

What to look for on visits and tours

Initial impressions and gut feelings often give a good indication of the 'right' residential care facility. The following examples are things you and your family member may also like to consider.

Care provided

- Can the facility offer the care your family member needs?
- Is '[Ageing in place](#)' offered and what does this really mean?
- What are the staff-to-resident ratios (day, evening and overnight)?
- What type of training do staff have? (e.g. nursing; personal care)
- What is the day-to-day routine and can this be flexible?

Carer involvement

- Are carers involved in developing the care plan?
- How could carers be involved in providing the care?
- Are there opportunities to help out around the facility? Is this encouraged?
- Is there a residents and relatives group or a carer support group?

Relationships

- How are staff and residents interacting? Is it warm and caring?
- Are some residents enjoying time together? Does it seem sociable?
- Are there private areas available (e.g. separate rooms or gardens) in which families and couples can spend time together?
- Is it located nearby or easily accessible for visiting? Is it close to public transport?
- How flexible are the visiting hours? Will this suit family who work?

Quality of life

- What types of activities are there for residents?
- Is there an activities coordinator?
- Are special events or cultural celebrations held?
- Are residents taken on outings?
- How accessible are the local shops or day clubs?
- Are residents encouraged to go on day or overnight visits with carers and families?

Special needs

- Are there other residents from your cultural group?
- Can the facility cater for food preferences?
- What if your family member doesn't speak English? How will the facility bridge the communication gap?

Physical surrounds

- What is the general 'feel' of the place? Trust your gut feelings.
- Is it clean and well maintained?
- Are there a number of different sitting areas for residents?
- Are there single or shared rooms? How is privacy maintained?
- Are there double rooms for couples?
- Are there pleasant outdoor areas?
- Is the facility 'secure'?



The [DPS Guide to Aged Care](#) provides a comprehensive list of facilities in both metropolitan and regional areas. It also contains other information that might be helpful.

What you should know about the realities of residential care

It's important to know the limitations and realities of residential care as this can help you to balance your expectations. It will also give you an insight into what might be difficult to negotiate and what is worth pursuing. Residents and relatives groups are often a strong source of support with some of these issues.

1. Residential care facilities are not like a 'home away from home'

Generally they are large open-style facilities, sometimes housing over 100 residents. This is communal living. Some facilities are creating distinct wings or sections to help overcome this.

2. Care is not always provided by nurses

Residential care facilities largely employ personal care workers who are trained to provide care and support to older and/or disabled people. High level care facilities (previously known as nursing homes) are required to have a registered nurse on duty at all times, however low level care facilities (or hostels) are not.

3. Overnight staffing is limited

Some low level care facilities have only 'sleep over' staff on duty overnight - if not needed they will sleep during their shift. High level care facilities have different requirements based on the level of need of residents, however the staffing is still limited overnight.

4. Limited staffing means residents must wait

Generally residents need to wait for assistance, unless their need is urgent or an emergency occurs. Sometimes this can mean accidents (for example, incontinence or falls) or at the very least, frustration.

5. Flexibility is an aim, not a guarantee

Sometimes routines that worked well at home are not able to be managed in the residential care facility. Staffing levels and costs will dictate whether some requests are possible. However, most facilities will try to accommodate the wishes of the resident if possible.

Further information:

- ▣ [5 Steps to Entry to Residential Aged Care](#) - booklet.
- ▣ [The DPS Guide to Aged Care](#).
- ▣ [Residential care - where to start](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [Residential care paperwork and waiting lists](#) - information sheet.
- ▣ [How to find your new carer role in residential care](#) - information sheet.

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