

Make sure you have the necessary paperwork

Before you can begin looking at residential care facilities your family member or friend will need to be assessed by the Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS). The GP or hospital doctor can arrange this or you can phone ACAS yourself.

ACAS will complete the required paperwork to confirm that your family member is 'eligible' for residential care. This paperwork, called the Aged Care Client Record, outlines the health and care needs of your family member and specifies which level of care is appropriate.

Find out which facilities are in your preferred area

The ACAS worker will provide you with a list of facilities in your preferred area and/or a copy of the [DPS Guide to Aged Care](#) that provides a comprehensive listing. Alternatively, contact [your local ACAS](#) (phone 1800 500 853 for details) to have this sent to you.

ACAS can provide information and guidance, but cannot make recommendations about the appropriateness or quality of facilities. Sometimes the best information about facilities comes from other carers and families.

Start making enquiries

The first step toward finding the right residential care facility is to start making enquiries. This is usually done by phoning the director of nursing or manager. Before calling make a short list of questions to ask. This might include:

- Could the facility manage the particular care needs of your family member? (e.g. daily injections)
- Does the facility have an activities coordinator?
- Are there garden areas to sit in?
- Is the facility 'secure' for those who wander?
- Are there other residents from the same cultural background?

Making enquiries is really about 'screening' so ask the questions that are most important to you and your family member or friend. If you like what you hear, make an appointment to view the facility.

Prepare yourself for visiting facilities

It's important to know what to expect when visiting facilities. Carers who have been through this say that it's natural to experience the following:

- Shock, at seeing so many disabled people in one place.
- Sadness, that your family member needs this type of care.
- Anxiety, about whether the facility can provide adequate care.
- Discomfort, about not knowing how to act or what to ask.
- Feeling overwhelmed and uncertain of how to approach residents.

At first it can be hard to see the residents as individuals, each with different likes and dislikes, interests, families and friendships. You may feel as though your family member is different and doesn't belong there. Over time you and your family member will get to know the different residents and their families - sometimes even making strong friendships and finding unexpected support.

Know what to expect on visits and tours

Families visit residential care facilities in one of two ways:

- ▣ Individual visits (by appointment).
- ▣ Group tours (at a set date and time).

Individual visits tend to be the preferred option, allowing carers and families to discuss their own family member's needs. However, appointments are not usually available after-hours or on weekends - at least, not with a senior staff member.

Group tours are often scheduled by facilities that are unable to offer one-on-one time to families. Sometimes this can make the screening process more difficult, although the benefit is that others on the tour may ask questions you have overlooked.

A useful tip if your family member is in hospital

If you are not able to wait for the facility's next tour, explain your situation and try to negotiate an individual visit. Continue visiting other facilities in the meantime. Notify the hospital each time you find a suitable facility - this will demonstrate your cooperation, despite the difficulties faced. In time, the hospital will have your complete list of preferred facilities.

Read the information sheet 'How to find the right residential care facility' for helpful advice on what to consider when visiting.

The following tips will help you get the most out of your visit:

- ▣ Expect feelings of doubt and confusion - this is natural.
- ▣ Be clear about the needs and wishes of your family member.
- ▣ Prepare questions in advance and take them with you.
- ▣ Take a support person with you to help you 'assess' the facility.
- ▣ Take home any available written information like brochures.
- ▣ Limit your visits to three per day and take notes - after a while they all begin to blur together.

Further information:

- ▣ [Aged Care Assessment](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [How to find the right residential care facility](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [The DPS Guide to Aged Care](#)
- ▣ The [Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre](#) - ph: 1800 242 636. Information, support and advice for people caring for a family member or friend. You can also request the above information sheets be sent to you - or 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