

Use of cameras in residential aged care

CCTV cameras are increasingly being used in residential aged care as a means of identifying and discouraging/preventing incidents of elder abuse and other criminal offences. Currently, there is no conclusive evidence to determine if using cameras in residential aged care helps to improve the quality of care to residents. However, Dementia Australia acknowledges that in some instances, cameras may be used by families or providers as a tool to help protect residents and staff safety.

When it comes to the use of cameras, Dementia Australia acknowledges the importance of residents having the right to choose. As such, we encourage families and carers to discuss with individuals with dementia their preferences regarding camera use, and to capture their wishes in an advance care plan/directive.

To ensure a consistent and ethical approach to camera use in aged care, Dementia Australia calls for clear and evidenced based national guidelines and safeguards on the use of cameras.

Issue

Closed circuit television cameras, or CCTV, are increasingly being installed in the rooms of residents who live in residential aged care. Usually, cameras are in hidden locations, to record what is occurring to a resident within their room. Often, cameras are installed by the family members of vulnerable residents where there is suspicion of abuse by staff and/or other residents. For some residents and their families, the use of CCTV cameras, especially those installed in residents' private rooms, provides reassurance that the resident has regular oversight and is safe from harm.

CCTV may also be used by facility staff to monitor the safety of residents. For example, cameras in fixed locations may be used to monitor individuals who are at risk of falling or observe the movement of residents through public areas.

Principally, CCTV is used as a risk mitigation device, either by a family member of a vulnerable resident or by the facility itself.

-

“My mother died in appalling circumstances. Under these circumstances, CCTV would have at the very least confirmed her honesty and integrity. CCTV has a role to play in maintaining the human rights of those living in residential care, by keeping standards of care high and staff honest. Aged care residents should have as many safeguards as possible, and CCTV in my opinion would work in conjunction and compliment to standard reporting and formal mechanisms.” Former carer

However, the use of CCTV cameras, particularly for people living with dementia, is not without its complexities. Issues associated with the use of CCTV include:

- The lack of consistent guidelines around the use of cameras in communal or private spaces in residential aged care;
- The potential breach of privacy of residents, especially those who are unable to provide informed consent to have cameras installed in their rooms;
- The impact on staff, who may feel they are constantly under surveillance and consequently may be more reluctant to engage with vulnerable residents for fear of ‘getting something wrong’;
- The impact on families of residents, who may see their loved one engage in activities or conversations which make them uncomfortable;
- The impact on residents, who may no longer feel comfortable expressing themselves or being able to enjoy intimate moments in their rooms where their family can now see them; and
- The lack of clarity around who ‘owns’ the footage and for what purposes it can be used.

“I’d like the option because it doesn’t suit everyone.” Person living with dementia

“Individual person and the family has the right to decide yes or no.” Person living with dementia

Dementia Australia’s position

Privacy is a fundamental human right of all Australians, and the Aged Care Quality Standards recognises an individual’s right to privacy and for individuals to be treated with dignity and respect. Residents also have the right to feel safe and protected in their home, and as such, residents should have the right to choose if CCTV is used in their personal space. To enable all residents to have their preferences upheld, we encourage families and carers to capture decisions regarding camera use in an advance care planning process.

Ultimately, decisions regarding the use of CCTV camera use in aged care must consider the balance between protecting residents’ safety and protecting individuals’ rights to privacy and choice.

Installing CCTV is not a stand-alone solution to combatting elder abuse, criminal offences or ensuring resident safety in residential aged care. Ensuring a resident's safety requires a range of risk reduction strategies and effective reporting mechanisms that prevent and respond to incidents that may occur. Comprehensive workforce training and education, effective leadership, active managerial oversight and robust reporting mechanisms are fundamental strategies which need to be implemented to prevent elder abuse within residential aged care. Installing CCTV could be considered complementary to these core strategies but should not be considered a single-handed solution to ensuring resident safety.

“CCTV will solve some things, and provide certain protections, but it is not necessarily going to address everything that is going on.” Carer

“Front line workers are like low hanging fruit – easy to see and easy to pick on. Systemic issues need to be addressed such as understaffing, unreasonable workloads which lead to poor quality care, burnout and high staff turnover.” Former carer

There is little formal or consistent studies that provide evidence that CCTV ensures resident safety, however CCTV has been used as a tool to bring the issue of elder abuse and mistreatment to light due to the physical evidence it provides. However, it is unclear whether CCTV use is good practice or that it ensures resident safety and improves resident outcomes. Outcomes from current trials on cameras in aged care should support the development of national 'best practice' guidelines on the use of cameras within residential aged care. Federal Government engagement in the development and distribution of best practice guidelines (and the development of safeguards) support a consistent approach to the use of cameras within aged care.

“There are a lot of things that can be done very subtly with technology, that wouldn't be intrusive and provide the threshold we need for when to record or that someone needs to intervene.” Person living with dementia

National guidelines on the use of cameras should consider and provide advice on the following:

- a. *Rights to choice*: Enabling residents to choose whether they have cameras installed in their individual room. This includes staff, families, carers and/or advocates using supportive decision-making techniques. Also, by encouraging individuals to discuss their preferences regarding camera use in the advance care planning process, so individual's preferences can be respected and upheld.
- b. *Rights to privacy*: Supporting resident's rights to privacy. For example, by allowing residents to request cameras to be turned off in common areas, so the space can be used in a private capacity.
- c. *A comprehensive risk reduction strategy*, which includes: Workforce education and training on elder abuse; effective incident reporting mechanisms and regular monitoring of daily operations – which may include the use of aids, such as CCTV.

- d. *Transparency and consent:* Clear signage indicating cameras in use, obtaining consent from those impacted by cameras and having clear processes regarding how, when and why cameras are being used will support transparency and communication around camera use.
- e. *Technology and innovation:* Exploring technological options that can balance safety and choice for residents wishing to use CCTV. For example video conferencing, Bluetooth and motion detection technology that could be integrated as part of the CCTV system.