

# Moving into residential aged care

## INFORMATION SHEET



With an increasing number of Australians who are living longer, a wider range of options are becoming available for our increasing care needs as we age. Governments have recognised that many people prefer to stay in their own homes as long as possible and so have substantially increased funding for home care services.

Sometimes, however, living independently is not an option, because of issues such as deteriorating chronic health conditions, a medical crisis, the loss of a partner, severe mobility restrictions or lack of access to suitable care. Many older people reach the stage when they prefer to move into an aged care facility, recognising the benefits of on-site medical assistance, mobility support and opportunities to socialise. However, the decision to move into residential aged care can be a difficult one. This is especially true if the decision has to be made as the result of a medical crisis and under time pressures.

As with many decisions and transitions as we age, it's better to have thought about options and planned in advance. Advance planning greatly reduces the likelihood of disagreements and conflict arising between family members, as well as minimising stress and uncertainty about finances.

Ideally, with the support of family, good medical advice and current information on aged care, the process of moving into residential aged care can be a smooth one. Most importantly for those entering care, having their preferences heard, and knowledge and experience respected will greatly benefit the older person's long-term physical and emotional wellbeing.

This is also true for people with dementia. Although they may not always remember the conversations, continuing to involve them in the decision-making process allows them to retain some control and feel more comfortable with the outcome. When dealing with dementia, change can be overwhelming and it's not uncommon for both carers and people with dementia to feel grief, loss and frustration.

### Helpful ideas

Some tips to help make the transition easier are below.

- **Understand costs.** It's important in planning aged care options in advance to understand what costs will be met by government

and what will need to be met from the assets of an older person. For further information on how costs are calculated visit [www.myagedcare.gov.au/costs/aged-care-homes-costs-explained](http://www.myagedcare.gov.au/costs/aged-care-homes-costs-explained)

- **Become familiar with the facility beforehand.** Consider visiting an aged care facility and joining the residents for a meal.
- **Communicate with staff and relevant agencies ahead of moving in.** This can help to prepare for what's likely to happen, and address any hesitations, fears or concerns. Discuss strategies that may have worked for other residents and their families in managing common issues.
- **Have an open, respectful conversation with all family members about the transition.** It's important to acknowledge the challenges of leaving your own home, but it's also important to think and talk about the advantages of moving into aged care. For example, more company, less financial pressure, increased safety, visitors and regular activities.
- **Keep lifestyle and surroundings as familiar as possible.** When moving into aged care there are limits to the amount of possessions an older person can take with them. Put thought into what's most important, such as photos, music, prized possessions or a favourite chair. If you are a carer or family member, think about helping the older person to

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establish a familiar routine in their new home, and support them in maintaining existing friendships.

- **Consider creating a 'Life Story' scrapbook about the person, including information, photos and stories.** The scrapbook can be a way to focus on happy memories and achievements, and help staff to learn more about the older person and what's important to them.

How well and quickly someone adapts to residential care will depend on their experience of the transition, their health, their relationship with staff, support from family and friends, and a willingness to find positivity and acceptance in the situation.

Keep in mind that while change is a normal part of life, how we think about it has a major impact on how we experience and respond to new situations.

### Responding to change

Moving into an aged care facility is a major life transition. Understanding the common responses to change can be helpful in addressing stress and confusion.

- **Anxiety around the unknown.** We all want to know what will happen now, and in the future, as it provides a sense of security. Thinking about what helped you cope with previous transitions and challenges can help you to deal with current challenges. For example, a positive attitude, family and friends, or sense of humour. Typically, things become more stable and a person's confidence improves as they gain

experience and familiarity with the new situation.

- **Questioning.** People involved in the move may question if they have made the right choice. This uncertainty usually decreases with time, but if not, it may mean someone is struggling to adjust and needs some additional support.
- **Time.** For most people, the first four weeks after moving into an aged care facility tend to be the most challenging. Adapting to change takes time and it's normal to need 6 to 12 months to fully adjust. Initial feelings of helplessness often cause residents to experience confusion and a depressed mood. If these feelings continue once the older person is settled in and any initial problems are resolved, it's important to assist them in receiving further help.

### Where to get help

- My Aged Care offers comprehensive information on the process of moving into residential aged care. Visit [www.myagedcare.gov.au](http://www.myagedcare.gov.au)
- My Aged Care also provide guidelines for reporting or managing any concerns or complaints about an aged care facility, Home Care Package or Commonwealth Home Support Program. Visit [www.myagedcare.gov.au/financial-and-legal/how-make-complaint](http://www.myagedcare.gov.au/financial-and-legal/how-make-complaint)

- Aged Care Online provides an extensive list of aged care facilities in Victoria. Visit [www.agedcareonline.com.au/residential-aged-care/victoria](http://www.agedcareonline.com.au/residential-aged-care/victoria)
- Alzheimer's Australia's website provides information on dementia and helpful tips for investigating residential care. Visit [www.fightdementia.org.au](http://www.fightdementia.org.au)
- Relationships Australia Victoria's Elder Relationship Service offers support to families who are having trouble making these difficult decisions. For further information or support visit [www.rav.org.au/elder-relationship-services](http://www.rav.org.au/elder-relationship-services)

### About Relationships Australia Victoria (RAV)

RAV is a valued provider of specialist family and relationship services. A community-based, not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations, our services are for all members of the community, regardless of their religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, lifestyle choice, cultural background or economic circumstances.

Visit [www.rav.org.au](http://www.rav.org.au) or call 1300 364 277 for more information on our programs, locations and how to access our services.

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