



## Assisting Passengers with Alzheimer's and Dementia



# Need for Accessible Transit Options

As transportation is a key element to all aspects of life, and since Alzheimer's and dementia negatively affect a person's ability to drive, accessible transportation options for people with Alzheimer's and dementia are essential to ensure these individuals are not isolated and can remain independent as long as possible.



**5.8 million** Americans are living with Alzheimer's disease, and the number is projected to **rise to 14 million by 2050**.



There are **7.7 million** new cases of dementia each year or **one every 4 seconds**.

## Impact on Transit

A growing population of persons with dementia can affect transit operators by increasing: paratransit ridership; the number of riders needing assistance; the level of assistance needed for passengers to travel independently; and the need for awareness of when a person might be at risk.

## Why do Bus Operators Need this Information?

Using public transportation can help an individual with dementia continue to be an active participant in society.

Individuals with moderate dementia riding public transportation alone may be at risk of becoming disoriented, getting off the bus at the wrong stop, or getting lost during travel.

Individuals with moderate to advanced dementia are more likely to safely travel on fixed-route public transportation with a caregiver, personal care attendant (PCA), or using assisted transportation services.

Operators who are aware of the challenges that individuals with dementia and their caregivers face, are better able to recognize dementia symptoms and ensure a safe and enjoyable trip for all riders.





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## Effective Communication

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires transit agencies and bus operators to ensure effective communication with people with disabilities. This can cause a unique challenge when communicating with people with Alzheimer's and dementia. Here are some tips and suggestions:

- Make information available in various formats including print, visual, and auditory
- Provide simplified versions of materials or use simplified language in conversations
- Allow extra time for communication/conversations
- Provide additional customer service assistance, when needed, for better understanding
- Identify the needs of the passenger and how best to serve them by asking
- Speak directly to passengers, not companions or personal care attendants
- Smile, listen, and show respect
- Emphasize the person, not the disability, by using person-first language
- Have a pen and paper handy to assist with communication
- Speak clearly with a normal tone and speed unless requested otherwise

# Operator Assistance Requirements and Good Customer Service

Bus operators are required to provide assistance to passengers with disabilities with the use of accessibility equipment on the vehicles. Requirements include:

- Deploying lift/ramp
- Securing passengers' wheelchairs
- Assisting with seat belts and shoulder harnesses
- Assisting passengers who use manual wheelchairs on and off lift platforms/or up and down ramps (possibly also assisting from the door of their origin to the bus and from the bus to the door of their destination, depending on the mode of transportation, the reasonableness of the assistance, and the local transit agency policy)

## Reasonable Modification

The ADA requires agencies to modify their existing policies and practices if reasonable and if needed by a person with a disability in order for them to take a trip.

For example, if a transit agency has a policy that bus operators do not assist passengers with fare payment, but there's a passenger that needs assistance in counting fare because of a disability, it is likely reasonable to assist the passenger by pointing out to them which bills/coins are necessary to pay the proper fare. It would not be reasonable, however, for the operator to be expected to reach into the passenger's bag, backpack, or pockets to retrieve the fare payment.

See the U.S. DOT Reasonable Modification Rule (<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2015-03-13/pdf/2015-05646.pdf>) for more information.



## Tips for Assisting Passengers with Alzheimer's and Dementia

- Give clear, concise, and simple directions
- Respond to questions (even when asked more than once)
- Remind passengers of destinations
- Be patient
- Ask how you can help
- Build a good rapport with passengers, so they will feel comfortable asking for help
- Provide resources/referrals upon request
- Report issues to your supervisor
- Pay attention to Silver Alerts (public announcement alerts of missing older adults)

## What is Alzheimer's and Dementia?

**"Dementia** is not a specific disease. It's an overall term that describes a group of symptoms associated with a decline in memory or other thinking skills severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities." It is caused by damage to brain cells.

At least 2 of the following must be significantly impaired for a person to be diagnosed with dementia:

- Memory
- Communication and language
- Ability to focus and pay attention
- Reasoning and judgement
- Visual perception

<https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-dementia>

## Alzheimer's

**Alzheimer's** is the most common type of dementia. Alzheimer's affects memory, thinking, and behavior; is not a normal part of aging; worsens over time; and currently has no cure. Symptoms of Alzheimer's include:

- Difficulty remembering newly learned information
- Disorientation
- Mood and behavior changes
- Deepening confusion about events, time and place
- Unfounded suspicions about family, friends, and caregivers
- More serious memory loss and behavior changes
- Difficulty speaking, swallowing, and walking

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