

How to design dementia-friendly care environments

The designed environment can have a major impact on a person living with dementia. This help sheet will outline the key principles to enable you to make simple changes at home or in a care facility to help make the best of everyday life.

People living with dementia can experience their world as confusing, disorienting and, at worst, disabling and even dangerous. A well set up or designed environment, planned with impaired thinking skills in mind, can help maintain abilities and provide meaningful engagement by providing essential prompts, accessibility and reduce risks to support a person with dementia.

The information in this help sheet is based on the ten Dementia Enabling Environment Principles from the work of Professor Richard Fleming and Kirsty Bennett, at the University of Wollongong. These principles have an evidence base and have been constructed by reviewing the research literature of studies looking at maximising enablement and wellbeing for people living with dementia through physical design.

Dementia Enabling Environment Principles

- Principle 1:** Unobtrusively reduce risks
- Principle 2:** Provide a human scale
- Principle 3:** Allow people to see and be seen
- Principle 4:** Reduce unhelpful stimulation
- Principle 5:** Optimise helpful stimulation
- Principle 6:** Support movement and engagement
- Principle 7:** Create a familiar space
- Principle 8:** Provide opportunities to be alone or with others
- Principle 9:** Provide links to the community
- Principle 10:** Respond to a vision for way of life

The principles can provide you with a way of looking at and reviewing your home, or factors to consider if you are moving house. These are also very useful for the design of new care facilities, hospitals and day centres.

Detailed information on these principles can be found at [**enablingenvironments.com.au/principles.html**](https://enablingenvironments.com.au/principles.html)

These principles expand in detail on the definition of a dementia-friendly environment which is one that:

- promotes independence and supports well-being
- has familiar surroundings
- allows easy access and finding your way
- supports meaningful tasks
- supports participation in daily activities
- promotes safety, security and comfort

An example of applying the Dementia Enabling Environment Principles into a real situation: ensuite bathroom

Principle 1: Unobtrusively reduce risks

- Ensure that grab rails are securely fixed to the wall
- Ensure that surfaces especially on the floor are non-slip
- Use a hand-held shower to make assisting with showers easier
- Keep the door open and ensure unobstructed sight lines from the bed to the toilet
- Ensure that doors are unlockable from the outside, in case the person with dementia has a fall, or is unable to unlock the door themselves
- Create a bathroom that is warm, inviting and also safe. Use warm colours to make the space more inviting, and to give the impression of a warmer temperature

Principle 3: Allow people to see and be seen

- Use a coloured toilet seat that contrasts with the toilet, to ensure that it can be seen easily
- Choose grab rails that are of a clear contrasting colour to the wall
- Allow for the door handle to be located easily, by ensuring that the colour of the door handle contrasts with the colour of the door

Principle 4: Reduce unhelpful stimulation

- Some people with dementia find glare and reflections from mirrors confusing and frightening. If this is the case, consider removing or covering mirrors with a blind that matches the surrounding wall colour.

Principle 5: Optimise helpful stimulation

- Ensure even lighting to achieve a minimum light level of 300 lux
- Leave in clear sight key objects the person with dementia may wish to use (e.g. toothbrush).

Principle 6: Support movement and engagement

- Make locating the toilet at night easier by using a Passive Infra-Red (PIR) light which detects movement and turns on automatically when someone enters the bathroom
- Ensure the toilet is visible from the bed or easy for the person to find their way to it

Auditing the care environment

A range of dementia specialist audit tools are available to assist you to review your care environment or plan a new design. Information on these tools can be found on the Dementia Enabling website. Using a validated tool can provide a systemic way of identifying areas for improvement.

Further information

For further information on creating a dementia enabling environment, including comprehensive illustrations and practical suggestions on how to make simple improvements in the home and in care facilities, please visit the Alzheimer's WA website [**enablingenvironments.com.au**](http://enablingenvironments.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**](http://dementia.org.au)



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