

How to design dementia-friendly care environments

This help sheet explains how a well-designed care environment can enable people living with dementia to make the best of everyday life. It outlines key Dementia Enabling Design Principles and suggests ways to review an existing care environment or plan a new one.

People living with dementia can experience their surroundings as confusing, disorienting and, at worst, disabling and even dangerous.

A well-set-up care environment can help maintain a person's abilities, increase independence and provide meaningful engagement. Their surroundings should provide essential prompts for wayfinding, maximise accessibility and reduce risks.

The information in this help sheet is based on the 10 Dementia Enabling Environment Principles, from the work of Professor Richard Fleming and Kirsty Bennett at the University of Wollongong. These principles are evidence-based. They come from reviewing research literature of studies looking at maximising enablement and wellbeing through physical design for people living with dementia.

Dementia Enabling Environment Principles

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

The principles provide a way to review existing care environments, new construction and refurbishment projects for care homes, hospitals and day centres.

Detailed information on the 10 principles can be found at enablingenvironments.com.au/dementia-enabling-environment-principles

These principles expand on the definition of a dementia-friendly environment, which:

- promotes independence and supports wellbeing
- has familiar surroundings
- allows easy access and wayfinding
- 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

Principle 1: Unobtrusively reduce risks

- Ensure grab rails are fixed to the wall securely.
- Ensure surfaces are non-slip, especially floors.
- Use a hand-held shower head to make assisting with showers easier.
- Keep the door open and ensure unobstructed sightlines between the bed and toilet.
- Ensure doors can be unlocked 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 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, so the seat can be easily seen.
- Choose grab rails that are of a clear contrasting colour to the wall.
- Ensure the colour of the doorhandle contrasts with the colour of the door, so the doorhandle can be easily seen.

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 mirrors or covering them 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.
- Place commonly used objects in clear sight (such as a toothbrush).
- Provide clear signage on the bathroom door, with both the word 'toilet' and a symbol to help with wayfinding and accessing the toilet.

Principle 6: Support movement and engagement

- Make locating the toilet at night easier by using a passive infrared light which turns on automatically when it detects movement in the bathroom.
- If possible, ensure the toilet is visible from the bed or easy for the person to find.

Developing a dementia-friendly environment

A range of dementia-friendly environment audit tools are available to assist you to review your care environment or plan a new design. You may also choose to engage professional consultants to complete an environmental audit onsite.

Dementia Australia can help organisations create care environments that enable people living with dementia to feel supported and engaged and live as independently as possible. After an onsite audit, a

report will be provided to highlight design features that are working well and make recommendations to make improvements. Dementia Australia can also review plans for new builds and renovations.

Dementia Training Australia offers a range of online tools and resources which can provide a systemic way of identifying areas for improvement.

Additional reading and resources

- Centre for Dementia Learning
Call: **1300 336 368**
Visit: dementialearning.org.au
- Dementia Learning Guide
Visit: dementialearning.org.au/courses/dementia-learning-guide
- Dementia-Friendly Home App
Visit: dementia.org.au/resources/dementia-friendly-home-app
- Enabling Environments
Visit: enablingenvironments.com.au
- Dementia Training Australia
Visit: dta.com.au

Further information

Dementia Australia offers support, information, education and counselling.

National Dementia Helpline: 1800 100 500

For language assistance: 131 450

Visit our website: dementia.org.au