Tips for home care providers

Information for providers of in-home care regarding coronavirus (COVID-19) and supporting people living with dementia.

In addition to the infection control measures aged care providers are implementing in response to coronavirus (COVID-19), the following outlines some considerations for people living with dementia. If you are concerned about the health of a person living with dementia, contact their GP directly.

Some initial suggestions on supporting people impacted by dementia are provided below and more detailed information is available through contacting the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

Tips and strategies

Reduce heightened anxiety about coronavirus

- Ensure information provided is from an authoritative source (e.g. Commonwealth Department of Health)
- Minimise the flow of media information by suggesting that clients don’t have the 24-hour news cycle on TV
- Use memory aids and visual prompts to explain in a simple way the current situation
- Provide reassurance about the use of masks and personal protective equipment
- Take the time to listen to the person and their concerns
• Validate how the person is feeling
• Provide reassurance
• When time is spent with the person, ask how they are going and if they have any questions
• Try to avoid talking about your own anxieties or concerns in front of your client
• Avoid the use of language such as ‘pandemic’ or ‘crisis’

Minimise disruption to service delivery

• Maintain usual routines as much as possible
• Where routines cannot be maintained, work with your client (and their families or carers, as appropriate) to identify alternative ways to deliver services
• If you are looking for alternatives to social support, you may wish to consider the following strategies:
  ° Encouraging the person living with dementia to consider doing some gentle exercises, either in a chair or around the house
  ° Having activities readily available, such as books, magazines, jigsaws, music, knitting, TV and radio programs
  ° Going for a gentle walk, spending time in the garden and accessing fresh air and natural light

Maintain physical health

• People living with dementia may need extra support to maintain proper hand hygiene. The following tips relate specifically to this:
  ° Consider placing dementia friendly instructional signs in bathrooms and elsewhere to remind people with dementia to wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds.
  ° Give a demonstration of thorough hand washing. Consider singing a song to encourage them to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.
• If the person with dementia cannot get to a sink to wash their hands, hand sanitiser or anti-bacterial hand wipes may be a quick alternative. Hand sanitiser is only effective if hands are not visibly dirty.

• Encourage them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, instead of into their hands and ensure the tissue is then discarded in the bin.

• Use prompts and reminders about physical distancing and not leaving the home

• Monitor for flu-like symptoms

• Monitor for changes in behaviour

• If the person you care for becomes unwell and experiences coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, contact coronavirus COVID-19 hotline 1800 675 398 or contact their doctor

• Arrange food and meal deliveries if unable to access shopping without support

Reduce social isolation and loneliness

• Encourage participating in everyday activities

• Maintain regular routines as much as possible

• Encourage listening to music or audiobooks or other activities that engage the senses

• Encourage family and friends to drop off care packages with letters from family and friends

• Arrange regular check-ins from family or neighbours and share contact numbers if extra support is required

• Use volunteer services to make regular phone calls to the person to check in

• Try to arrange other means of communication- iPad, video calling, skype, phone calls, social media messaging if applicable
• Use technology, such as iPads to access online games and social engagement. Options include ‘A better visit’ app (dementialearning.org.au/technology/a-better-visit-app), a virtual zoo (zoo.org.au/animal-house) or virtual museum (artsandculture.google.com)

Recognise and address emerging behaviours

• Try to pre-empt the persons needs

• Spend time trying to understand what the person is communicating

• Report changed behaviours that may pose a risk to the person or others to your supervisor

• For further advice contact our contact National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500

• Or contact Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS) on 1800 699 799

Supporting clients who are self-isolating

• Clarify with your client before entering whether anyone living in the home is self-isolating. Avoid visiting if you are unwell

• For further advice on the approach to in-home care services, see health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guide-for-home-care-providers

Dementia specific information is available by calling our National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

The Centre for Dementia Learning has a comprehensive range of education programs to help aged care providers address many of the issues raised above. For further details contact 1300 DEMENTIA. You can also find a wide range of resources at the Dementia Australia library: dementia.org.au/library
The above information was based on information provided by Alzheimer’s Disease Chinese (ADC) and shared by Alzheimer’s Disease International. You can find the full presentation here: www.alz.co.uk/news/covid-19-sharing-experience-and-advice-from-adis-member-association-in-china

The coronavirus situation is rapidly evolving. This information is provided as a guide only and may not be appropriate for every situation. For up to date information on the coronavirus, visit www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert

Dementia Australia would like to acknowledge Alzheimer’s Disease International and Alzheimer’s Chinese for their advice in putting together this help sheet.