



Missing Adults: Background, Federal Programs, and Issues for Congress

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Summary

Adults may go missing due to choice, an abduction, foul play, a mental or physical disability, or a natural catastrophe, among other reasons. Although no accurate estimates exist of the number of missing adults, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) reported that as of January 1, 2013, nearly 50,000 cases of missing adults (age 18 and older) were pending in the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system, a federal computerized index with data on crimes and locator files for missing and unidentified persons. Certain adults are particularly vulnerable to missing episodes; for example, those with dementia are at risk for wandering. Adults who engage in high-risk behaviors, including involvement in gang activity, may also be more prone to going missing.

Unlike children, adults have the legal right to go missing under most circumstances. As a result, families of missing adults may receive limited assistance from state and local law enforcement entities in recovering their loved ones. The federal government has not been involved in assisting law enforcement entities with missing adult cases in the same way it has with missing children cases. Further, cases of missing children and young adults under the age of 21 must be reported to the NCIC, while reporting missing adults to the database is voluntary. In recent years, however, the federal government has increasingly played a role in (1) preventing certain types of missing adult incidents; (2) working to recover adults who go missing, including those who are deceased and for whom only remains can be found; and (3) supporting databases, including NCIC, that maintain records of missing adults and unidentified remains.

Recognizing the needs of a growing aging population, Congress authorized funding for the Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert program under the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322). Recent appropriations have been approximately \$1 million to \$2 million annually. Since FY1996, the program has awarded funds to the Alzheimer's Association, a nonprofit organization that provides research on Alzheimer's disease, to protect and locate missing individuals with dementia through a patient identification program, as well as outreach and education efforts. In 2000, Congress passed Kristen's Act (P.L. 106-468) to permit the Department of Justice (DOJ) to make grants to establish a national clearinghouse for missing adults and provide technical assistance to law enforcement agencies in locating these individuals. From FY2002 through FY2006, DOJ made grants for these purposes. In addition, the federal DNA Initiative has also supported efforts to recover missing persons and identify unidentified human remains by funding DNA analysis and providing related assistance.

In addition to the NCIC, the federal government maintains the National DNA Index System (NDIS), which stores criminal information as well as individuals believed to be missing, their relatives, and unidentified human remains; and the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), which includes databases for missing adults and unidentified remains. Records are submitted to most of the databases by authorized law enforcement agencies, state missing persons clearinghouses, medical examiners and coroners, or DNA laboratories. The NDIS, NamUs, and NCIC databases can be accessed only by authorized law enforcement and other personnel; however, records in NamUs can also be reviewed by the public.

Policymakers and other stakeholders have increasingly focused on the coordination of the federal databases on missing persons, as well as the role of the federal government in providing assistance to states and localities to develop alert systems and technology to locate missing adults. Many states have developed alert systems to recover vulnerable adults who have gone missing.

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Introduction

Adults may go missing due to choice; an abduction or foul play; a physical or developmental disability; natural catastrophes that displace individuals, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; or certain high-risk behaviors, including gang involvement or drug use, among other circumstances.

State and local laws govern how criminal justice entities respond to missing adult cases. This response is complicated by a number of factors. Unlike children, adults have the legal right to go missing in most cases and may do so to seek protection from a domestic abuser and other related reasons.¹ Further, law enforcement agencies may be hesitant to devote resources to missing adult cases, given competing priorities. Law enforcement agencies within and across states also respond differently to missing adult cases. Some states mandate that law enforcement officials take reports without a waiting period, while other states require at least a 24-hour waiting period after the person is believed to be missing.²

The federal government has not been involved in assisting state and local law enforcement entities with missing adult cases in the same way it has with missing children cases. Federal law requires law enforcement to report missing children and young adults under the age of 21 to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) National Crime Information Center (NCIC), a federal database of crime and missing person information; reporting missing adults to the database is voluntary. In addition, since 1985, Congress has appropriated funding to the Missing and Exploited Children's Program to coordinate a federal response to missing children cases and to create and maintain a national clearinghouse that assists law enforcement and families with these cases.³

Nonetheless, the federal government has increasingly played a role in both (1) preventing certain types of missing adult incidents and (2) recovering adults who go missing, including those who are deceased and for whom only remains provide clues to their identity and circumstances surrounding their disappearance. Congress authorized the Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert program under the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322) to assist in locating missing individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia through a patient identification program, as well as outreach and education efforts. In 2000, Congress authorized the Department of Justice (DOJ), through Kristen's Act (P.L. 106-468), to make grants to establish a national clearinghouse for missing adults and provide technical assistance to law enforcement agencies in locating missing adults. This grant was funded from FY2002 through FY2006. The federal government has also supported efforts to establish databases to track and identify missing adults, their relatives, and unidentified human remains. Some advocates of missing adults and policymakers have called for the federal government to expand its role in missing adult cases. For example, these advocates and policymakers would like the federal government to assist states by creating or expanding missing adult alert programs that

¹ Guardians and the court system may limit the autonomy of some adults through conservatorship or guardianship arrangements.

² For information about state responses to missing adults, see U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) "Resources," <http://www.namus.gov/index.htm>. The website includes varying levels of detail across states.

³ For further information, see CRS Report RL34050, *Missing and Exploited Children: Background, Policies, and Issues*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara.

serve as a warning to the public about cases of missing adults, much like the AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alert program for missing children.

The first section of this report discusses demographics and record keeping of missing adults and unidentified remains, as well as some of the factors that may contribute to the disappearance of adults. This section also discusses federally funded databases that are used to track data on missing adults and unidentified individuals. The second section of the report describes the federal programs and initiatives to assist in locating missing adults, including funding data where applicable. Finally, the third section discusses issues about the federal role in missing adult cases.

Why Do Adults Go Missing?

Certain circumstances can make adults vulnerable to going missing. Adults may go missing because of an abduction or foul play. A physical or developmental disability or cognitive disorder, such as Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, may also contribute to a missing episode. Adults with dementia have been identified as high-risk for going missing by advocates for older adults. According to the Alzheimer's Association, a nonprofit organization that provides research on Alzheimer's disease, as many as 5 million people in the United States suffer from Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, and about 60% of those will wander away from their homes or health care facilities.⁴ Further, a natural catastrophe can displace individuals and make their whereabouts unknown to others. Finally, other adults vulnerable to missing incidents may include those with high-risk lifestyles, such as individuals who abuse drugs or are gang involved, and those that have a history of victimization, including domestic violence.⁵

Data on Missing Adults and Unidentified Remains

There is no definitive estimate of the number of adults who go missing, because some adults are not known to be missing or are not reported to databases that compile data on missing persons. However, three federally supported data sources provide some insight into this number: the Missing Person File at the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC); the FBI's National DNA Index System (NDIS), which stores information on offenders and arrestees, forensic evidence, as well as individuals believed to be missing, their relatives, and unidentified human remains; and the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), administered by DOJ's National Institute of Justice (NIJ).⁶ Profiles of missing individuals entered into one database do not necessarily populate other databases, although some missing individuals may be

⁴ Alzheimer's Association, *Alzheimer's Association Statement on Silver Alert*, July 15, 2008, http://www.alz.org/news_and_events_14004.asp. (Hereinafter referenced as Alzheimer's Association, *Alzheimer's Association Statement on Silver Alert*.) For a discussion of the incidence and prevalence of Alzheimer's disease, see CRS Report RL32970, *Biomedical Advances in Alzheimer's Disease*, by Michele M. Schoonmaker and Laura B. Shrestha.

⁵ These groups have been identified as vulnerable to going missing by the National Center for Missing Adults, a nonprofit organization that received funding under Kristen's Act and has since merged with "Let's Bring Them Home," another non-profit organization committed to recovering missing adults.

⁶ Some private organizations that advocate for missing adults and provide assistance to the families of missing adults maintain missing person records that can be accessed by the public. Such organizations include Let's Bring Them Home and the Doe Network.

reported to more than one of the databases. Therefore, numbers of missing persons should not be added across any of the databases.

The NCIC Unidentified Person File, NamUs, and NDIS contain information about unidentified decedents, or remains. However, the true number of unidentified missing adult cases is unknown because remains can go undiscovered, or if they are recovered, they may not be reported to the databases or retained. In a census conducted by DOJ in 2004, medical examiners and coroners reported a total of 13,486 unidentified human remains on record, though about 51% of medical examiner and coroners' offices lacked policies for retaining records such as x-rays, DNA, or fingerprints that could identify missing individuals.⁷ (The report also found that 90% of offices serving large jurisdictions did retain such records.) Further, medical examiners and coroners estimated that about 4,400 unidentified human decedents were reported in an average year, with approximately 1,000 (23.0%) remaining unidentified after one year. Another DOJ study estimated, using death records reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 1980 through 2004, that as many as 10,300 of these records were for unidentified decedents. This number is an approximation, as states do not uniformly specify on the death certificate when a person's identity is not known.⁸ In addition, the criteria used by DOJ to search the death records may have included individuals whose identities were known, as well as unidentified individuals who were later identified.

The discussion below will show that the databases range in the number of profiles they contain, as well as the type of information they collect, such as basic demographic profiles, DNA profiles, etc. (*Note that only the data on missing persons and unidentified decedents, as reported in NCIC, are updated in this report.*) The discussion also raises the question about whether these databases can, or should, share data or indicate that data about an individual profile is available in another database (some cross-referencing between the databases now occurs, though on a limited basis).

National Crime Information Center Missing Person and Unidentified Person Files

The NCIC within the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Division maintains statistics on missing adults and unidentified decedents.⁹ The NCIC is a computerized index of documented information concerning crimes and criminals of nationwide interest and a locator file for missing and unidentified persons. Since October 1, 1975, the NCIC has maintained records of missing persons (known as the Missing Person File) who are reported to the FBI by federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies; foreign criminal justice agencies; and authorized courts. The Missing Person File was created in response to a request in 1974 from the NCIC Advisory Policy Board (APB).¹⁰ The APB is composed of local, state, and federal criminal justice and national

⁷ Matthew J. Hickman et al., *Medical Examiners and Coroners' Offices, 2004*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, June 2007, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/meco04.pdf>.

⁸ Kristen Hughes, *Unidentified Human Remains in the United States, 1980-2004*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 2007, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=819>.

⁹ The FBI is authorized to maintain the NCIC under 28 U.S.C. 434. Unless otherwise noted, this information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division. For further information about the current NCIC Advisory Policy Board, see <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/advisory-policy-board>.

¹⁰ The Missing Children Act of 1982 affirmed the need for the Missing Person File by requiring the FBI to "acquire, (continued...)"

security agencies, and it advises the FBI on criminal justice information matters. The Missing Person File includes records for individuals who are missing because they

- have a proven physical or mental disability,
- are missing under circumstances indicating that they may be in physical danger,
- are missing under circumstances indicating their disappearance may not have been voluntary,
- are under the age of 21 and do not meet the above criteria,
- are missing after a catastrophe, or
- are 21 and older and do not meet any of the above criteria but for whom there is a reasonable concern for their safety.

These categories are presented in further detail in **Table A-1** in the **Appendix**. Pursuant to the National Child Search Assistance Act of 1990 (Title XXXVII of the Crime Control Act of 1990, P.L. 101-647), records of missing children under age 18 *must* be immediately entered into the Missing Person File. The act also requires the Attorney General to publish an annual statistical summary of the Missing Person File. Suzanne’s Law, enacted by the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today Act of 2003 (PROTECT Act, P.L. 108-21), requires law enforcement to also immediately submit information about missing adults to the NCIC ages 18 through 20. Law enforcement agencies are not mandated under federal law to submit missing person records of adults over the age of 21 into the Missing Person File. Therefore, although records of missing adults are captured, the NCIC does not include the complete number of adults who go missing and are not reported to the database.

NCIC Missing Person Data¹¹

As of January 1, 2013, there were 77,217 individual records (entered in 2012 and previous years) remaining in the Missing Person File. Of these, 49,992 (64.7%) were for missing adults ages 18 and older and 27,225 (35.3%) were for children ages 17 and younger.

In calendar year 2012, 661,593 individuals of all ages were reported missing to the NCIC. Of all individuals reported missing in 2012, a total of 164,266 (22.2%) were ages 18 and older. Also in that same year, approximately 680,178 missing person records were cleared or canceled; some of these records were entered prior to 2012. **Table A-1** in the **Appendix** summarizes the number of missing cases entered in 2009 through 2012 for individuals ages 18 and older under the six missing person categories listed above. The highest number of missing adults went missing for an unspecified reason, but there was a reasonable concern for their safety.

(...continued)

collect, classify, and preserve any information which would assist in the location of any missing person (including an unemancipated person as defined by the laws of the places of residence of such person) and provide confirmation as to any entry for such a person to the parent, legal guardian, or next of kin of that person.” 28 U.S.C. 534(a). The FBI amended NCIC entry procedures in May 1999 to replace the phrase “unemancipated person” with “a person who is missing under the age of 18.”

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, this information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division on March 15, 2013.

Of all adults age 18 and older who were reported missing in 2012, most were male (58.8%). The majority (65.1%) of missing adults were white, followed by individuals who were black (27.9%), of an unknown race (2.9%), Asian (3.0%),¹² and American Indian or Alaskan Native (1.1%). Relative to their share of the population generally, missing white and Asian adults appear to be underrepresented and missing African American adults appear to be overrepresented.¹³ The NCIC does not report on the Hispanic origin of missing individuals, and NCIC users are instructed to enter records for Hispanic individuals using the race code (American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, black, or white) that most closely represents that individual as perceived by the law enforcement official.¹⁴

NCIC Unidentified Missing Persons Data

Some individuals who go missing may be deceased, and their remains, intact or not, may be the only available clues concerning their identity and circumstances surrounding their disappearance. Since 1983, the NCIC has taken reports of unidentified missing persons, pursuant to the passage of the Missing Children Act of 1982 (P.L. 97-292). The act required the FBI to “acquire, collect, classify, and preserve any information which would assist in the identification of any deceased individual who has not been identified after the discovery of such deceased individual.”¹⁵ Pursuant to this requirement, the NCIC’s Unidentified Remains File was established to take reports of unidentified deceased persons, persons of any age who are living and unable to determine their identity, and unidentified catastrophe victims. Reports may include information about bodies found shortly after death, when a person’s remains may be fairly intact, as well as skeletal remains.

As of January 1, 2013, the Unidentified Remains File included 7,885 unidentified persons. Nearly all (7,699) of the entries were for deceased unidentified bodies; the remaining were for unidentified catastrophe victims and living persons who could not be identified, either because they could not identify themselves or refused to disclose their identity.¹⁶ The total number of unidentified persons in the NCIC may represent just a fraction of the true number of missing remains.

¹² This includes individuals who identify as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

¹³ For information about demographics of the general population, see Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones and Roberto R. Ramirez, *Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census Briefs, March 2011, <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>.

¹⁴ In October 1997, the Office of Management and Budget published revised standards for the reporting by federal agencies of statistics on race and ethnicity. The standards specify the racial categories of American Indian or Alaska Native, black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and white; and ethnic categories of Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. However, the FBI received an exemption from this reporting requirement for the NCIC. According to the FBI, states are not required to comply with the racial and ethnic classifications, due to the uniqueness of crime data and the fact that the data are reported by state and local jurisdictions. This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division.

¹⁵ 28 U.S.C. 534(a).

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division on March 18, 2013.

National DNA Index System¹⁷

Another database operated by the FBI stores DNA records, including for missing adults and unidentified remains, and was authorized under the DNA Identification Act of 1994 as part the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322). This database is known as NDIS. P.L. 103-322 specified that the FBI could establish an index of DNA identification records of persons convicted of crimes, analyses of DNA samples recovered from crime scenes, and analyses from unidentified human remains. A fourth category of records for relatives of missing persons was added in 1999 by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-113). DNA laboratories may enter DNA information into NDIS that involves one of the four categories of records, as well as the records of missing adults.¹⁸ The data are first entered by authorized users into the Local DNA Index System (LDIS), which can then populate the central laboratory for each state, known as a State DNA Index System (SDIS). Only SDIS laboratories may upload DNA profiles directly to the NDIS. LDIS or SDIS laboratories can conduct searches of their own databases prior to uploading the data to NDIS. Searches of data entered by other states into NDIS are conducted by the FBI Laboratory, which automatically searches new DNA data when profiles are submitted by the states.

NDIS contains approximately 12 million profiles in the five databases: offenders and arrestees database, forensic evidence database, missing unidentified human remains database, missing person database, and biological relatives of missing persons database.¹⁹ Most of the DNA profiles are those stored in the criminal and forensic evidence databases. The three missing person databases are part of the FBI Laboratory's National Missing Person DNA Database (NMPDD) program, which works to identify missing and unidentified persons based on available DNA profiles and other clues.²⁰ The unidentified human remains database contains DNA profiles from the remains of individuals that cannot be identified by fingerprint; dental, medical, or anthropological examinations; and of individuals who are living, but are unidentifiable using typical investigative methods (e.g., children and others who cannot or refuse to identify themselves). The relatives of missing persons database contains DNA profiles that are voluntarily submitted by the relatives of known missing individuals. Finally, the missing person database contains DNA records of missing persons obtained from their belongings or derived from the profiles of their relatives.

The three missing persons databases can be searched against one another. The Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) is the software in NDIS that compares various DNA profiles, and if a match is made between two sets of DNA profiles, the software sends an electronic message to the laboratories that contributed the samples. DNA analysts at the laboratories review the data to

¹⁷ Unless otherwise noted, this information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Office of Congressional Affairs.

¹⁸ According to the FBI, the authority to include DNA from missing persons is derived from P.L. 103-322, because in order to identify unidentified remains, a search of missing person records must be conducted that compares those records to the records for unidentified remains. This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Office of Congressional Affairs.

¹⁹ This is as of March 2013. See, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, "CODIS-NDIS Statistics, <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/lab/codis/ndis-statistics>. The convicted offender database and forensic database, can be searched against one another to assist law enforcement personnel in solving crimes.

²⁰ In addition to conducting DNA analysis, the FBI Laboratory also assists state and local law enforcement agencies with investigations of missing persons involving examinations of anthropology, trace evidence, facial reconstruction, and fingerprinting, among other types of assistance. These services are provided at no cost.

confirm the match. The laboratories are responsible for alerting the investigating law enforcement agency, medical examiner, coroner, or medical-legal authority of the results. The FBI is continuing to develop technology, including software to conduct kinship DNA analyses, and is using meta-data (e.g., sex, date of last sighting, and age) that is intended to assist in locating missing persons.²¹

The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System²²

The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) is an online repository for information about missing persons and unidentified remains that is overseen by DOJ's National Institute of Justice (NIJ). According to DOJ, NamUs was established in response to an overwhelming need for a central reporting system for unidentified human remains cases. In 2005, DOJ's National Institute of Justice convened stakeholders—medical examiners, coroners, law enforcement personnel, managers of state missing children clearinghouses, family members of missing persons, forensic scientists, and policymakers—for a national strategy meeting called the “Identifying the Missing Summit.” The summit focused on the challenges in investigating and solving missing person cases. After the summit, work began on the development of the online repository.²³ To further work on the feasibility of a database, DOJ appointed an expert panel of medical examiners and coroners, which ultimately confirmed the need for a central reporting system for unidentified human remains. These efforts also led DOJ to establish and fund NamUs. NamUs is composed of three databases: missing persons, unidentified remains, and unclaimed remains.²⁴ The system has been accessible via the web since 2009. NamUs users, including members of the public, can search across both databases in an effort to identify unidentified human remains and solve missing person cases.

The missing person database serves as a repository for information on missing persons that can be entered by law enforcement agencies or members of the public. Profiles of missing individuals may include photographs and information about the circumstances around their disappearance, their dental records, DNA, physical appearance, and police contact information, among other items. Users of the website may search the database based on these attributes. The database also includes information about state statutes on recovering missing persons as well as links to state missing person clearinghouses, which are maintained by state law enforcement agencies or advocacy organizations and provide information about missing adults.

²¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, “CODIS: Combined DNA Index System,” <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/lab/codis>.

²² Unless otherwise noted, this information is provided by U.S. Department of Justice, “About Missing Persons Database,” NamUs, <http://www.namus.gov/index.htm>.

²³ According to the Department of Justice, there is no specific statutory authority for NamUs; however, the agency derives its authority to establish the database from statutes on the general authorities of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ, 42 U.S.C. 3721-3723), which manages the database, to support research and develop tools and technologies, as well as statutes concerning the general authorities of NIJ's Office of Science and Technology (6 U.S.C. 161-165). This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

²⁴ The database that became the Unidentified Remains database was initially developed in 2005 and 2006 as a public service project by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). NIJ has since hosted NamUs focus group meetings to define additional requirements for the system. NIJ has partnerships with the National Center for Forensic Science and NAME for the unidentified remains database and with the National Forensic Science Technology Center for development of the missing persons database.

The unidentified remains database is available for medical examiners and coroners to upload their cases. Website users may view profiles of the unidentified remains; however, only law enforcement agencies and other authorized entities may enter information and review additional information and photographs that are not available to the public. Some of the profiles are fully intact, whereas others include pieces of the missing person's body or information about the remains and where they were found. Website users can also search based on characteristics such as demographics, anthropologic analysis, the NCIC record number, dental information, and distinct body features.

The unclaimed remains database is available for medical examiners and coroners to upload profiles of deceased individuals who have been identified by name, but for

whom no family members have been identified or located to claim the body. NamUs automatically performs comparisons of the various databases to determine matches or similarities between profiles of missing persons, unidentified persons, or unclaimed remains.

Other Databases that Can Store Information About Missing Persons

Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System

(IAFIS): IAFIS is an electronic database that stores information on fingerprints and corresponding criminal histories. This information is submitted voluntarily by state, local, and federal law enforcement agencies. The database includes more than 70 million subjects in its Criminal Master File; nearly 50 million records are for missing persons. Law enforcement agencies that submit electronic fingerprints receive electronic responses to criminal 10-print fingerprint submissions within 2 hours and within 24 hours for civil fingerprint submissions (i.e., background checks for employment and other non-criminal justice related purposes). The response indicates whether an individual has a criminal history. IAFIS is administered by the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division. For additional information, see <http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cjisd/iafis.htm>.

Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP): ViCAP is a data center that collects and analyzes information on crimes, including missing person cases where the circumstances indicate a strong possibility of foul play and the victim is still missing. However, few missing adult cases are actually entered because, according to the FBI, the NCIC does not automatically populate the ViCAP database. Cases with an arrested or identified offender can be entered into the ViCAP system by law enforcement investigators for database comparison and possible matching with unsolved cases. Once a case is entered into the ViCAP database, it is compared continuously against all other entries on the basis of certain aspects of the crime. The purpose of this process is to detect signature aspects and traits of the crime to allow ViCAP personnel with the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Division to identify crimes that have been committed by the same offender. For additional information, see <http://www.fbi.gov/hq/isd/ciirg/ncavc.htm#vicap>.

Source: Congressional Research Service.

Comparison and Interaction of Databases

Table A-2 in the **Appendix** summarizes some of the features of the databases discussed above, as well as the entities that may access them. NDIS includes DNA profiles and IAFIS includes fingerprint records, whereas some of the other databases only indicate whether these records are available. These other databases also tend to include more general information about missing persons and the circumstances surrounding their disappearance. Further, IAFIS and ViCAP have a broader mandate to store criminal justice-related data and do not focus, per se, on missing adult cases. The databases are not linked and do not populate one another.²⁵

²⁵ This may be due, in part, to concerns with protecting the privacy of individuals registered in the databases. For example, the DNA Identification Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322) limit the accessibility of the profiles in NDIS for certain purposes.

Records are submitted to most of the databases by authorized law enforcement agencies, state missing persons clearinghouses, medical examiners and coroners, or DNA laboratories. All of the databases can be accessed only by the federal government or authorized law enforcement and other personnel; however, records in NamUs and the NCMA database can also be reviewed by the public, though sometimes only on a limited basis for NamUs.

Federal Role in Recovering Missing Adults

Efforts to recover missing adults are primarily under the jurisdiction of state and local governments. These efforts may be complicated by a number of factors. Unlike children, adults have the legal right to go missing in most cases and can do so to seek protection from a domestic abuser and other reasons.²⁶ Further, law enforcement agencies may be hesitant to devote resources to missing adult cases given competing priorities. In addition, law enforcement agencies within and across states respond differently to missing adult cases. Some states mandate that law enforcement officials take reports without a waiting period, whereas other states require at least a 24-hour waiting period after the person is believed to be missing.²⁷

In recent years, the federal government has increasingly played a role both in preventing certain types of missing adult incidents and in working to recover adults who go missing, including those who are deceased and for whom only remains provide clues to the circumstances surrounding their disappearance. In addition to funding or operating databases that track information about missing adults and unidentified remains, the federal government has undertaken other related efforts, including support for (1) the DNA Initiative, created under President George W. Bush, which has focused on identifying the remains of unidentified deceased individuals; (2) National Missing Persons Task Force, with its emphasis on achieving greater cooperation among the various federal databases; (3) the Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert program to prevent missing episodes and locate missing individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia; (4) activities funded under Kristen's Act to locate missing adults; and (5) the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), which works to recover missing children and adults ages 18 to 21 who are reported to the agency as missing by law enforcement officials. The Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert program and activities funded under Kristen's Act have specifically received congressional appropriations for missing adult activities. The other activities have been funded under appropriations for initiatives or programs that encompass activities other than just those for missing adults.

DNA-Related Activities

In March 2003, President Bush announced a new DNA Initiative to promote the use of forensic DNA technology to solve crimes, protect individuals from wrongful prosecution, and identify missing persons. Funding was provided under the initiative from FY2004 through FY2008.²⁸

²⁶ Guardians and the court system may limit the autonomy of some adults through conservatorship or guardianship arrangements.

²⁷ For information about state responses to missing adults, see U.S. Department of Justice, National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) "Resources," <https://www.findthemissing.org/en/homes/resources>. The website includes varying levels of detail across states.

²⁸ For additional information about the DNA Initiative, see CRS Report RL33489, *An Overview and Funding History of Select Department of Justice (DOJ) Grant Programs*, by Nathan James.

Within the past several years, Congress has appropriated funding to DOJ to carry out the following activities to assist with locating missing adults and unidentified remains:²⁹

- sample analysis of unidentified human remains and family reference samples;³⁰
- standardized sample DNA collection kits for unidentified remains of missing persons;
- evaluation and implementation of advanced DNA technologies to facilitate the analysis of skeletal remains;
- focus group on using DNA technology to assist the identification of human remains;
- training and technical assistance on using DNA to identify missing persons and unidentified remains;
- census of medical examiners and coroners and inventory of unidentified remains; and
- NamUs databases.

National Missing Person's Taskforce³¹

As part of the DNA Initiative, in 2005, NIJ and FBI were directed by DOJ leadership to establish a national task force to assess how to better encourage, facilitate, and achieve greater use of federal missing person databases to solve missing persons cases and identify human remains. In response to this directive, NIJ and the FBI convened the National Missing Persons Taskforce, composed of a broad cross-section of criminal justice officials, forensic science experts, and victim advocates. The task force met July 2005 through January 2006 to address, among other issues, the federal databases that store information on missing persons and unidentified human remains. According to DOJ, members of the task force convened these meetings to better understand and improve the information sharing tools and DNA technologies available to solve cases involving missing persons and unidentified decedents. The task force also created model state legislation to encourage states to adopt laws that improve the ability of law enforcement to locate and return missing persons, identify human remains, and provide timely information to family members of missing persons.

²⁹ The Justice for All Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-405) authorized funding for DNA technology to meet some of the activities set forth in the DNA Initiative. Sec. 308 of the act provides that the Attorney General may use DNA technology to identify missing persons and unidentified human remains. Sec. 308 further requires that each state or unit of local government that receives funding under the section is required to submit the DNA profiles of missing persons and unidentified human remains to the NDIS national missing persons database. According to the Department of Justice, no specific appropriation has been made pursuant to this section of the act. For further information about funding since FY2004, see U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, "Funding to Identify Missing Persons," <http://www.nij.gov/nij/topics/forensics/investigations/missing-persons/funding-program.htm>.

³⁰ Laboratories that participate in NDIS conduct these sample analyses, and the DNA results are forwarded to the relevant missing person indexes in NDIS.

³¹ This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert Program³²

The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-322) authorized the Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert program to provide grants to locally based organizations to protect and locate missing patients with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia. Funding was authorized at \$900,000 for each of FY1996, FY1997, and FY1998. Congress has appropriated funding for the program from FY1996 through FY2013. Funding more than doubled from FY2008 to FY2009. These funds, administered by DOJ's Office of Justice Programs, have been awarded to the Alzheimer's Association, an organization that provides research on Alzheimer's disease. **Table 1** shows funding for the program from FY2002 through FY2013.

On March 26, 2013, President Obama signed into law the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (P.L. 113-6). This full-year CR superseded a six-month CR for FY2013 (P.L. 112-175) that had been enacted on September 28, 2012. P.L. 113-6 provides \$1 million for the Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert program, minus an across-the-board recession of 1.877%, per Section 3001 of the act.³³ With this rescission, funding remains at about \$1.0 million.

Still, the final FY2013 funding level for the program remains uncertain. On March 1, 2013, President Obama ordered that a sequester be implemented as required under the terms of the Budget Control Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-25) and the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-177), as amended.³⁴ The order called for an across-the-board cut of 5.0% for non-exempt nondefense discretionary funding. Because the sequester was ordered before the enactment of the FY2013 full-year CR, OMB calculated the amounts to be sequestered based on annualized funding levels in place under the six-month FY2013 CR (P.L. 112-175).³⁵ In light of the enactment of the full-year appropriations law, the effect of these reductions at the account, program, project, and activity level remains unclear, pending further guidance from OMB as to how these reductions are to be applied.

The President's budget for FY2014 proposes to eliminate the Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patient Alert program, citing that redirecting funds can ensure that OJP's "limited funding is focused on addressing the nation's most important criminal justice priorities."³⁶

³² This section was co-authored with Kirsten J. Colello, Specialist in Gerontology.

³³ This rescission was applicable to discretionary, non-security (as defined at 2 U.S.C. §900(c)(4)(A)) accounts within Division B of the act. Division B pertains to appropriations for Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) accounts.

³⁴ White House, President Obama, Sequestration Order for Fiscal Year 2013 Pursuant to Section 251A of the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act, As Amended, March 1, 2013, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2013sequestration-order-rel.pdf>.

³⁵ Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *OMB Report to the Congress on the Joint Committee Sequestration for Fiscal Year 2013*, March 1, 2013, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/legislative_reports/fy13ombjcssequestrationreport.pdf.

³⁶ U.S. Department of Justice, *FY2014 Performance Budget: Office of Justice Programs*, p. 26, <http://www.justice.gov/jmd/2014justification/pdf/ojp-justification.pdf>.

Table I. Appropriations for Missing Alzheimer’s Disease Patient Alert Program, FY2003-FY2013

(\$ in millions)

FY2004	FY2005	FY2006	FY2007	FY2008	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013 (without sequester applied)
\$0.85	\$0.87	\$0.84	\$0.84	\$0.94	\$2.0	\$2.0	\$1.96	\$1.0	\$1.0

Sources: FY2002 appropriations from H.Rept. 107-278; FY2003 appropriations from H.Rept. 108-10; FY2004 appropriations from H.Rept. 108-401; FY2005 appropriations from H.Rept. 108-792; and FY2006 appropriations from H.Rept. 109-272. FY2007 appropriations from Revised Continuing Appropriation Resolution (P.L. 110-5), minus a 1.28% rescission from FY2006. FY2008 appropriations from U.S. House, Committee on Rules, Joint Explanatory Statement to Accompany FY2008 Consolidated Appropriations Amendment to H.R. 2764 (P.L. 110-161), Division B. FY2009 appropriations from U.S. House, Committee on Rules, Joint Explanatory Statement to Accompany FY2009 Consolidated Appropriations Amendment to H.R. 1105 (P.L. 111-8), Division B. FY2010 appropriations from U.S. House, Committee on Rules, Conference Report to Accompany Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2010 (P.L. 111-117), Division B. FY2011 appropriations from Department of Defense and Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2011 (P.L. 112-10), minus a 0.2% rescission. FY2012 appropriations from Continuing Appropriations Act (P.L. 112-36), minus a 1.503% rescission. FY2013 appropriations from Further and Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013 (P.L. 113-6), minus a 1.877% rescission.

MedicAlert® + Alzheimer’s Association Safe Return Program³⁷

DOJ has awarded funds through the Missing Alzheimer’s Disease Patient Alert program to the Alzheimer’s Association in each year since FY1996. These funds have been used to establish and carry out the MedicAlert® + Alzheimer’s Association Safe Return Program. The program is a nationwide emergency response service for individuals with Alzheimer’s or a related dementia who wander or have a medical emergency. Enrollees receive a bracelet indicating that the individual is memory impaired and including a toll-free, 24-hour emergency response number to call if the person is found wandering or has a medical emergency.³⁸

The MedicAlert® + Alzheimer’s Association Safe Return Program provides 24-hour assistance, regardless of when or where the person is reported missing. The response can be initiated if the individual is found or is reported missing by a caretaker or others. The call is received by a trained emergency response operator, who assesses the incident and reaches out to the enrollee’s identified contacts. In the case of a medical emergency, the operator can also relay information from the enrollee electronic medical information record, including medications and doctor contacts. The operator will also file a report with the local Alzheimer’s Association chapter, who can assist with family education, contact with law enforcement agencies or the media, and perform follow up.

³⁷ Unless otherwise noted, this information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the Alzheimer’s Association.

³⁸ Wandering may pose a significant, if not life threatening, danger to the personal health, safety, and welfare of those with dementia. This may occur from exposure to the elements; lack of food; dehydration or lack of medication for extended periods of time; and general inability to think, act, or communicate in a way that could assist them. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for persons with dementia to wander from their homes, sometimes repeatedly. The Alzheimer’s Association reports that six out of 10 people with Alzheimer’s disease will wander at least once during the course of the disease.

In two-thirds of cases, enrolled missing individuals are found even before they are reported missing. This is because someone came across those individuals and called the program to report them as found. The Alzheimer's Association reports a success rate of 99% for reuniting enrolled missing individuals with their caretakers (this figure includes those who are found missing even before they are reported as such). The program also assists individuals with dementia who are not enrolled, and the success rate of reuniting these individuals is 88%. These individuals go missing and are intercepted by individuals who call the program. According to the Alzheimer's Association, first responders and others often call the hotline to report someone found or missing without knowing whether the person is enrolled. Although the Alzheimer's Association does not maintain information about non-enrolled individuals, the organization contacts the local chapter and local law enforcement to try to identify where the person belongs.

The program reportedly has helped in the safe return of over 18,000 people since 1993. The organization also provides training materials to law enforcement agencies about individuals with Alzheimer's, and how to recognize wandering behavior or individuals with dementia who are engaging in unsafe or uncharacteristic behavior, such as driving or shoplifting. Some chapters have partnerships with local law enforcement agencies to educate them about wandering behavior, but the level of contact varies across the country. Most chapters coordinate with state units on aging to make them aware of the organization and Safe Return program.

Kristen's Act

In 2000, Congress passed Kristen's Act (P.L. 106-468), named after Kristen Modafferi, who has been missing since 1997. Kristen was 18 when she disappeared and her family was unable to access services through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) because, at the time, the organization only provided assistance to missing incident cases for children under age 18. NCMEC now provides services for missing young adults ages 18 to 21, pursuant to Suzanne's Law, which requires law enforcement to also immediately submit information about missing adults ages 18 through 20 to the NCIC. Kristen's Act authorized \$1 million in funding for each of FY2001 to FY2004 and permitted the Attorney General to make grants to assist law enforcement agencies in locating missing adults; maintain a database for tracking adults believed by law enforcement to be endangered due to age, diminished mental capacity, and possible foul play; maintain statistical information on missing adults; provide resources and referrals to the families of missing adults; and establish and maintain a national clearinghouse for missing adults.

Kristen's Act grants were made from FY2002 through FY2006 through the Edward Byrne Discretionary Grant Program to the National Center for Missing Adults (NCMA), though funding authorization expired at the end of FY2004. Funding levels ranged from \$150,000 to \$1.7 million. NCMA began in 1995 as the missing adult division of the Nation's Missing Children Organization. NCMA received funding under Kristen's Act to expand its efforts to recover missing adults beginning in FY2002 and received this funding through FY2006. The organization merged with Let's Bring Them Home, a nonprofit organization that provides education and resources on missing persons. According to NCMA, this partnership is providing financial stability to the organization.³⁹

³⁹ Let's Bring Them Home (formerly known as the National Center for Missing Adults), "National Missing Persons Organizations Merge," press release, <http://www.lbth.org/ncma/content.php?webid=NCMA-LBTH-merger>.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children is a primary component of the federally funded Missing and Exploited Children’s Program.⁴⁰ Although NCMEC’s mission is to recover missing children under age 18, it also provides services for missing young adults ages 18 through 20, pursuant to Suzanne’s Law, which requires law enforcement to also immediately submit information about missing adults to the NCIC ages 18 through 20. This law changed the upper age limit of individuals who must be entered into the NCIC.

NCMEC processes young adult cases differently than cases for missing children.⁴¹ NCMEC will accept a young adult case only if it is reported by a law enforcement entity—and not by parents, spouses, partners, or others—because the organization relies on law enforcement personnel to verify that the young adult is missing due to foul play or other reasons that would cause concern about the individual’s whereabouts, such as diminished mental capacity. NCMEC then assists in recovery efforts for these adults as it would for children under age 18. A case manager in the Missing Children’s Division is assigned to serve as the single point of contact for the searching family and to provide technical assistance to locate abductors and recover missing children and young adults.

Issues

Federal and state policymakers and other stakeholders have increasingly focused on three issues related to adults who go missing: (1) coordinating databases on missing persons; (2) assisting states with building the capacity to develop both alert systems to inform the public about missing older adults and technology to recover these individuals; and (3) extending federal protections to missing adults with diminished mental capacity.

Coordination of Federally Funded Databases on Missing Persons and Unidentified Decedents

The first section of this report discussed the various federally funded databases that store information on missing persons and unidentified decedents. These databases do not currently populate one another, although some of the databases indicate whether information about a particular individual is available in another database. This limitation raises the question about whether the federal government can and should develop technology to enable the databases to coordinate, although concerns about privacy and funding would likely need to be addressed.

⁴⁰ NCMEC receives federal funding through the Missing and Exploited Children’s Program and other sources. For a full discussion of NCMEC activities, see CRS Report RL34050, *Missing and Exploited Children: Background, Policies, and Issues*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara.

⁴¹ This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Alert Systems

Silver or Senior Alerts⁴²

Alert systems, known as Silver or Senior Alerts, have been established in multiple states.⁴³ These alert systems were created out of concern for the safety of seniors and other at-risk adult populations who are prone to wandering due to a physical or cognitive disability or medical condition such as Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia. Some missing adult alert programs are modeled after the states' AMBER Alert system for abducted children.⁴⁴

Issuing alerts to law enforcement agencies and the public for missing vulnerable adults in some of the states appears to be at the discretion of the law enforcement agency—local or state or both—and is not required of the agency.⁴⁵ In addition, state alert systems vary in terms of the target population for issuing an alert (i.e., older adults with dementia versus any adult with a disability). Most law enforcement agencies have the ability to disseminate the alert to law enforcement agencies and media in the local area, region, statewide, and other states. For example, the Texas Division of Emergency Management disseminates information within the alert advisory area to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies; primary media outlets; the Texas Department of Transportation; the Texas Lottery Commission; and the Independent Bankers Association of Texas.

Some advocates have raised concerns that alert systems may not be useful for some adults who go missing. For example, it is reported that nearly all (95%) persons with Alzheimer's disease who wander are found less than a quarter mile from their homes.⁴⁶ Further, there is concern that alerting the media repeatedly about a missing adult case could desensitize the public to the issue of wandering. Some advocates suggest that policymakers may wish to consider Silver Alerts in combination with a combination of other policy approaches.⁴⁷

Further, the use of any alert system for missing adults may challenge the legal rights of an individual, in this case an adult, who may choose to go missing. Unlike incidents involving the AMBER Alert program, which was established to alert law enforcement and the public when a child is missing and criminal activity may be involved, it is not a crime for an adult to wander

⁴² This section was co-authored with Kirsten J. Colello, Specialist in Gerontology.

⁴³ For further information, see CRS Report R40552, *Alert Systems for Missing Adults in Eleven States: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara and Kirsten J. Colello. The report was written in 2009, when 11 states were identified as having these systems. See also, National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities, *Silver Alert Initiatives in the States: Protecting Seniors with Cognitive Impairments*, November 11, 2010, http://www.nasquad.org/documentation/nasquad_materials/Silver%20Alert%20Updated%20Report_11-9-10.pdf.

⁴⁴ AMBER Alert systems are voluntary partnerships among law enforcement agencies, broadcasters, and transportation agencies to activate messages in a targeted area when a child is abducted and believed to be in grave danger. For additional information, see CRS Report RL34050, *Missing and Exploited Children: Background, Policies, and Issues*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara.

⁴⁵ This information is primarily based on the Congressional Research Service's review of authorizing legislation.

⁴⁶ Alzheimer's Association, *Alzheimer's Association Statement on Silver Alert*, July 15, 2008, http://www.alz.org/news_and_events_14004.asp.

⁴⁷ For example, one such approach might be providing support to the caregivers of individuals with dementia, to better ensure that adults with the disease do not go missing. For information about current federal funding to assist caregivers, see CRS Report RL34123, *Family Caregiving to the Older Population: Background, Federal Programs, and Issues for Congress*, by Kirsten J. Colello.

from home or purposely go missing. To attempt to balance the rights of an individual with the concerns of family members or caregivers, states with alert systems have established specific criteria that must be met in order to activate a missing adult alert. In general, states have targeted missing individuals who are particularly vulnerable due to a credible threat to the individual's health and safety.⁴⁸ Also, as previously mentioned, timing can be a critical factor in locating individuals with cognitive or mental impairment who wander either on foot or in a vehicle and may be without basic provisions or medicine, or exposed to the elements for extended periods. Concerns about violating an individual's privacy with respect to filing a missing person's report appear to outweigh the perceived benefits among various stakeholders, including family members, law enforcement officials, and policymakers.

In 2011, DOJ published a guide to assist states and communities in developing or enhancing what DOJ calls an Endangered Missing Advisory (EMA), or an advisory for individuals who do not meet the AMBER Alert criteria established by DOJ.⁴⁹ The guide suggests that EMAs can be issued for missing adults, or for children while law enforcement determines whether a case meets the AMBER Alert criteria. The guide outlines the steps states and communities can take in developing an EMA plan, including creating a task force—comprised of key AMBER Alert stakeholders, broadcasters and other representatives from the media, and law enforcement, among others—that can establish criteria and procedures for the EMA and oversee its operation and effectiveness. The guide suggests that adults may benefit from a different type of alert system than AMBER Alert, and that task forces should determine which elements of the AMBER Alert plan should be used to activate an EMA.⁵⁰

Still, some states with alert systems could have difficulty coordinating with another state that lacks a similar system. States could also have challenges coordinating with states that have alert systems with different criteria for activating an alert. Although state and local governments have taken the lead in implementing alert systems, the federal government could play a role in coordinating efforts when a missing individual is believed to have crossed state lines as well as assist in the development of formal agreements or protocols for the use of interstate alerts. The federal government could model any policies to coordinate across state lines on the AMBER Alert program, which provides training and technical assistance to states on a number of issues related to abducted children. This training addresses how jurisdictions, including those in different states, can work together to recover children who are abducted, among other topics. Through conference and training exercises, state AMBER Alert coordinators, state and local law enforcement agencies, and other stakeholders have opportunities to meet and exchange ideas, which may further facilitate coordination.

Congress has recently considered legislation (including H.R. 632/S. 557 in the 111th Congress and H.R. 112 and S. 1263 in the 112th Congress) that would create a network of state missing adult alert systems that seek to provide greater coordination between states for missing adult cases by establishing a leadership position at DOJ. The person assigned to this position would establish

⁴⁸ CRS Report R40552, *Alert Systems for Missing Adults in Eleven States: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara and Kirsten J. Colello.

⁴⁹ For further information about the AMBER Alert program, see CRS Report RL34050, *Missing and Exploited Children: Background, Policies, and Issues*, by Adrienne L. Fernandes-Alcantara.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Guide for Implementing or Enhancing an Endangered Missing Advisory*, March 2011, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/232001.pdf>.

voluntary guidelines for states in developing Silver Alert plans to promote compatible and integrated Silver Alert systems throughout the United States.

Tracking Technology

Electronic monitoring services for individuals who are susceptible to going missing are being implemented. One such electronic monitoring program is used by some state and local law enforcement agencies with technology developed by Project Lifesaver International, a nonprofit organization that administers the Project Lifesaver program.⁵¹ Project Lifesaver uses a personalized wristband that emits a signal to track individuals prone to going missing. The wristband is worn by the clients continuously, and each month, a law enforcement officer or trained volunteer visits with the clients to replace the wristband batteries and provide referrals to clients and their caregivers in need of social services. When family members or caregivers report to the designated Project Lifesaver agency—typically a local law enforcement or first responder agency—that the client is missing, a search and rescue team responds to the wanderer’s area to search using a mobile locator tracking system.

Project Lifesaver grew out of local law enforcement experience with search and rescue efforts for missing persons with Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia. The target population of the program has expanded to include children with special needs such as autism and Down’s syndrome and to anyone else that may be at risk of wandering for a medical reason.

In addition to providing the technology, the program trains the designated agency to communicate with persons with Alzheimer’s disease and other disorders. Project Lifesaver International reports that the tracking technology is used by hundreds of law enforcement agencies in nearly all states and the District of Columbia (as well as Australia and Canada). According to Project Lifesaver International, the benefits from the program include saving law enforcement and search and rescue response time and resources in locating missing persons due to wandering.

The Alzheimer’s Association also has a program, known as Comfort Zone, that uses tracking technology. The program is a web application that includes a location-based mapping service. The enrolled individual carries a tracking device with global positioning system (GPS) technology. Caretakers can track the individual’s whereabouts via a secure online website through the Alzheimer’s Association. The website includes a map with addresses of the vicinity in which the person is located. Caretakers can also receive alerts and notifications of the individual’s whereabouts, such as when the individual leaves a specified radius (e.g., beyond their house or some other location).⁵²

Tracking technology raises questions about the rights to privacy and autonomy of individuals who are enrolled. These organizations appear to have taken steps to ensure that enrolled participants meet the eligibility criteria and to secure the consent of the enrolled individual, where possible. For individuals who participate in Project Lifesaver, consent usually comes from a caregiver having legal responsibility for the individual. In rare cases, the individual gives consent. Individuals enrolled in Comfort Zone give consent to be enrolled, and in some cases the caregiver

⁵¹ This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by Project Lifesaver. See also, Project Lifesaver, “About Us,” <http://www.projectlifesaver.org/what-we-do/>.

⁵² Alzheimer’s Association, Comfort Zone, “About Comfort Zone,” http://www.alz.org/comfortzone/about_comfort_zone.asp.

with legal responsibility gives consent. According to the Alzheimer's Association, the program is ideally for individuals with early stages of dementia.

Congress has considered legislation that would provide federal support for tracking technology. For example, S. 557 from the 111th Congress would have authorized DOJ, after consulting with HHS, to award grants to states and local governments to carry out programs that provide electronic monitoring services to elderly individuals that will assist in their recovery if they go missing.

Appendix.

Table A-1. National Crime Information Center (NCIC): Missing Entries of Adults Ages 18 and Older, 2008-2012

Category (as defined under the NCIC Operating Manual)	Number of Missing Adults and Share of Total Missing Adult Cases (2009)	Number of Missing Adults and Share of Total Missing Adult Cases (2010) ^a	Number of Missing Adults and Share of Total Missing Adult Cases (2011) ^a	Number of Missing Adults and Share of Total Missing Adult Cases (2012) ^a
Disability: a person of any age who is missing and under proven mental/physical disability or senile, thereby subjecting himself/herself or others to personal and immediate danger. ^b	28,824 (17.9%)	27,009 (16.8%)	25,448 (16.9%)	26,699 (16.3%)
Endangered: a person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that his/her physical safety may be in danger.	71,070 (44.1%)	50,951 (31.6%)	37,829 (25.1%)	37,745 (23.0%)
Involuntary: a person of any age who is missing under circumstances indicating that the disappearance may not have been voluntary, i.e., abduction or kidnapping.	14,290 (8.9%)	14,555 (9.0%)	13,342 (8.9%)	13,774 (8.4%)
Juvenile: a person under age 21 who is missing and does not meet any of the enter criteria set forth under the Disability, Endangered, Involuntary, or Catastrophe categories.	7,658 (4.8%)	5,324 (3.3%)	1,787 (1.2%)	4,747 (2.9%)
Catastrophe: a person of any age who missing after a catastrophe. ^b	267 (0.2%)	238 (0.2%)	280 (0.2%)	215 (0.1%)
Other: a person age 21 and older who does not meet any of the above criteria but for whom there is a reasonable concern for their safety; or a person who is under age 21 who is declared emancipated by the laws of his or her state of residence.	38,956 (24.2%)	62,939 (39.1%)	71,935 (47.7%)	81,086 (49.4%)
Total	161,065	161,016	150,661	164,266

Source: Congressional Research Service presentation of data provided by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division on April 5, 2009; January 27, 2010; January 18-19, 2011; February 16, 2012; and March 18, 2013.

- a. Since 2009, the share of missing adults who were reported in the “endangered” category has decreased while the share of missing adults who were reported in the “other” category has increased. According to the FBI, this is due to the change in the definition of the “other” category in August 2009. The definition changed from “a person age 18 or older not meeting the criteria for entry in any other category who is missing and for who there is a reasonable concern for his/her safety” to “a person age 21 and older not meeting the criteria for entry in any other category who is missing and for whom there is a reasonable concern for his/her safety or a person who is under 21 and declared emancipated by laws of his/her state of residence.” This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division on January 19, 2011.
- b. According to the FBI, “proven physical or mental disability” refers to an individual who could have suicidal tendencies or a drug addiction, is a hemophiliac or diabetic, or has previously escaped custody, among other possible characteristics. A “catastrophe” refers to a disaster, such as an airplane crash, terrorist attack, natural disaster, among other possible scenarios. This information was provided to the Congressional Research Service by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Criminal Justice Information Services Division.

Table A-2. Databases of Missing Adults and Unidentified Remains

Database— Administering Agency or Organization	Features	Access to Database
National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Person File and Unidentified Persons File—DOJ/FBI	The database includes descriptive information about the missing individual or their remains. Individuals are classified under one of six missing person categories or one of three unidentified missing person categories. The databases indicate whether DNA and fingerprinting information are available.	Data are reported by, and available to, authorized federal, state, and local criminal justice and non-criminal justice agencies.
National DNA Index System (NDIS)—DOJ/FBI	The system includes three databases for the DNA of missing persons, unidentified remains, and relatives of missing persons.	Data are reported by state and local DNA laboratories, in cooperation with state and local law enforcement officials. All profiles can be accessed by the FBI; some profiles can be accessed by the state and local DNA laboratories.
National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)—DOJ/NIJ	The system is under construction and will include two databases for descriptive information and pictures about missing persons and unidentified remains. The unidentified remains database is operational, and features information about the location of the remains, distinguishing features, and law enforcement contact information, and whether DNA and dental records are available. The two databases will ultimately be linked.	Data are reported by, and available to, authorized federal, state, and local criminal justice and non-criminal justice agencies. Profiles can be accessed by these entities and the public, although the public may not have access to information and photographs for some profiles.
Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System (IAFIS)—DOJ/FBI	The system includes fingerprints and corresponding criminal histories.	Data are reported by authorized international, federal, state, and local criminal justice and non-criminal justice agencies.
Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP)—DOJ/FBI	The system includes information on crimes, including missing person cases where the circumstances indicate a strong possibility of foul play and the victim is still missing. The database entries are continuously compared on the basis of certain aspects of the crime.	Data are reported by authorized federal, state, and local criminal justice and non-criminal justice agencies.

Source: Congressional Research Service.

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