

Facing the possibility of residential care

Carers and families face the possibility of residential care in different ways. For some it arises through the sudden onset of a condition (for example, a stroke) in their family member. For others it arises gradually, through progressive changes in their family member's condition and the realisation that care at home is becoming difficult to manage.

Sudden shock of the condition

Suddenly learning that your family member has been diagnosed with a serious health condition or disability can be extremely stressful, particularly if you have not been in a caring role before. Carers talk about feelings of shock, anxiety, helplessness, an overwhelming sense of sadness and fear of the unknown. These are all normal reactions.

Life as you have known it may change dramatically. You realise that you may become completely responsible for the health of your family member - in other words, you may become their 'primary carer'. Sometimes doctors, health professionals or your family will raise the possibility of residential care almost immediately.

In this situation, take time to consider the situation and look at all the options available. Do not allow yourself to be pushed into a decision before you've had time to think it through. Speak to the treating doctor or your family member's GP about the possibility of rehabilitation. Push for this, as it will ensure intensive therapy and medical attention for as long as is feasible.

Gradual awareness of the condition

Gradually becoming aware of the increasing vulnerability of your family member can be a long and drawn out process. It is particularly frustrating for carers and families if the condition is difficult to diagnose and no name is given to explain the difficulties your family member is experiencing.

In this situation, many carers will have been caring long before the need for residential care becomes apparent. Some will have anticipated this need, although often it is a decision that is dreaded, put off or avoided.

Signs that residential care is needed

Having a condition that is severe or likely to worsen does not necessarily mean that residential care will be required. People who are highly dependent may manage quite well at home with the support of a carer, family and friends and community support services.

However, some conditions are more likely to result in the need for residential care. The key signs that indicate when caring at home may be difficult include:

- ▣ major difficulties with mobility;
- ▣ severe continence problems;
- ▣ challenging behaviours;
- ▣ severe communication problems; and
- ▣ significant thinking, planning and memory difficulties.

It is often a combination of these, as well as the safety issues involved, that lead families to consider residential care.



The Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS) can visit your family member at home to assess their eligibility for residential care. ACAS may also recommend community support services, respite care, therapies or clinics that may help. If in hospital, an aged care team can see your family member there.

The assessment usually involves meeting with one of the ACAS workers to talk about your family member's need for support with day-to-day activities. This might include showering, dressing, walking, eating, shopping and other activities.

The information sheet 'Aged care assessment' has more on this. It also talks about your role in the assessment process. You need to feel sure that you have participated in the decision making and considered all the options.

Further information:

- ▣ [Residential care - where to start](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [Aged care assessment](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [Aged Care Assessment Service locations](#) - phone 1800 500 853 for contact details.

Contact the [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) on 1800 242 636* to request the above information sheets be sent to you - or to find out about other information sheets in this series.

*Free call except from mobile phones. Mobile calls at mobile rates.

We do our best to keep these links up to date, but the internet changes all the time. If you can no longer access any of the above resources, please go to our [Internet Troubleshooting Guide](#), or email us at website@carersvic.org.au