

Residential aged care

This help sheet provides information for people with dementia, their families and carers to help in planning and navigating the move into residential aged care.

Making the decision to find an alternative to caring for a person with dementia at home can be one of the most difficult decisions families and carers will make. The process can be emotionally overwhelming and challenging if you are unfamiliar with navigating through the government funding system and don't know what residential aged care services are available.

Being prepared and knowing about the services and costs beforehand can help you make the best decision and also make that decision less stressful. Having steps to follow can make the process clearer and easier.

This help sheet is designed as a guide to help you plan the move into residential aged care. It also includes a list of useful resources and contacts which will enable you to seek more information as you need it.

Build your support network

The first step with moving into residential care is acknowledging that it is a difficult decision to make. Many people feel a mix of emotions such as loss, guilt and even relief. This can be overwhelming, so it's important to have support around you. Reaching out to friends, family or your family doctor is a good place to start. Being able to talk to other carers or counsellors who specialise in working with people with dementia is another option that many find helpful.

- **Dementia Australia** operates the National Dementia Helpline that provides information and support to people living with dementia, their family and carers. The Helpline can guide you to dementia specific services in your area including face-to-face counselling. Contact the **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500**

- The **Carer Advisory and Counselling Service** provides carers with information and advice about their caring role, relevant carer services and entitlements. Call **1800 242 636** or visit carersaustralia.com.au
- The **Carer Gateway** website and contact centre provides practical information and resources support carers. Call **1800 422 737** or visit carergateway.gov.au

Eligibility and Assessment

For people over 65 years

Entry into residential aged care requires an assessment of the person entering care. The first thing to do if you are considering residential care is to contact **My Aged Care** on **1800 200 422** or visit the website myagedcare.gov.au

My Aged Care assists older people, and their families and carers, to access information about the types of aged care services available, to determine eligibility for services, obtain referrals to service providers, and to determine any contributions they need to make towards the cost of their care.

If My Aged Care determines that you may require residential aged care, an **Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT)** will provide a free assessment to determine your eligibility. If you are concerned with the results or quality of the ACAT, you have the right to voice these concerns. ACAT have processes in place to work through any issues that may arise.

For people under 65 years

For people under 65, the process to enter residential aged care is different because the funding scheme for people under 65 is different. For more information about support for people under 65, contact the **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** on **1800 800 110** or visit ndis.gov.au

Fees and Administration

An important point to consider when moving into an aged care home is the cost. Typically there are four types of fees, although some facilities may combine them. A number of these fees are means tested meaning that government assistance is available for people who require financial support.

On entry into residential aged care, you will be given a Centrelink means test form to determine if you will receive financial assistance from the government.

To get an estimate of what fees you should expect, contact **My Aged Care** on **1800 200 422** or use the online calculator at myagedcare.gov.au/fee-estimator/residential-care/form

The types of fees you can expect are:

1. **Basic daily fee** – this is the minimum fee that covers meals, utilities, etc. Some people may only pay this amount.
2. **Care fee** – this covers the cost of care required for the resident and is means tested. Depending on your financial situation this fee may be covered by the Australian Government.
3. **Accommodation payment** – this may be covered in part or in full by the Australian Government, however depending on your financial circumstances, you may have to pay this fee yourself.
4. **Fees for extra or additional optional services** – these will vary between facilities. Your residential aged care home provider will be able to advise you about what services may be available and their associated costs.

Finding the right aged care home

Location, location, location

Following the ACAT assessment, you will receive a letter advising if you are eligible to enter residential aged care. Once you're approved, the next step is to find the best residential aged care home to meet the needs of the person entering into care. The first thing to consider is the location of the home.

- Is there a location where the person moving into care would most like to live? For example, if they have lived in a regional town for most of their life, they may want to stay in the area.

- Is the location convenient for family, friends and visitors? Keeping up social contact is important, so a suitable aged care home needs to be somewhere family and friends are able to travel to.

A perfect location that is convenient for all parties is not always possible. As the person moving will be living at the aged care home, it is important to consider their needs first. When you have chosen a potential location, you can use My Aged Care's tool to search for residential aged care facilities in that area:

myagedcare.gov.au/service-finder?tab=aged-carehomes

Keep your needs in mind

The recommendations from ACAT will tell you what level of care the person entering residential aged care will require. This will determine the most suitable type of residential aged care and whether specialist care, such as dementia care, is required. The ACAT assessment focuses on the physical care needs of the person moving into care, but there are some other key needs that you should think about when choosing an aged care home.

- Does the person moving into care speak a language other than English? If they prefer to communicate in a language other than English, it is very important to find a home that meets this need.
- Does the person moving into care have cultural or spiritual practices or traditions that they observe?
- What are the hobbies or interests of the person moving into care? Different homes have different activity schedules and additional services that may be offered. It is important to look at these to determine the best fit for the person moving into care.
- Is the aged care home accessible to all people regardless of race or ethnicity, religious affiliation or LGBTI status? All residential aged care facilities are required to have a non-discrimination policy by law, however it's important to have staff who understand your individual needs.

Take a tour

An important part of choosing an aged care home is making visits to the site. Once you have a shortlist, make contact with them and arrange a tour. A good provider will be happy to show around prospective residents and their families.

While on your visits, it is good to ask questions and take note of the environment. Below is a checklist of key things to keep in mind, and questions you may want to ask:

- How were you greeted by staff? First impressions matter. Management and staff should be welcoming and friendly, dressed in appropriate attire, and should be easily identifiable (e.g. wear name badges).
- What were the residents doing? Did they look comfortable and happy?
- What activities are on offer? Are there activities available outside the aged care home? Can families be involved?
- Are residents respected and supported by staff? Are employees flexible with individual preferences and needs?
- Is the environment home-like or does it feel like a hospital? Are staff organised, and does the home look clean and tidy?
- Are residents rooms maintained well and treated as their own private spaces?
- Is there accessible outdoor space? Does it get used? Experiencing sunlight and the outdoors is very important for wellbeing.
- Does the aged care home provide a safe, secure and dementia-friendly environment?
- Do staff have specific dementia training?
- Do staff have specific training for other medical or care needs the person may have?
- Can the resident have his or her own doctor?
- What is the policy for prescribing pain medication and anti-psychotics?
- Can increased needs be catered for?
- How are staff assigned to families and residents? Ideally, residents and families should be assigned a specific staff member to contact with any questions.

- Is there a family/carer group or committee for the aged care home? Having a place for families to connect and share their experiences is very important. At the very least, residential aged care homes should have knowledge of external support networks that families can contact.
- Are you satisfied with visiting times and access for family members?
- How are families involved in care? Are they allowed to assist the person with dementia to eat or shower?
- Has the fee structure been fully explained? Are there extra costs?
- Are there additional services such as hairdressing and massage provided?
- Is there assistance for you and the person with dementia in preparing for the move?
- What is the person moving into care allowed to bring with them?

Planning the move

When you've chosen the right residential aged care home, it's time to start planning the move. Below is a checklist of things you need to do before the move:

1. **Inform family, friends and health care professionals** about the upcoming move. If the aged care home has its own doctors, dentists, etc., medical records will need to be forwarded on to the new healthcare professionals.
2. **Notify any home care staff or other services** that regularly assist the person who is moving into care. This includes any support workers, nurses, gardeners, cleaners, etc.
3. **Inform any government services** that record your address including:
 - Medicare
 - Australian Taxation Office
 - Australian Electoral Commission
 - Department of Human Services
 - Roads and Maritime Services
 - Department of Veteran Affairs
 - Post office

4. **Inform financial institutions:**

- Your bank, building society or credit union
- Your superannuation company
- Your medical insurance company

5. **Make arrangements for pets and/or any important items** that belong to the person who is moving into care. Pets are not usually allowed in residential aged care homes, and it may not be possible to take some larger items when moving into care.

What do I bring?

Clothing, toiletries and personal care items are the essentials when moving into care. If clothing is going to be washed by staff, it will need to be labelled. Some homes offer a labelling service but you can also do this yourself.

You may also want to bring books, movies, music, personal photos, or small furnishings such as vases etc., to add a personal touch. Depending on what is available in your room, you may want to bring your own DVD player, radio or television, etc.

Room sizes can vary a lot within different residential aged care homes, so ask about what additional items you can bring with you. For example, you may want to ask if you can swap out the provided armchair for a favourite armchair from home.

Keeping a person connected to their past is very important. Bringing photos from home, favourite music and items of personal significance are particularly helpful in maintaining a connection. These items can also help visitors to engage with the person in care, and can support staff with getting to know the person. This can help relationships to develop with staff which can have a positive impact on care.

Living in residential aged care

Once the physical move is complete, living in residential aged care may take some adjusting to. Emotionally, this period can be very difficult for the person moving into care, and also for their family and carers. A person who is easily disoriented may become distressed by the new surroundings, and their carer may feel upset or guilty in response. It is important to check in with support networks and make

strategies to manage this discomfort for all parties. Many residents and carers report that after the initial move-in period, their experience of the home improves.

All residential aged care homes should be open and welcoming for you to visit anytime you want. As a carer, you should also expect clear communication from staff regarding your loved one's care. Care plans are typically updated at set time intervals (for example, every six months), however you need to be able to make adjustments as necessary. This is especially important for people with dementia as symptoms may change rapidly, meaning a care plan must be updated more regularly.

If you have any complaints about residential aged care you can first address the problem through the provider's complaints procedure. Every residential aged care provider will have their own complaints process and this information should be made available to you in the Aged Care Home Handbook or similar document on request.

If you are uncomfortable to raise a complaint directly with the service provider or if things remain unresolved, you can contact:

- If you receive an Australian Government funded aged care service:

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

Phone: **1800 951 822** Online: agedcarequality.gov.au

- If you receive support through the National Disability Insurance (NDIS) scheme:

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

Phone: **1800 035 544** Online: ndiscommission.gov.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**