

Respite and Residential Care

THIS FACT SHEET describes the different forms of respite care and how to access them. It also discusses permanent residential care – making the decision and finding the right hostel or nursing home.

Respite Care

Carers often don't like to admit they need time off but respite care allows someone else to step in and give you that break for a few hours, a day, a week or more. It's essential to have time to revitalise yourself so that you can go on caring for your family member.

Giving yourself permission: Carers often feel they must be doing something "important" or "useful" to warrant using respite – the whole point is to ensure you get time off from being useful! Placing your loved one in respite so you can relax by reading a magazine or going on a day trip is just as good a reason as any. Don't wait until you feel stressed. You need regular breaks so that you remain healthy too.

Besides, most people being cared for enjoy a new face, new conversation and new activities. Even if this is not the case, stand up for your right to respite. It will be good for both of you in the long run.

Sometimes family and friends can provide some respite but other services are available, such as government-subsidised or commercial.

In-home respite: This is when someone comes to your home and looks after your family member while you go out and do things you can't do while caring. If there is a charge, it will be at an hourly rate.

Day centres: Day centres offer activities, company and stimulation for people in need of care.

They are often used on a regular basis – perhaps a full-day or a half-day each week – and some services offer weekend care. There may be a fee per session. Most can organise transport to and from the centre. Contact your local council or community health centre for details.

Residential respite care: Some residential care facilities – nursing homes and hostels – admit people for a short stay while you have a holiday or break. In some areas, especially smaller country towns, the local hospital may also be able to provide this service. Nursing homes and hostels charge standard fees. Other services range widely in cost. Some have a sliding scale, depending on your income.

In theory, you may use these residential respite services for up to nine weeks a year, usually in blocks of two or three weeks. It depends on availability however, which is based on priority and need. This is assessed by an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT, see below). Bookings need to be made well in advance.

Centrelink allows you to have up to 42 days away from care-giving while still receiving the carers pension.

Emergency respite: This is not available in all areas so check first with a Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre. If emergency respite is not available, it may be important for your peace of mind to have a back-up plan. This could include family, neighbours or a local service, but it is best discussed in advance.

Permanent Residential Care

There are many reasons why people move to a hostel or nursing home. Deteriorating health and physical abilities may mean the person can no longer be managed at home. Sometimes their behaviour can be the trigger. For instance, a person's condition may cause them to become aggressive. Maybe your health has deteriorated and you need to go into hospital or you are no longer physically capable of caring. Perhaps there are other family demands, your back-up help is no longer available or the services you need are not available locally.

Making the decision: Whatever the reason, making the decision about permanent residential care

is difficult and feelings are often mixed. Carers describe feeling relief and guilt, pride in what they have done, yet a sense of failure that they can no longer continue. There may be a sense of freedom but also a sense of loneliness, and worry about the care their family member will now receive.

Involve your family member: If possible, it is best to consider and plan this move together with your family member before relocation becomes necessary. A person who is mentally alert should always be involved in this planning. Even where thinking skills and insight are blunted, it usually helps to involve the person as far as possible. Preparation and planning make the transition easier for everyone, though this is not always possible. The most difficult situations occur where a person has to be moved suddenly because of a crisis.

The rewards: Many carers find that once the move is made, it opens a new dimension in their relationship with the person. Without the physical burden of caring, you are free to relax and enjoy each other's company. If it is physically possible, the person can still go out with you to visit home, have a meal or go to a movie.

Issues to explore: You may consider visiting potential nursing homes or hostels and find out more information about them. Issues you might want to consider include:

- > What nursing home or hostel care is available nearby?
- > What information and advice will help in making the decision? Where do I find it?
- > How can I make sure that my family member receives the best care?
- > How will we know when the time is right?
- > How can I continue to be a carer when he or she goes into residential care?

You will have the opportunity to discuss these issues with an ACAT member (see below) when your family member is assessed for residential care. Otherwise, your condition-specific support organization.

Hostels: Hostels are available for people who need some help with everyday living. Each person has their own room with a private or shared bathroom. Meals are served in a dining room and other services are provided. Qualified staff are available to help with activities such as dressing, laundry, medication and bathing.

Hostels usually charge fees based on the person's financial situation, and these fees are limited to make sure that the person retains set amounts of assets and income.

Nursing homes: Nursing homes are for people who need full-time nursing and substantial help with personal care. Nursing homes are run by private companies, government departments and church groups.

Aged-Care Assessment Teams (ACATs)

Before a person can enter a hostel or nursing home or receive certain community services, they must be assessed by an Aged-Care Assessment Team (ACAT). ACATs are independent teams who assist frail, older people and their carers to identify what kind of care will best meet their needs.

They are multi-disciplinary teams that include health professionals, such as medical officers, social workers, nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists, who conduct comprehensive, medically based assessments. Some younger people who have age-related disabilities are also eligible for an ACAT assessment.

An ACAT will assess the person at home or in hospital and discuss the results with you together, so that you can decide on the right move. ACATs can also arrange nursing home or hostel care if needed, or refer you to local community services to support your care at home. You can find your nearest ACAT through your doctor, regional hospital or health centre.

Choosing a Nursing Home or Hostel

Single or shared room: Choosing the right hostel or nursing home will be different for everyone. In newer nursing homes, the trend is to provide single rooms, while older ones have larger shared rooms. Don't dismiss shared rooms without consideration. In a shared room, staff are about more often, visitors are shared and there is more company and stimulation. A single room preserves privacy, but it can be very isolating too.

Privacy issues: If you are choosing a nursing home for your partner, bear in mind that a lack of privacy may seriously restrict your opportunities for intimacy and touching. Some nursing homes address this issue better than others.

Quality of service: The standard of care in all nursing homes and hostels is monitored by teams from the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency and their reports are available to the public.

Checklist: Here are some issues you may want to consider and some questions to ask when choosing a nursing home or hostel.

- > Are the managers and workers interested in you – do they listen and ask for information?

- > Does the place feel friendly, welcoming and caring?
- > Do other residents appear well cared for?
- > Is there somewhere to sit together privately?
- > Is it acceptable for you to come and feed and shower your family member?
- > What is the diet provided? Are you satisfied with the quality of food and nutrition? Do the meals look appetising?
- > What training does staff have?
- > Are you satisfied with medical and specialist services available? Can the person have his or her own doctor?
- > What is the medication policy?
- > Are therapies provided – speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy?
- > Are you satisfied with environment issues, such as heating/cooling of the building, bathroom access, maintenance of rooms, buildings, grounds?
- > Are there procedures in place in the event of a fire?
- > Is there at least one person on duty at all times? What level of training does this person have?
- > What are individual residents' rights regarding their privacy, belongings, pets, mail, telephone, religious beliefs?
- > Are you satisfied with the range of activities and choices for recreation?
- > Are you satisfied with visiting times and access for family members?
- > Can outings, overnight stays and holidays with family members be arranged easily?
- > Does anyone speak the language of your family member?
- > Are other services provided, such as hairdressing or massage?
- > Is there assistance for you and the person in preparing for the move?
- > Will you be asked for suggestions and comments?
- > Is there a policy for addressing any of your complaints or concerns?
- > Can you join a residents' and relatives' committee?
- > Has the fee structure been fully explained? Are there extra costs?

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