

Moving to residential aged care



TIP SHEET

Many older Australians prefer to stay in their own homes as long as possible as they age.

Sometimes, however, living independently is not an option due to factors such as a deteriorating chronic health conditions, a medical crisis, the loss of a partner, severe mobility restrictions or lack of access to suitable care.

Many 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.

It's important for those entering care to have their preferences heard, and knowledge and experience respected, as this will greatly benefit their long-term mental and physical wellbeing.

Supporting people with dementia

For people with dementia, it's just as important that their preferences are heard. 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.



Six tips to help ease the transition to residential aged care

- 1. Understand costs.** When advance-planning, it's important to find out what costs will be met by government and what will need to be met from the assets of the older person. For more information, visit www.myagedcare.gov.au/understanding-costs
- 2. Become familiar with the facility beforehand.** Consider visiting an aged care facility and joining the residents for a meal.
- 3. 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.
- 4. 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 also to think and talk about the advantages of moving into aged care, e.g. more company, visitors, safety and regular activities.
- 4. 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 establish a familiar routine in their new home, and support them in maintaining existing friendships.
- 6. 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.

Relationships Australia
VICTORIA

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
- their 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.

Common responses 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 4 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 to access further help.

Where to get help

My Aged Care offers comprehensive information on the process of moving into residential aged care, and guidelines for reporting or managing any concerns or complaints about your care. Call 1800 200 422 or visit their website www.myagedcare.gov.au



Aged Care Online provides an extensive list of aged care facilities in Victoria. Visit www.agedcareonline.com.au/residential-aged-care/victoria

Dementia Australia provides information and support for people living with dementia and their families and carers, including help sheets about residential care. Call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500 800 or visit www.dementia.org.au

Relationships Australia Victoria provides family support services including elder mediation and counselling for families who are having trouble making these difficult decisions. To find out how we can help, visit www.rav.org.au/family-dispute-resolution/elder-mediation

To find other services that can support you, visit www.rav.org.au/resources/senior-services

About us

Relationships Australia Victoria has over 70 years' experience providing family and relationship support services across Melbourne and Victoria.

We are committed to providing safe, inclusive and accessible services for all people.



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waterways of Australia and we support Aboriginal people's right to self-determination and culturally safe services.

We recognise the lifelong impacts of childhood trauma.

We recognise those who had children taken away from them.