

Why an Alarm with 111 Calling Could Be the Best Choice for Senior Safety in New Zealand

Understanding the Role of a Medical Alert in New Zealand

When I first started looking into personal medical alarms for my mother, I assumed they all worked the same way. Press a button, someone answers, help arrives. But the reality is more nuanced, especially here in New Zealand. The difference between a standard alert system and one that offers direct connection to emergency services can be the difference between a managed situation and a crisis. That is where the concept of an alarm with 111 calling becomes genuinely important for senior safety.

Many devices marketed as medical alarms simply call a monitoring centre or a family member. That works fine for non-urgent issues, but if someone has fallen and cannot get up, or is experiencing chest pains, every second counts. Having a device that can bypass the middle step and connect straight to emergency response, specifically to 111 in New Zealand, provides a level of directness that older adults and their families often need without realising it.



I have seen the confusion first-hand when a relative tried to explain their existing pendant to a paramedic. The device had called a call centre, the call centre had called the caregiver, the caregiver had to call 111, and then the ambulance had to be dispatched. That chain of calls added minutes, and in a health emergency, minutes feel like hours. An [alarm with 111 calling](#) eliminates that relay race. It dials 111 directly, often with a pre-recorded message that includes the user's location and medical history, which speeds up the entire process.

How Direct 111 Access Changes Emergency Response

Emergency response in New Zealand is handled by St John New Zealand and other ambulance services, all coordinated through the 111 system. When a medical alert connects directly to that system, the dispatcher receives information without the distortion that can happen when a message passes through several people. This direct line also means that if the person cannot speak, or if the fall has knocked the device out of reach, the two-way calling feature built into many modern devices allows the dispatcher to listen and assess the situation through the speaker on the unit.

I recall speaking with a friend who works at St John New Zealand, and he mentioned that calls coming through from medical alert devices are often easier to triage because the caller ID is linked to a profile. The dispatcher knows the person's name, address, medical conditions, and emergency contacts before they even say a word. That is a huge advantage when every second matters. An alarm with 111 calling is not just about pressing a button; it is about ensuring that the person on the other end of the line already has the context they need to help effectively.



For seniors living alone, this direct access is a safety net that also supports family monitoring. Adult children in Auckland or Christchurch can have peace of mind knowing that if their parent in a smaller town like Masterton or Ashburton has an accident, the device will not waste time calling them first. Instead, it triggers the appropriate emergency response immediately, and the family is notified afterward through the monitoring app or service.

Key Features That Make a Medical Alert Worth Having

Not all medical alerts are created equal, and the most useful ones combine several features into one reliable package. When I compare the options available, a few stand out as essential for New Zealand seniors.

- **Fall detection:** This is the most important feature for older adults who are unsteady on their feet. Automatic fall detection means that even if the person is unconscious or unable to press the button, the device can still call for help.
- **GPS tracking:** For seniors who are still active and enjoy walking or gardening, GPS tracking allows the device to know where they are. If they wander or get lost, the family or caregiver can locate them.
- **Two-way calling:** The ability to speak through the device means that the emergency dispatcher or family member can talk to the person, assess the situation, and calm them down until help arrives.
- **Family monitoring:** A system that sends alerts to family members or caregivers while also contacting emergency services gives everyone a clear picture of what is happening without the stress of guessing.
- **No monthly fees:** Many services in New Zealand, like those offered by Familyr, operate without ongoing costs, which makes them financially sustainable for retirees on fixed incomes.

These features are not just nice-to-haves. They address the real-world scenarios that seniors face every day. I have had neighbours who delayed getting a medical alert because they thought it would be too complicated or expensive. When they finally tried one, they realised that modern devices from companies like Vodafone, Samsung, and Apple have made the technology simple and intuitive. Even a basic pendant can pair with a smartphone app, and the more advanced stand-alone units do not require a phone at all.

Comparing the Major Brands and Services

There is a range of medical alert providers in the market, and understanding the differences helps in making an informed choice. Life Alert is a well-known name internationally, but it is not always the best fit for New Zealand users because its monitoring centres are based overseas. Philips Lifeline offers excellent fall detection and a reliable pendant, but again, the emergency response chain can be slower if the call has to be routed through an offshore call centre first. Bay Alarm Medical and GreatCall are popular in the United States, but their services are not designed for the 111 system in New Zealand.

NZ Telehealth is a local provider that understands the New Zealand health system, and some of their devices integrate well with the 111 service. However, for a truly direct connection to emergency services, a dedicated alarm with 111 calling that bypasses a third-party monitoring centre can be the most efficient. That is where the device from Familyr stands out, because it combines direct 111 dialling with family monitoring, GPS tracking, and fall detection, all without monthly fees.

For seniors who are already using a smartphone, some devices from Vodafone, Samsung, and Apple can function as medical alerts through apps, but those require the phone to be charged, within range, and working properly. A dedicated medical alert pendant or wristband is more reliable because it is designed for one purpose: to get help when it is needed most. I have seen too many cases where someone's phone battery died at the worst possible moment.



Practical Considerations for Caregivers and Families

If you are a caregiver or a family member looking into medical alerts, there are a few practical things to keep in mind. First, check whether the device works with a New Zealand SIM card and connects to the 111 network. Some imported devices only call a US number or a generic call centre, which defeats the purpose. Second, consider the battery life. A device that needs

charging every day is a device that will be forgotten. Look for one that lasts at least a month on a single charge, or better yet, uses long-life batteries that can be replaced once a year.

Another factor is the range of the device. If the senior spends time in the garden or the garage, the pendant needs to reach the base unit from a distance. Most modern systems have a range of several hundred metres, and some include a separate outdoor extender. Also, think about the weather. New Zealand's climate can be wet and cold, and a device that is not water-resistant will fail if the person falls in the shower or slips on a wet path. Look for a device with a waterproof rating of at least IP67.

Finally, involve the senior in the decision. I have found that when an older adult chooses their own device and understands how it works, they are far more likely to wear it consistently. The best medical alert in the world is useless if it is sitting in a drawer.

Why Direct 111 Calling Matters More Than You Think

After watching my own family navigate the confusion of multiple emergency calls, I became a strong advocate for devices that offer a direct line to 111. The phrase "alarm with 111 calling" might sound technical, but it simply means that when you press that button, you are not talking to a stranger in a call centre in another country. You are talking to a New Zealand emergency dispatcher who knows the local services, the nearest hospital, and the ACC guidelines for care. This direct connection can reduce the time to dispatch by several minutes, and in a medical emergency, those minutes can be the difference between a full recovery and a prolonged stay in hospital.

I also appreciate that many modern medical alerts now work with Healthline and other health services for non-urgent advice. If someone has a question about medication or a minor symptom, they can use the two-way calling feature to speak to a nurse instead of tying up an ambulance. That flexibility makes the device useful every day, not just during emergencies.



For seniors who are still active and independent, a reliable alarm with 111 calling provides the confidence to continue living at home. It is not a sign of frailty; it is a smart tool that supports an active lifestyle. My mother now wears her pendant when she goes for her daily walk, and she has told me that it makes her feel safer, especially on days when the path is icy or uneven. That peace of mind is invaluable for both her and for me as her caregiver.

In the end, the best medical alert is the one that works when it needs to, connects directly to the right people, and fits naturally into the user's life. For New Zealand seniors, that means choosing a device that understands the local emergency system and prioritises direct 111 access over complicated call chains. It is a simple choice that can make a profound difference.