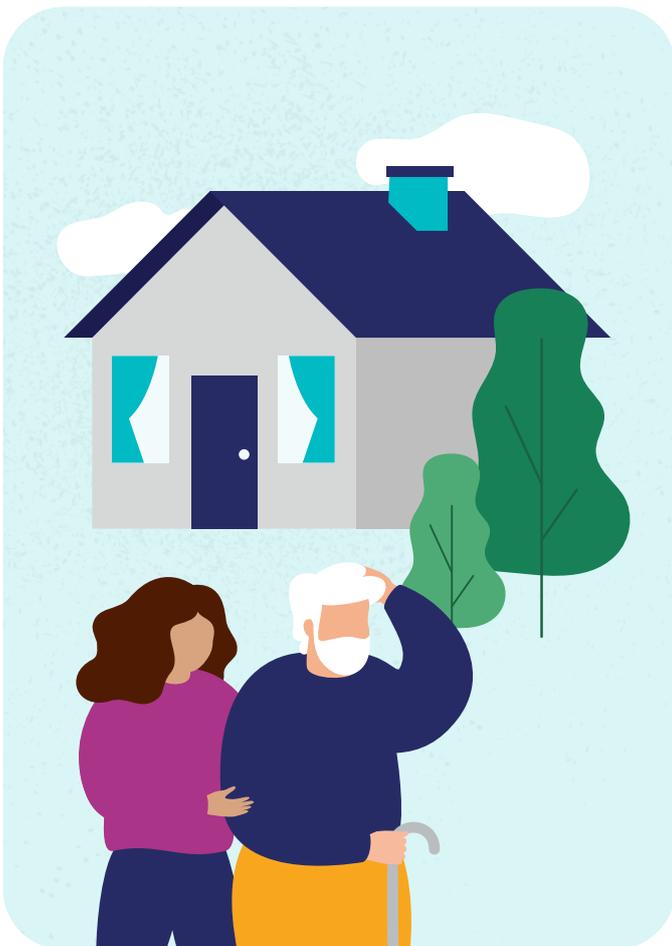




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Is it time to consider an Aged Care Home?



Most people want to be cared for in their own home as they approach the end of their life. This is not always possible. In reality, the majority of Australians experience end of life in an aged care home (also called a residential aged care facility) or a hospital (or palliative care unit/hospice).

There are many reasons why you might consider an aged care home for the person you are caring for. Ideally this will be a conversation and joint decision between you and the person you are caring for. However, sometimes the family (or main carer) has to make the difficult decision. You can always discuss this decision with your health care team. Your health care team can also help you to have the conversation with the person you are caring for.



Common reasons to consider an aged care home (for respite or permanently)

- The caring role has become much bigger and more difficult and you no longer feel able (or willing) to continue.
- The person develops complex care needs, has symptoms that are difficult to manage at home (such as pain or agitation), or it becomes unsafe for them or yourself at home.
- The home environment is not set up appropriately for someone who has limited mobility – e.g. stairs, a bedroom and bathroom very close together, or lack of necessary equipment or lack of space for equipment.
- You have your own health issues that need to be a priority or you are very tired from caring and need a break.
- The person you are caring for wants to be in an aged care home. This may be because they want more support or do not want to overly burden you or other family members.

Sometimes you may plan to care for the person at home and it doesn't work out. Remember that this is no one's fault and a move to an aged care home may be necessary for them to receive the best care or for your own health. Sometimes this decision needs to be made quickly as a result of a fall or fast deterioration which can be difficult for everyone involved.

Benefits of transitioning to an aged care home

Many people find this transition difficult, but it can also be a very positive one. There are potential benefits to both you and to the person you are caring for. They will be receiving 24-hour care in a safe environment with trained staff and appropriate equipment and resources. The aged care home is also likely to have a nurse available, a General Practitioner or Nurse Practitioner on call, and staff trained in end of life care who can support you. There may also be activities available to engage the residents and help them socialise (exercise groups, arts and craft activities, or music).

You may be able to change your focus from the stress of caring and the many small daily tasks, to being able to focus on the relationship and spending quality time with the person. Your role is still extremely important and you have a lot of useful information about the person which can help the aged care workers provide the most personalised care. You can continue to provide companionship and emotional support to the person. There is no reason why you cannot also remain involved in practical care tasks if you want to.



Possible negative reactions to the decision



Some people feel guilt or sadness when making the decision to move the person to an aged care home.

This is a very normal response. Sometimes people have made 'promises' or there may be family or cultural expectations to remain at home. However, in the long term, this is a practical and sometimes medically directed decision that is being made to maximise wellbeing for both of you.

Many people also have a negative attitude about aged care homes and have only heard negative stories.

Going for tours of aged care homes and talking to staff and residents can help alleviate your concerns. You will see that the majority of services are clean, comfortable, and staff are friendly, caring and attentive.

You may also be feeling a sense of loss at this time. You may feel a loss for the person, for your plans and hopes for the future, or for your identity as a carer.

Feelings of loss and grief are a common experience, and you may find that talking about your feelings with close friends or alternatively seeking some professional support is helpful at this time. Consider contacting Carer Gateway counselling services, your General Practitioner or Griefline.

The person being cared for may feel angry about this decision, and this may be hiding other deeper emotions such as sadness, fear, or even a sense of rejection.

This can be helped by re-assuring the person that you love them, want them to receive good care, plan to see them often, and will make sure they are safe and well cared for. It is also important not to react to their anger but to remain calm and reassuring. Remember, their anger is not a reason to change the decision.



Case Study – John and Patrick

John is 74 years of age with a diagnosis of Alzheimers disease as well as other chronic diseases. Patrick, his partner, is caring for him at home. Patrick has noticed that John is getting confused and even angry more frequently. He is also having much more difficulty getting out of his chair and walking to the bathroom. Patrick is fearful of John having a serious fall, but cannot be around all of the time. He is wondering about transitioning John to an aged care home before he becomes more confused and frail.



1. Patrick calls My Aged Care to register John for an assessment. He informs My Aged Care that John is at risk of a fall.
2. The Aged Care Assessment team assess John within 2 weeks. But then they have to wait for the outcome of the assessment.
3. John gets a notification that he has been allocated a package which includes home care supports and states he is eligible for a residential aged care facility placement.
4. Patrick finds a local aged care home and takes John there for a tour.
5. They trial a 2 week respite before accepting a permanent place.
6. Patrick visits John regularly while he is settling in and shows staff how listening to country music helps John relax if he is agitated.

Resources to help find an aged care home

There are many resources to help you choose the right aged care home, understand what quality care looks like, and further information on end of life care in an aged care home:

- [Aged care homes on the My Aged Care website](#)
- [Steps to enter an aged care home booklet](#)
- [Finding quality care on the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission website](#)
- [OPAN has compiled a list of resources to help you choose an Aged Care Home](#)