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## Area 1 Agency On Aging

Connecting older adults to service in Del Norte and Humboldt counties since 1980



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## Mission of A1AA

- Area 1 Agency on Aging provides leadership and services that support and promote healthy aging.

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## Area 1 Agency on Aging Planning and Service Area 1



- Includes both Humboldt & Del Norte Counties
- Spans 4,586 square miles (2,935,040 acres)
- Is home to approximately 163,233 people
- By 2060, the number of people aged 60 years and older is expected to increase by 140%

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## What does the Area 1 Agency on Aging do?

- **Identifies** the **needs** of local older adults and develops a plan of coordinated services to meet needs (Area Plan).
- **Advocates** on behalf of local older adults to protect their rights.
- Provides direct **services**.
- Provides **funding** for other key agencies for services, defined by the Older Americans Act.
- **Monitors** use of funding and reports service provided to state and federal governments.

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## Lessons in Dementia Hoarding Behaviors in Relation to Dementia

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## What is compulsive hoarding?

Compulsive hoarding includes ALL three of the following:

1. A person collects and keeps a lot of items, even things that appear useless or of little value to most people, and
2. These items clutter the living spaces and keep the person from using their rooms as they were intended, and
3. These items cause distress or problems in day-to-day activities.

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## How is hoarding different from collecting?

- In hoarding, people seldom seek to display their possessions, which are usually kept in disarray.
- In collecting, people usually proudly display their collections and keep them well organized.



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## Diagnosis

- It is not diagnosed as hoarding if the behavior can be attributed to another diagnosis. Like Alzheimer's or Associated Dementias.
- Let's not give these folks another label. Let's figure out how to address the behavior.
- In people with dementia, behavior is usually relatively harmless, but under certain circumstances can create health and safety issues.

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## Hoarding Behavior

**Reflects internal needs and PWD gains a sense of security through hoarding. In pursuit of a desired goal that expresses inner needs, the PWD is actually showing meaningful and purposeful communication behavior (Algase et al., 1996)**

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## Remember!!

- Most Behavioral and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia reflect underlying unmet needs.
- Look at hoarding behavior with this same lens and be a detective.

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## Why is this happening?

### Psychological or Medical Causes

- **Physical changes in the brain cause memory loss, impaired judgment, and confusion.**
- **Inability to remember taking items, unable to remember where the items were placed or hidden.**
- **Rummaging, hiding, and hoarding are to gain a sense of security. Hoarded items out of fear that they may “need” the items someday.**



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## **Why is this happening?**

### **Psychological or Medical Causes**

- **Individuals may begin to hide items when they are not able to recognize the people around them any longer.**
- **Individuals may rummage through items because seeing and touching the items reminds them that they are there and gives them comfort.**
- **Loss of control over behaviors**



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## **Why is this happening?**

### **Environmental Causes**

- **Fear of being robbed or losing items; hiding or hoarding items is an attempt to make them safe.**
- **Inability to distinguish between items that should be kept or thrown away.**
- **Lack of stimulation, boredom, or difficulty initiating new activities.**



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## Needs more Study

**“Characteristics and Underlying Meaning of Hoarding Behaviors in Elders with Alzheimer’s Dementia: Caregivers’ Perspective” – small study in Taiwan.**

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## Taiwan Study

- **Three main characteristics related to Alzheimer’s dementia hoarding behavior emerged from the data**
- **These characteristics reflected patients’ past social and family background and the current life situation.**
- **Study found “a desire for security” as the underlying meaning of hoarding behavior**
- **Hoarding provided a feeling of preparedness and a reduction in the sense of danger. Provided a greater sense of stability.**

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**Influence of former and current symptoms:**

previous hoarding behavior and current memory impairment and delusions create a vicious cycle: hiding the item, forgetting it, delusions believing it was stolen, then continuing to hide more items as a result.

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**Reoccurrence of the original personal**

**characteristics and habits:** Almost all patients had lived frugally in the past and carefully managed money-related issues. Cautious personalities prior to dementia. While had always done purposeful and systematic collection of daily living necessities, was made word with dementia. Disease made it harder for them to distinguish the value or importance of items.

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**Re-experiencing past economic crises.** Lived through great depression. High value on rainy day saving for security. Past resource deficiencies: Hoarding readily available items to maintain control. Past uncertainties about household finances - strongly associated with hoarding behavior in dementia. Hoarding to feel secure.

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**THEIR REALITY:  
Seeking Security and Sense of Control  
over Environment**



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## Shifting how WE think about it

- **Treat behaviors as meaningful indicators linked to past experiences. Use knowledge of PWD past experiences with present situation.**
- **understand the underlying meaning of hoarding behavior and identify ways to better meet security needs.**
- **Behavior should not be viewed as a problem to be eliminated.**
- **Meeting needs enhances self-esteem and self-identify.**

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## And never forget....

- **Accept the fact that it COULD also be true that someone has moved or taken their stuff....**

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## Solutions?

- keep items in places where the person is used to them being – hanging keys on a specific hook or always keeping them in the same drawer.
- Make copies of items that are important or often misplaced, such as keys, glasses, or important documents.
- Keep rooms and drawers tidy so that things are less likely to get lost and easier to find if they are misplaced (declutter your own stuff first)



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## Solutions?

- Put items that are often used where they can be seen and are easily accessible.
- Label drawers and cupboards. Use visual clues, not just words, to explain where items go, such as pictures or photos.
- What hiding place would be most logical to the person hiding it – look there first
- If the person puts items in unusual places that poses no risk, consider leaving it there.
- Provide a place where “hoarding and rummaging are okay”



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## Focus on Safety

- **Fire Prevention:** Check for and remove items stored or hidden in or on the stove, microwave, radiators, kerosene heaters, etc. Check for overloaded extension cords. Check that smoke alarms have batteries and are in working order.
- **Prevent poisonous ingestion:** The individual may not be able to recognize things that are harmful to eat. Lock up cleaning fluids, medications, glue products, etc. Check for and throw away rotting food.
- **Prevent falls:** Ensure that there are clear pathways between rooms. Clear all clutter from stairways. Remove throw rugs.

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## Protect Valuables

- **Put items that cannot be easily replaced in a safe, locked location. These items may include birth certificates, passports, tax records, cash, jewelry, medical records, sentimental photos and letters, etc.**
- **Get duplicates of items that are commonly misplaced such as glasses, hearing aids, medication, keys, remote controls, cell phones.**

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## Identify, Eliminate Hiding Places

### ■ Simplify the home!!

- Look under cushions, mattress or bed, carpets, inside shoes, purses, coat pockets, under stove burners, inside washers and dryers, dishwashers, trash compactors, trash bins, sink drains, and garbage disposals.
- Check hiding places frequently for lost items. Learn their favorite places.
- Check the trash.
- Eliminate common hiding spots by using drain traps, disposal strainers, and drain screens, and disconnecting trash compactors and disposals.
- Install hard-to-open latches or locks on the doors. Placing a STOP sign on the drawer or closet or camouflaging the door with paint or wallpaper so that it blends in with the room may also discourage a person from using that area for hiding or rummaging.
- Lock mailbox.

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## Use Technology

- Consider a locator device to help find items that often get lost, such as keys. For more information on these see Using technology to help with everyday life.
- If hiding is a serious problem and hiding places cannot be found, surveillance cameras or “nanny cams” can help identify where an individual is hiding items.

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## Make Rummaging Productive

- Many individuals will rummage or constantly reorganize items because they feel a need to be productive.
- Provide an opportunity to rummage safely and make rummaging a stimulating activity. Provide easy access to some closets, drawers, or portable boxes that contain safe items that the individual can rummage in. They can contain random items or be themed: sewing drawer, sports closet, jewelry box, etc.
- Make these hiding places stand out/easier to find and use.

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## Remember....

**One person's cluttered and disorganized is another person's "system".**

**Out of sight is out of mind.**

**If not (super) broke, don't fix it.**

- Be prepared for the person's reaction and have support for the person and yourself. You may want to involve family, friends, clergy, or a social worker.
- Have activities planned and ready to divert the person's attention from the removal of their items.

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## Addressing Clutter

- **Only remove what is needed to eliminate safety and health hazards. Leave behind as much safe clutter as you can. Organize it in large bins or baskets away from walking pathways, stairs, stoves, and heaters.**
- **Give the individual a good reason to part with their items. They may be more willing to let go of something if they are told that the item will be given to a charity, church, family member, etc.**
- **Negotiate. Trade a year's worth of newspapers for a month's worth. Trade rotten or expired food for fresh food.**

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- **Be Creative. Take pictures of items that are given away and let them keep the pictures. Allow the person to take time to say goodbye to items.**
- **Remove discarded items immediately because the person may rummage through the garbage and bring back inside.**
- **If the individual agrees to help de-clutter, give them one box of items to sort through at a time. Start slowly and take breaks frequently.**

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## Reduce items coming into the home

- Reduce spending money and monitor purchases.
- Consider blocking home shopping channels.
- Stop junk mail and catalog mailings by visiting [www.dmachoice.org](http://www.dmachoice.org), [www.catalogchoice.org](http://www.catalogchoice.org), and [www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com).
- Consider getting bills sent to another address.

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- If you live in the home, you will need to reduce your clutter too.
- Place the important items you need in a locked cabinet.

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## More Study Stuff, if time

- The disease intensifies a person's inherent behavior patterns and frequency (Shomaker 1987); the disease is not the only explanation for hoarding behavior but is more of a magnifying glass that makes the behavior more pronounced.
- A patient's coping methods and living patterns did not significantly change after the Alzheimer's dementia diagnosis. Rather, behaviors increased in frequency to a level beyond what caregivers could comfortably handle.

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- These findings support those of a similar study by Kolanowski, Strand, and Whall (1997), which found that patients tend to use techniques learned in the past to address various current situations. Patients who were inherently frugal or stingy saw these character traits amplified by dementia.

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- Atchley (1989) used continuity theory to demonstrate that most older adults do not change their ways of thinking, activities, living arrangements, or relationships after becoming physically ill.
- In old age, individuals tend to follow patterns of behavior consistent with when they were younger. This affirms that personality, past experiences, and behavior share a consistent trajectory, even in persons with dementia.

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- Studies in Japan – one found hoarding behavior very common. Another reporting that nearly half of elders with dementia exhibited hoarding behavior.

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## Final Questions & Follow-up Needed?

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## Northcoast Homeshare

- Promotes homesharing to address lack of affordable housing for older adults/students as well as issues faced by seniors living alone in large homes.
- Screens, interviews and matches homeowners with homeseekers.

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