers in protecting assets for the person with dementia

Dementia affects people differently. One person may begin to lose the ability to handle money matters or make competent business decisions at an early stage; another may retain these skills much longer. But sooner or later, their abilities will decline and the person with dementia will be unable to make their own decisions about their financial and legal matters.

Planning ahead

Planning ahead can make it easier for caregivers to manage the affairs of the person with dementia once they can no longer do so alone. It may also mean that the person with dementia can participate in the planning and make sure that their wishes are carried out in the way that they would like. Where possible, get advice while the person with dementia can still participate in the discussion and is legally competent to sign any documents.

The first thing you need to do is set up Powers of Attorney for both Property and Personal Care. It is best if you seek professional guidance from a lawyer and/or a financial consultant. Your local Alzheimer Society can provide information to help you get started.

Working with the bank

If a bank account is jointly shared, the partner of the person with dementia can continue to operate it without any change in arrangements. However, problems can occur if the person with dementia uses

the account inappropriately or has accounts in their name only.

If the account is in their name only, the person with dementia can give authority, while legally competent, to another person to operate the account. Remember that this authority cannot be given if the person is no longer legally competent. If the person with dementia is unwilling to agree to a change in arrangement, it may be helpful for you, as the Power of Attorney (POA) for Property, to consult with the bank manager about a possible solution. As the POA, you will have the legal right to administer the person's accounts. You will need to meet with the bank manager to find out what paperwork is needed, over and above the legally signed POA Property document, in order to make this change.

Managing daily expenses

A person with dementia may wish to have ongoing access to their financial resources for personal purchases. If the person remains able to act on his or her own behalf in a competent manner, this arrangement should be accommodated. Using direct deposit services for income and direct payment arrangements for recurring bills may assist the person to remain independent for a longer time period. When the person with dementia begins to act in a way that might jeopardize his or her financial security, then the person named as POA should make arrangements that ensure the continued safety of financial resources.

Indicators that the POA may need to become more active in the person's affairs and actively make use of the POA rights and responsibilities include:

- The person is losing a sense of the value of money
- Failure to pay bills
- The person is using money in a manner inconsistent with prior habits.

Dealing with credit cards and chequebooks

In the early stages of dementia, for most people, the problems they experience involve multi-step sequences, prioritizing, timing, judgment, concentration, and working with numbers. Because of these risk factors and the high risk associated with credit card theft and fraud, it is suggested that all credit accounts in the name of a person with dementia be reviewed in the early stages of the dementia.

What to do

- Remove credit cards (or lower credit limits) and key wallet documents.
- Try switching out credit cards with prepaid ones and only let the person with dementia carry around small amounts of cash.
- Manage chequebook by watching for unrecorded or duplicate checks. Better yet, assist the person in writing out cheques at first and then as the dementia progresses, manage this process yourself.

Guarding against fraud

Far too often, we hear of incidences of fraud and financial abuse affecting older adults and those with dementia. Telemarketers, charity scams, health care scams and even door-to-door solicitors can quickly take advantage of a person's limited insight. It may be important to keep an eye out for large numbers of

packages being delivered, sudden changes in their bank account balances and overdue bill notices.

The National Do Not Call List is an option for Canadians to reduce the number of unwanted telemarketing calls received. Placing the person's home phone number on this list prohibits soliciting companies from contacting them. You can register for the National Do Not Call List by calling (866) 580-3625.

Some final comments

- It is strongly recommended that families discuss legal and financial concerns as early as possible, and that the person with dementia and family members be involved as much as possible with such decision-making.
- Community professionals such as lawyers and financial consultants can assist to make difficult decisions in the best interest of all concerned. Health care professionals such as a doctor, social worker or nurse are experienced in discussing options and can help determine what care is best suited to the situation.
- The Alzheimer Society is available to provide information and support. Remember, you are not alone.

Further information on this topic

Visit the following websites:

- Alzheimer Society of Canada:
<http://www.alzheimer.ca/en>
- Alzheimer Society of PEI:
<http://www.alzheimer.ca/en/pei>
- Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral (ADEAR) Centre:
<http://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/>

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