Call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500
8 Residential care
When living at home is no longer possible

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Making the decision to explore residential care options for a person living with dementia can be difficult for the person with the condition and their family and friends.

In this part, you will learn more about the process of finding and placing a loved one into suitable residential care, including services, government policies and costs. These considerations are equally important for younger people diagnosed with dementia.

Many decisions go into identifying when a person living with dementia should enter a residential care facility and finding the right place. The person living with dementia should be involved in the decision making process as much as possible.

Family carers should ask themselves whether the care needed by their family member or friend is beyond their ability to provide, whether the residential care facility provides everything the person might need and whether they will be able to remain in contact easily.

The Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS) must assess a person before they can enter a government funded residential care facility. Privately owned and funded Supported Residential Services also exist, and do not require an assessment.
It is important to choose the right facility for the individual. Many considerations must be taken into account, including location and accessibility, the friendliness and competence of staff, access to medical care, cleanliness, space, ambiance, a dementia-friendly environment, good quality meals, and social and recreational activities.

When you are visiting prospective facilities, take a check list of what is important to the person with dementia and their family and friends.

While the Australian government funds care in residential facilities, most residents will be expected to make a contribution towards the costs. The amount of this contribution depends on the facility and the person’s individual financial circumstances. These fees and charges range according to the person’s income and assets.
Identifying the right time

Making the decision to explore residential care options for a person living with dementia can be difficult for everybody involved. Include the person with dementia early in conversations about alternative living arrangements.

If it is agreed that a residential care facility is the best option, it can be a challenge to identify the right time. On one hand, the person may be continuing to live independently in many ways. On the other hand, there may be instances where their dementia seriously jeopardises their wellbeing.

Every situation is unique. Safety situations need to be considered in each case. Memory loss, confusion and disorientation can cause problems, as well as limited mobility and coordination.

Has it become apparent that the person with dementia requires ongoing supervision? Do the personal needs of the individual outweigh the capabilities of the carer, family or support services to provide them? If so, it may be time to consider residential care options.

For more information see Help Sheet, Residential care and dementia 1: Residential aged care. Available at dementia.org.au

Where to begin

You can discuss the changing needs of the person with dementia, as well as the health and wellbeing of family members and carers with your doctor. You can also visit myagedcare.gov.au for additional information.

The process of considering residential care can bring up many conflicting feelings including stress, sadness, relief, loneliness and guilt. There may be some disagreement within the family and there may be concerns about the quality of care available.

Dementia Australia offers advisory and counselling services that can help during this time. For more information, call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.
Assessment

The Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS) must assess a person before they can enter a government funded Home Care Package or residential care facility. The assessment is free of charge and is normally conducted in your home (or hospital) with family members, carers or close friends.

The assessment:
- determines the level of care required by the person with dementia
- recommends appropriate types of residential care
- provides details of suitable facilities
- provides a written statement of eligibility to show residential care facilities.

A doctor can refer the person with dementia for assessment, or you can request an assessment directly by calling My Aged Care on 1800 200 422 or visiting myagedcare.gov.au

Privately owned and funded residential care services also exist, and do not require an assessment.

Residential respite care

Before deciding on full time residential care, a short stay or multiple short stays in a residential respite care facility could have numerous benefits. The carer is given a break, which may result in them being able to maintain care at home for longer, and it can also provide a stepping stone to longer term care.

Regular respite stays in the same facility can have the added benefit of familiarising the person living with dementia with that facility, which could make an eventual transition into full time care easier.

Choosing the right facility

Visit at least three facilities to get an overall impression of how well they can each meet the needs of the person with dementia in the short term, and as the condition progresses. Take a check list of what is important to the person with dementia and their family and friends.
First impressions are important. Let your instincts play a part in the decision making process.

Many considerations should be taken into account, including:

- location (i.e. close to family and friends)
- accessibility by public transport and car
- welcoming and informative staff
- positive staff interactions with residents and family
- 24-hour care under a registered nurse
- care staff with appropriate dementia training
- appropriate overnight staffing levels
- a clean and homely environment
- respect for privacy and personal space
- comfortable bedrooms with personal belongings
- pets being welcome to visit
- ambiance of communal areas and garden
- a dementia-friendly environment e.g. clear signs and paths to the toilets
- good quality, varied meals served in suitable dining facilities
- consultation on food preferences and dietary requirements
- families being welcome to stay for meals
- the person’s individual cultural and spiritual beliefs, social and emotional needs being respected and met
- family and friends being given the opportunity to continue playing a caring role
- social and recreational activities appropriate for people with dementia
- outings and special events
- provision of additional services such as hairdressing, podiatry, dental
- provision of appropriate medical care, and the option for the person with dementia to keep their own doctor
- flexible visiting hours
- a committee for residents and relatives
- vacancies and waiting lists
A useful resource to take with you when viewing potential residential care facilities is ‘Choosing a care home: the 7 signposts of person-centred care’, developed by BUPA Care Services in collaboration with Dementia Australia.

Call BUPA on 1300 302 305 or download a copy by visiting bupaagedcare.com.au/choosing-an-aged-care-home

A full list of residential care homes in Victoria is available through the DPS Guide to Aged Care. Call 1300 186 688 or visit agedcareguide.com.au

You can search for facilities in your area using My Aged Care, Aged Care Homes Finders at myagedcare.gov.au or call 1800 200 422.

To help with the transition into an aged care facility, the ‘Five Steps to Entry into an Aged Care Home’ booklet provides an overview of the considerations to make, from eligibility through to adjusting to life in full time care. You can order a free printed version by calling My Aged Care on 1800 200 422.

For more information see Help Sheet, Residential care and dementia 2: Choosing a residential aged care home. Available at dementia.org.au

Involve the person with dementia

The person living with dementia should be involved in the decision making process wherever possible. If they are involved in selecting the facility, the prospect of leaving home may not seem as daunting when the time comes. Respite care or short stays might be helpful in making the decision by giving you an indication as to whether a facility meets everyone’s needs.

Ask questions

When visiting prospective facilities, feel free to ask as many questions as you need to. In particular, find out what proportion of residents have dementia. You are looking for assurance that staff are trained and experienced in caring for a person with the condition.
Visiting somebody with dementia

Visits can be difficult, particularly as the person with dementia’s cognitive abilities decline. But there are ways to make visits meaningful and in doing so, helping to improve or maintain the person’s emotional wellbeing.

- Develop a flexible attitude. We all have high and low energy days and your friend or family member may be tired the day you visit.
- If your visit does not go as you had planned, remember it is still important – for you and the person you are visiting.
- Be kind to yourself. Maintaining a carer’s good morale is important. Perhaps take a supportive friend with you or plan a treat for yourself on the way home.
- Engage the person you are visiting by taking a magazine or newspaper with you. Read out interesting articles or do a quiz together. Take old photos or postcards to aid stimulation and reminiscence.
- Establish a visiting ritual. Say and do the same things on arrival and departure each time to create structure for your relative or friend.
- Introduce yourself on arrival. This reduces your friend or family member’s anxiety as you remind them of your name and connection to them.
- Working together, write a letter to your mutual friends or family. This can nourish and maintain important links in their life.
- Get to know the care staff by name.
- Remember that talking isn’t everything. Hugs, neck massages and hand holding can replace or complement conversation.
- Request a private space during visits, to facilitate intimacy between the person with dementia and their partner, if they have one.
- Make a life book. This is a wonderful way of validating the life journey of your friend or family member and remembering accomplishments.
- If allowed by the facility, take an animal or your pet with you. A visit from a well-loved pet can improve the emotional health and wellbeing of your friend or relative.
Communication

As a person’s dementia progresses, it may become more difficult for family and friends to communicate with them.

**Communication do’s:**
- Introduce yourself.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Remain calm and speak in a matter of fact way.
- Keep sentences short and simple.
- Use positive language e.g. ‘let’s enjoy the moment.’
- Use humour.
- Focus on one topic at a time.
- Give time for responses.
- Focus on body language and non-verbal communication (e.g. tone of voice).
- Repeat yourself – don’t assume you have been understood.

**Communication don’ts:**
- Don’t give too many choices.
- Don’t argue or confront.
- Don’t talk down to the person.
- Don’t talk about the person as if they are not there.
- Don’t ask questions that require remembering too much.
- Don’t give information too far in advance.

"If you learn to listen for clues as to how I feel instead of what I say you will be able to understand me much better."

*Mara Botonis*
Keeping in touch

Encourage friends and family to stay in touch with the person living with dementia by sending cards and notes. In many cases, due to diminished memory, each time the person looks at a card they will experience a fresh sense of wellbeing.

Fees and costs

While the Australian Government funds residential aged care homes to assist with the cost involved, most residents will be expected to make a financial contribution.

The amount of this contribution depends on the person’s individual financial circumstances and can vary between facilities. No one will be excluded from care if they cannot afford it.

Fees and charges may include:

- a basic daily fee
- a means-tested care fee
- an accommodation payment
- fees for extra or optional services

Fees are based on an assessment of income and assets by Centrelink or the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. Contact details for Centrelink can be found at humanservices.gov.au/individuals/centrelink

My Aged Care is an Australian Government service providing information on organising residential care and can help estimate bonds and fees with its Residential Care Fee Estimator. Visit myagedcare.gov.au/fee-estimator/residential-care/form or call 1800 200 422.

As you look into residential care options, seek independent advice from a financial specialist in aged care, or from an accountant.
The process

Applications

Applications can be made to more than one residential care facility at a time. The facility must keep applications private. If there is a waiting list, ask to be placed on it. This can give you some extra time to consider if the time is right for the move. If you or your relative or friend need to move in urgently, let the facility know.

Stay in regular contact with the facility while you or your relative or friend is on the waiting list. This lets the facility know you are still interested.

Placement agencies can provide assistance to find an appropriate facility or even manage the whole process on your behalf, for a fee. You can view a list of such agencies by visiting agedcareguide.com.au

Being offered a place

When a place becomes available, the facility will make contact to ask if you are still interested and when you may be able to move in. Generally, you will be given seven days to complete the move into the facility.

Charges may apply from the date of acceptance of a place. The Australian government will offer financial assistance from the date of acceptance.

Moving into one care facility doesn’t mean that you or your relative or friend has to stay there forever. It is possible to move from one facility to another.

Agreements

Before moving in, the facility will offer a Resident Agreement covering services, fees, rights and responsibilities, including the circumstances under which a person might be asked to leave a facility. It is important to understand everything before an agreement is signed.
Assessment
Care facility staff will gather information about the person due to move in. The information gathered might include personal preferences, interests, life and family history, medical conditions, food likes and dislikes, as well as social and activity preferences.

A care plan will then be drafted. This is a good time to let staff know as much as you can about yourself or your relative or friend, as this will help them provide the best possible care.

Moving in
Some things to consider when preparing to move into a facility include:

- putting labels on all personal belongings
- considering what personal items and furniture will go into the room at the facility
- having a pharmacist or doctor review all medications and pass on these details to staff
- remembering that, once the person goes into residential care, Home Care Packages cease, as do the carer payment and carer allowance from Centrelink
Support

Support for the person with dementia, their family and friends should not cease when the person enters full time care. transitioning into care can be an emotionally charged time, and can be challenging and confusing for all involved. It can take some time for the person with dementia to settle into their new environment and for families to deal with the transition on a practical and emotional level.

Dementia Australia is available to support you through this process. To access information and support call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

Carers Victoria offers support and advice throughout the transition from home to residential care – either respite or permanent. The organisation offers free ‘Carers in Transition’ group counselling sessions to provide support before, during and after placement. Call 1800 242 636 for more information.

If you are concerned about the care or service you or your relative or friend is receiving in a facility, you should raise your concerns with the manager of the facility in the first instance.

You may also contact Elder Rights Advocacy on 1800 700 600 or the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner by calling 1800 550 552 or online at agedcarecomplaints.gov.au

For more information see our series of Help Sheets, Residential care and dementia. Available at dementia.org.au
Key contacts

Please note, all contact details listed in this guide are correct at the time of printing. For updates, please visit dementia.org.au, helpwithdementia.org.au or call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

Dementia Australia
1800 100 500
dementia.org.au

My Aged Care
1800 200 422
myagedcare.gov.au

ACAS Aged Care Information Line
1800 200 422

Aged Care Complaints Commissioner
1800 550 552
agedcarecomplaints.gov.au

Carer Advisory and Counselling Service
1800 242 636
carersaustralia.com.au

Carers Victoria Advisory Line
1800 242 636
carersvictoria.org.au

Centrelink
132 300

National Disability Insurance Scheme
1800 800 110
ndis.gov.au

Elder Rights Advocacy
1800 700 600
era.asn.au
Things to consider

- What are the considerations to make when looking at residential care options?
- Have you organised an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) or Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS) assessment?
- What are the things that are most important to you about a residential care facility?
- What are the costs involved with residential care?
- Do you know how to get the best out of the person living with dementia when visiting them in residential care?