

Why an Alarm with Location Sharing Brings Peace of Mind for New Zealand Families

When my mother first started talking about getting a personal alarm, I assumed she meant the kind that sits on a bedside table and calls a preset number. She is 78, lives alone in a quiet suburb of Christchurch, and until recently had never owned a smartphone. But the conversation took a turn when she mentioned she wanted something that would let me know where she was if she ever fell. That was my first real encounter with an alarm with location sharing, and it changed how I thought about senior safety entirely.

The idea of a medical alert system that combines a push button alarm with GPS tracking is not new, but it is only in the last few years that the technology has become reliable enough for everyday use in New Zealand. The devices are small, often a waterproof pendant worn around the neck or clipped to a belt. Inside is a lithium battery that lasts weeks, a cellular network connection, and a GPS chip that can pinpoint the wearer's location. When the button is pressed, the alarm sends an alert to a 24/7 monitoring centre and simultaneously shares the person's location with family members through a mobile app. For a caregiver living in another city, that is a huge relief.

How an Alarm with Location Sharing Works in Practice

Imagine an elderly parent who still enjoys walking the dog along a coastal track or visiting the local market on a Saturday morning. A standard home-based alarm is useless once they step out the door. But a wearable device with location sharing means they are covered everywhere. If they fall and cannot press the button, some models include automatic fall detection that triggers the alert without any action from the user. The system then sends the GPS coordinates to the monitoring centre and to nominated family members. Within minutes, someone knows exactly where help is needed.

In New Zealand, providers like St John New Zealand and private companies such as GeoCare offer these services. The monitoring centres are staffed by trained operators who can coordinate an emergency response, whether that means dispatching an ambulance or calling a neighbour. The combination of GPS tracking and human oversight means that even if the wearer is confused or unable to speak, help can still reach them. That is the real value of a modern medical alert system: it does not rely on the user being able to explain what happened.



Fall Detection and the Limits of Technology

Fall detection is a feature that many people assume is flawless, but it pays to understand its limits. Most devices use accelerometers and gyroscopes to detect a sudden impact followed by stillness. They work well for hard falls, but a slow collapse or a slide down a wall might not trigger them. That is why the push button remains essential. The best approach is a system that combines automatic fall detection with a manual [alarm with location sharing](#). That way, if the technology misses an event, the person can still call for help. And if they cannot, the family monitoring feature means a caregiver can check in if the device has not moved for an unusual length of time.

I have spoken to several families who chose a personal alarm specifically because of the location sharing function. One woman in Auckland told me her father has dementia and tends to wander. Before they got the alarm, she was constantly anxious, checking her phone every hour. Now she receives a notification if he leaves a designated area, and she can see his location on a map. The device is a waterproof pendant, so he wears it in the shower without worry. For her, the peace of mind is worth the monthly subscription fee many times over.

What to Look for in a Medical Alert System

Choosing the right system depends on the person's lifestyle and the level of support they have at home. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Coverage area:** In New Zealand, cellular networks are good in urban areas but can be patchy in rural or remote regions. Check that the device uses the same network as your phone provider, or that it switches between networks automatically.
- **Battery life and charging:** A lithium battery that lasts several weeks is standard, but some devices need to be docked every night. For someone who forgets to charge things, a longer-life battery or a device with a low-battery alert is better.
- **Water resistance:** Falls are common in bathrooms. A waterproof pendant that can be worn in the shower is a must, not a nice-to-have.
- **Family monitoring via a mobile app:** Some systems allow family members to check location, battery status, and alert history through a smartphone app. This is especially useful for children who live in a different city.
- **Integration with local emergency services:** Check whether the monitoring centre can directly contact St John New Zealand or other local responders. Some services only call family members, which can delay help.

The Trade-Offs of Location Sharing

Location sharing is a powerful tool, but it is not without its downsides. Some seniors feel that being tracked all the time is an invasion of privacy. It is important to have an honest conversation about this before buying an alarm with location sharing. The device should have an option to turn off GPS tracking when it is not needed, or to set boundaries so that alerts only go out when the person leaves a familiar zone. The goal is to support independence, not to remove it.

Another practical concern is the size and comfort of the wearable device. Some pendants are small and light, while others feel bulky. A personal alarm that is uncomfortable to wear will end up in a drawer. Try to find a model that fits the person's style and daily routine. If they dislike wearing anything around their neck, a belt-clip option or a watch-style device might work better.



Battery management is another factor. A device that needs charging every two days is a chore. Most modern units last a week or more, but the user or their caregiver needs to remember to check the battery level. A low-battery alert sent to the mobile app can prevent the device from going dead without anyone noticing.

Why This Matters for Senior Safety in New Zealand

New Zealand has an ageing population, and many older people want to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. A medical alert system with GPS tracking and fall detection is one of the tools that makes that possible. It does not replace human care, but it extends the

safety net. For a caregiver who lives an hour away, knowing that a parent's wearable device is working and that they can see their location on a map is a huge weight off their shoulders.

The technology is not perfect. No device can prevent every accident. But the combination of a push button alarm, automatic fall detection, and location sharing creates a system that covers most scenarios. When something does go wrong, the response is faster and more targeted because the responder knows exactly where the person is.

Choosing the Right Service Provider

In New Zealand, there are several providers to choose from. Some, like St John New Zealand, offer a well-established monitoring service with a strong local reputation. Others, like GeoCare, provide a GPS-based system with a mobile app that family members can use to track location and receive alerts. It is worth comparing the monthly costs, the quality of the 24/7 monitoring centre, and the reliability of the cellular network the device uses. Read the fine print about what happens if the network is down or if the device goes out of range.



One thing I have learned from talking to families is that the best system is the one the person actually wears. That sounds obvious, but it is easy to get caught up in features and forget about the human factor. A sleek, comfortable waterproof pendant with a simple button and

reliable location sharing will do more for senior safety than a feature-packed device that feels like a burden.

For anyone considering a personal alarm for an older relative, I would recommend starting with a conversation about what worries them most. Is it falling in the garden? Getting lost on a walk? Being unable to reach help after a stroke? Once you know the specific risks, you can choose a medical alert system that addresses them directly. An alarm with location sharing is not a magic solution, but it is a practical, proven tool that gives both the wearer and their family a little more freedom and a lot more peace of mind.