

Caring for someone who lives alone

This help sheet addresses concerns families and carers may have when someone with dementia lives alone, and some ways to help the person live alone safely.

Each person with dementia is unique and so is the situation in which they find themselves. While most people live with a partner or in some type of family situation, increasingly many people live alone. This may be by choice, or by circumstance. Whatever the reason, it creates a particular challenge for people who care for someone with dementia who lives on their own.

A diagnosis of dementia does not automatically mean that people are immediately incapable of caring for themselves. Assisting a person to remain in the familiar surroundings of their home for as long as possible is a worthwhile goal. However it can be very worrying for family and friends.

The type of support needed depends on the individual situation.

A person living alone may:

- Forget to eat or take prescribed medication
- Forget to bathe or change their clothes regularly
- Lack awareness of potentially hazardous situations such as fire or electrical appliances
- Show poor judgement about who they let into the house
- Forget to feed or care for pets
- Have unrealistic ideas or suspicions which can lead to trouble with neighbours, the police or the community

Some of these situations may be able to be dealt with fairly simply. For instance, if the person is forgetting to eat, arrange for delivered meals, such as meals-on-wheels and then make a phone call or have a person visit to remind them to eat the meal. Some of the situations however may compromise the person's safety and well being, and a move to more supervised care may have to be arranged.

How can you help?

Accepting a degree of risk

There is an increased risk when a person with dementia lives alone. However whether this continues to be an acceptable risk will need to be reviewed regularly by family, carers and professionals. The person's own wishes and concerns must also be considered.

Family involvement

It may be possible for more family members to be involved in aspects of the care and assistance of someone living alone. It can be useful to organise a family meeting at an early stage to work out what each person can offer now and into the future as well as when the situation will be reviewed.

Household safety

Ensure that the house is well lit and that there are no obvious hazards such as faulty kitchen appliances, loose carpets or unsteady furniture.

Aids to independence

There are many aids which can assist a person to remain independent. Some of these include:

- Hand rails at bath, shower and toilet
- Easy to read clocks and large calendars will help to orient to time
- Reminder timers may also be helpful, particularly for remembering medications
- Personal alarms or monitoring systems may help

Independent living

The Independent Living Centre (ILC) is in most States and Territories and offers a number of services designed to promote safe living. Information is available on a number of products including smoke detectors, hot water service temperature regulators and monitoring services. Advice is also available on home modifications and home design. Contact numbers for ILCs in each state can be obtained by contacting the **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500** or by visiting ilcaustralia.org.au

Managing finances

As the dementia progresses, the person's ability to make financial and legal decisions will decrease. They will need assistance in managing their finances. It is essential to get legal and financial advice while the person can still participate in the decision.

Telling other people

Explain the person's condition to friends, neighbours, local shopkeepers and the local police and provide them with contact numbers. They can be very helpful in keeping a tactful eye on a person with dementia. Ensure that the person has adequate identification and an emergency contact number when they go out.

Who can help?

Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAT) provide assistance to older people in determining their needs for home based supports or residential care. A range of health care workers such as geriatricians, social workers and occupational therapists work together as part of the ACAT. You can contact your nearest ACAT by calling My Aged Care.

The Australian Government has established My Aged Care, a service to provide support and assistance with queries about access to home and community care, respite fees, and bonds and charges. They can also help you look for Government funded aged care homes that meet your particular needs. Call **1800 200 422** or visit myagedcare.gov.au

Carer Gateway website and contact centre provides practical information and resources to support carers. **1800 422 737** (free call except from mobile phones) or visit carergateway.gov.au

For emergency respite at other times call **1800 059 059**.

The Carer Advisory and Counselling Service provides carers with information and advice about relevant services and entitlements. Contact your closest Carer Advisory and Counselling Service on **1800 242 636** or visit carersaustralia.com.au

Further Information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling. Contact the National Dementia Helpline on **1800 100 500**, or visit our website at dementia.org.au



For language assistance phone the Translating and Interpreting Service on **131 450**