



## Vulnerable and Hard-to-Reach Population FACT SHEET: The Cognitively Impaired

*This fact sheet provides information about a population in Florida that is potentially vulnerable and/or hard-to-reach before, during, and after a disaster event. Preparedness requires understanding the demographics and characteristics of these groups in order to best meet the needs of all persons.*

### Overview of Cognitive Impairment

According to 2006 Florida Statutes, "cognitive impairment" is defined as a deficiency in a person's short-term or long-term memory; orientation as to person, place, and time; deductive or abstract reasoning; or judgment as it relates to safety awareness.

Potential Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Memory loss</li><li>▪ Language and communication difficulties</li><li>▪ Visual-spatial impairments</li><li>▪ Changes in emotions, behavior and/or personality</li><li>▪ Changes or loss in higher cognitive skills such as judgment and decision-making, planning</li><li>▪ Calculation skills</li></ul>

#### **Four Major Causes of Cognitive Impairment:**

**1) Dementia:** a collection of symptoms caused by a number of disorders that affect the brain (NIH)

##### *Demographics*

- Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia affecting about 4.5 million Americans
  - An estimated 435,000 Floridians suffer from Alzheimer's Disease
- Rates of dementia increase with age
  - 5% or more of persons 65 years and older are diagnosed with dementia
  - The percent of persons with dementia doubles every 5 years after age 65

##### *Some Causes*

- Metabolic conditions (e.g. anoxia, B12 or folic acid deficiency, substance abuse, hypoglycemia, hypothyroidism, organ system failure)
- Structural changes (e.g. Alzheimer's disease, vascular dementia, brain trauma, brain tumor, Parkinson's plus dementia complex)
- Infectious conditions (e.g. bacterial endocarditis, HIV-related disorders, Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease, viral encephalitis)

**2) Delirium:** a condition of severe confusion and rapid changes in brain function usually caused by a treatable physical or mental illness (NIH)

##### *Demographics*

- 10-25% of hospital patients experience a delirium episode
- Rates for older patients are higher at 30-40%

##### *General Information*

- Characterized by an abrupt decline in cognitive functioning with:

- Potential decreased attention
- Confusion and disorientation (especially to time)
- Disrupted sleep-wake cycle
- Hallucinations
- Usually reversible once the underlying cause is determined and treated
- Risk factors include:
  - Very old or very young age
  - Pre-existing brain dysfunction (e.g. dementia, tumor)
  - Alcohol dependence
  - Diabetes mellitus
  - Cancer
  - Sensory impairment (e.g. blindness or poor hearing)
  - Malnutrition

*Some Causes*

- Infections: Urinary tract infection, meningitis
- Toxins: Drugs, alcohol, metals (e.g. lead)
- Metabolic: Electrolyte disturbances, diabetes complications
- Structural: Stroke, brain tumor, head injury

**3) Developmental Disorders:** Refer to the Developmentally Disabled Fact Sheet for definitions, demographics, and other relevant information.

<b>Some Developmental Disorders</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mental retardation</li> <li>▪ Autism</li> <li>▪ Learning disabilities</li> <li>▪ Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder</li> <li>▪ Asperger's syndrome</li> </ul>

**4) Brain Trauma:** Sudden physical damage to the brain when the head hits or is hit by something hard and with force or when pierced by an object (e.g. gunshot or other penetrating objects, physical abuse, automobile accidents, sports accidents; NIH)

### For More Information

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