

## Government Regulation Of Assisted Living Preferred, Survey Finds

**N**early 60 percent of those interviewed in a recent nationwide survey believe that assisted living should be government-regulated (either state or federal), as opposed to the self-regulation model favored by many providers.

The survey, released by “The News Hour with Jim Lehrer,” the Kaiser Family Foundation, and Harvard’s School of Public Health, polled 1,309 adults 18 years and older, 301 of whom were 45 years and older. Although a majority of the survey questions focused on skilled nursing, there were also questions about assisted living, long term care insurance, and the government’s role in supporting America’s seniors. The margin of sampling error was three percentage points for the whole sample and six percentage points for respondents who had known a friend or family member who had been in an assisted living facility.

In response to another question designed to gauge respondents’ knowledge of assisted living regulation, 44 percent said that assisted living was already regulated by the government, 30 percent did not know if the profession was regulated, and 26 percent said assisted living was not regulated by the government.

The survey also asked about the level of regulation of assisted living as compared with skilled nursing. Forty-nine percent of those polled said both sectors of the long term care profession had about the same level of regulation, 34 percent said assisted living was less regulated, and 10 percent said that assisted living was more regulated than skilled nursing.

When respondents were asked to compare whether or not assisted living facilities had enough, just enough, or too much government regulation, the majority (39 percent) said assisted living had the right amount of regulation.

Other statistics pertaining to assisted living culled from the survey include:

- Fifty percent said assisted living is doing a good job in serving health care consumers, while 16 percent felt assisted living is doing a bad job. Twenty-seven percent said they didn’t know, and 7 percent had mixed views.
- Twenty-two percent said they formed their impression about assisted living from their own experience; 36 percent said their knowledge came from friends and family; and 35 percent gained impressions from television, radio, or newspaper stories.
- Forty-four percent said they had heard, seen, or read a news story about an assisted living facility, while 55 percent said they hadn’t.
- Seventy-eight percent said they would prefer assisted living if they couldn’t take care of themselves at home; 12 percent said they would prefer a nursing facility.
- Fifty-eight percent said they did not know where to go for advice if they or a family member needed skilled nursing or assisted living care, while 40 percent said they knew of sources for advice and information.

Survey highlights can be found on the Internet at [www.kff.org/content/2001/3171](http://www.kff.org/content/2001/3171). For copies of the survey, call the Kaiser Family Foundation at (800) 656-4533 and ask for publications #3188 and #3171.

—Lisa Gelhaus

# Alzheimer's Association Study Examines Wandering

## COLLECTS DATA FROM 'SAFE RETURN' PROGRAM

It has long been known that wandering is characteristic of patients with Alzheimer's, and a recent study confirms the prevalence of this behavior. Researchers found that 60 percent of patients with Alzheimer's will wander off some time during the course of their illness—nearly one in five of these from long term care facilities, adult day care centers, or professional transportation services.

The study examined 675 wandering cases occurring between 1997 and 1998. It was conducted by Meredith Rowe of the University of Florida at Gainesville and Judith Glover of Lourdes Primary Care Associates, Binghamton, N.Y., on the Alzheimer's Association's Safe Return program, an initiative designed to facilitate the safe return of people with cognitive impairments who become lost.

Adults with Alzheimer's who are registered with Safe Return wear ID tags that identify them as having cognitive impair-

ments and include a 24-hour emergency phone number. The program's operators assist in a quick and safe return of lost adults.

And, indeed, quick returns are critical. Wanderers have a 46 percent chance of dying if they are not found within 24 hours, the researchers said.

"While the study results are specific to the Safe Return program, this is the first time any data have become available on which to base policies related to cognitively impaired wandering individuals," Rowe said. "Incidents of unattended wandering had always been unpredictable."

The research begins to define the typical patterns of wanderers and the most common places to find lost adults. For example, the study found that patients in skilled nursing facilities, day care centers, or other caregiving facilities are the most likely to wander off (17.9 percent of the cases). Wandering also occurs relatively frequently outside a patient's home (14.3 percent of the cases), following an episode of agitated or difficult behavior (13.1 percent), or when a caregiver becomes distracted (13.1 percent).

The most likely places to find wandering

patients are in a residential yard (26 percent), on the street (22.3 percent), at businesses (11.8 percent), and in health care facilities (9.2 percent), the study says. In 35 percent of the cases studied, wanderers were discovered by strangers—or "good Samaritans."

And while the researchers recommended that those searching for wanderers file missing persons reports with the local police, they warned that police departments typically wait before searching under the assumption that a missing person may return home—an assumption that does not apply to people with cognitive impairments. To the contrary, the researchers recommended that searches begin immediately and should be concentrated within a five-mile radius of the missing person's care setting. Searchers should also look into easily accessible areas such as convenience stores, public buildings, open fields, wooded areas, and property along railroad tracks.

For more information on the Safe Return program, visit [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org), call (888) 572-8566, or contact a local Alzheimer's Association chapter.

—Lisa Gelhaus