

Choosing a residential care home

This help sheet discusses what to consider when choosing a residential care home to suit the needs of someone living with dementia.

Involve the person with dementia

If the person living with dementia can be consulted, it is important to involve them in all planning and decisions about moving into residential care.

They may wish to help select the care home, so that when the time to move comes, their accommodation will feel more familiar and comfortable.

Information about an aged care assessment

If there has been an aged care assessment, it will advise what level of care the person entering residential care will need. This will determine the most suitable type of residential care and whether specialist care (such as dementia care and/or palliative care) is required.

Assessments are available to people aged 65 years and over (50 years and older for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) through My Aged Care.

Looking at residential care homes

When you are choosing a residential care home, consider how it will meet the needs of the person living with dementia.

Most people living with dementia respond well to small, familiar domestic environments, with safe places to move around in.

When considering the options, it is a good idea to:

- visit at least three care homes
- make a shortlist and contact each place to arrange a tour to see if it will suit the person

- take a friend or relative with you
- visit more than once, if this is helpful.

Planning and making the move into residential care for someone living with dementia can be difficult for everyone involved.

It can be emotionally overwhelming and challenging. Many people feel a mix of emotions such as loss, guilt and perhaps even relief.

Develop a checklist

You may be able to get a feel for each place by arranging a visit during mealtimes or planned activities. It may be possible to discuss some specific features with other residents, their relatives and staff.

Take a checklist that includes the things that are important to you, the person living with dementia and to family and friends.

Your checklist might include:

- Asking about the process used around vacancies and if there is a waiting list.
- Asking questions and taking note of the environment.
- Observing how care is provided on a personal level and using your intuition about the way it makes you feel.

Look for:

- welcoming and informative staff
- positive staff interactions with residents and family
- staff speaking to residents and addressing them appropriately
- residents looking comfortable and happy, respected and supported by staff around their individual preferences and needs
- recognition of diversity (such as language considerations)
- resident engagement in on-site activities.

Activities, services and policies:

- whether the person's individual needs can be met
- appropriate social and recreational activities
- activities, outings and special events, and whether families can be involved

- provision of appropriate medical care
- care staff with specific dementia training
- provision of staff training for residents' medical or care needs
- appropriate overnight staffing levels
- option to keep the person's existing doctor
- when and how the care home communicates information
- policy on prescribing pain medications and antipsychotics
- provision of extra services, such as hairdressing, podiatry, physiotherapy, optical and dental care
- meeting the Aged Care Quality Standards.

Comfort:

- a clean and homely environment
- respect for privacy and personal space
- comfortable bedrooms with personal belongings
- pets being welcome to visit
- ambience of communal areas and garden and whether outdoor spaces are safe and secure
- dementia-friendly environment (for example, clear signs and paths to the toilets)
- good-quality, varied meals served in suitable dining facilities
- consultation on food preferences and dietary requirements
- respect for cultural and spiritual beliefs and emotional needs.

Family support:

- located close to family and friends, with easy access (by walking, or by car and public transport)
- families welcome to stay for meals
- option for family and friends to continue playing a caring role
- flexible visiting hours
- a committee for residents and relatives
- support for moving in

- a specific staff member nominated as a contact point for any questions
- recommendations for external support networks for families and carers.

Star ratings

The Department of Health and Aged Care applies star ratings for residential aged care across Australia. Star ratings can help residents and their families make more informed choices about care.

Aged care homes receive a rating between one and five stars to indicate the quality of care across four key areas of performance: staffing, compliance, residents' experience and quality measures.

Making the choice

You need to feel comfortable with the residential care home you choose.

If you receive an offer from a care home that is not your first choice:

- You may decline the offer, so long as circumstances allow for you to wait longer for an offer from your preferred care home.
- If the situation is urgent, speak with family, friends and the person's healthcare team to ensure the care home meets the needs of the person.

If you accept a vacancy that is not your preference, it may be possible to transfer to the residential care home of your choice when a bed becomes available. Keep in touch with the preferred care home, letting them know that you are still interested.

Ensure the fee structure has been fully explained and that you understand whether there are any hidden costs.

Trialling residential care

Before making a decision, consider trying one or more short stays in a residential care home that offers respite. This will give the opportunity for you and the person going into care to become familiar with the care home. It may make the eventual transition into full-time care easier. If you are a carer, it will also give you a break. Regular respite might help you continue caring for the person at home longer.

Who can help

- **My Aged Care**

Call: **1800 200 422**

Visit: myagedcare.gov.au

- **Department of Health and Aged Care: Star ratings**

Compare the quality and safety of residential aged care homes.

Call: **1800 200 422**

Visit: health.gov.au/our-work/star-ratings-for-residential-aged-care

Additional reading and resources

- Dementia Australia library service

Visit: dementia.org.au/library

- Dementia Australia support

Visit: dementia.org.au/support

- Dementia Australia education

Visit: dementia.org.au/education

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