

# Tips for residential aged care providers

## Information for residential aged care providers regarding coronavirus (COVID-19) and supporting people living with dementia.

In addition to the infection control measures aged care providers are implementing in response to coronavirus (COVID-19), the following outlines some considerations for people living with dementia. If you are concerned about the health of a person living with dementia, contact their GP directly.

Some initial suggestions on supporting people impacted by dementia are provided below and more detailed information is available through contacting the **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500**.

## Tips and strategies

### Reduce heightened anxiety about coronavirus

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- Ensure information provided is from an authoritative source (e.g. Commonwealth Department of Health)
- Minimise the flow of media information by turning off the 24-hour news cycle on TV
- Provide information and explanation to residents who are aware and concerned about what is happening
- Provide reassurance about the use of masks and personal protective equipment
- Use memory aids and visual prompts to explain in a simple way the current situation

- Make sure regular time is spent with residents to ask how they are going and if they have any questions
- Take the time to listen to the person and their concerns
- Validate how the person is feeling
- Provide reassurance
- Minimise staff discussion, speculation or opinions on the impact of COVID-19 in front of residents
- Avoid the use of negative language such as 'lockdown', 'pandemic' or 'crisis'

### **Support continued engagement with families and carers**

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- Communicate with families through a variety of communication channels what the infection control measures are in relation to coronavirus (COVID-19) and where to go for further information
- Discourage visiting to your service if the visitor is unwell
- Encourage visitors to adhere to social distancing of 1.5 metres where possible and discuss with them in advance how visits should be conducted
- Encourage visitors to maintain strict hygiene measures
- Try to conduct visits in a resident's room, outdoors or in a specific designated area at the facility and not in communal areas, to minimise the risk of transmission
- Maintain open communication with residents and their families and provide regular updates to families about the wellbeing of the resident
- Provide reassurance to families about the infection control measures you have in place
- Try to arrange other means of communication – iPad, video call apps, phone calls, or social media messaging, if applicable. Make appointments with family to Skype or FaceTime

- Be understanding and listen to concerns of family and residents
- Try to respond in a timely manner to questions and concerns of residents and their families
- Escalate to supervisor if unable to answer questions or concerns
- Understand this is a stressful time for everyone

### **Maintain physical health**

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- Staff may need to provide people living with dementia with additional support to ensure infection control procedures are adhered to
- People living with dementia may need extra support to maintain proper hand hygiene. The following five tips relate specifically to this:
  - Consider placing dementia friendly instructional signs in bathrooms and elsewhere to remind people with dementia to wash their hands with soap for at least 20 seconds.
  - Give a demonstration of thorough hand washing. Consider singing a song to encourage them to wash their hands for at least 20 seconds.
  - If the person with dementia cannot get to a sink to wash their hands, hand sanitiser or anti-bacterial hand wipes may be a quick alternative. Hand sanitiser is only effective if hands are not visibly dirty.
  - Encourage them to cough or sneeze into a tissue or their elbow, instead of into their hands and ensure the tissue is then discarded in the bin.
  - More tips on hand washing can be found at **[www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/how-to-wash-and-dry-hands](http://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/how-to-wash-and-dry-hands)**

## **Promote appropriate social connection and engagement**

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- Consider creating a buddy system between residents or between residents and staff to strengthen support networks
- Look at maintaining social support through smaller groups with social distancing principles where feasible (e.g. meetings in larger spaces or outside)
- Encourage music and singing so that others can join in
- Use the overhead speakers to play interactive games (bingo could work)
- Encourage regular opportunity to walk outside and exercise, especially where this is part of the resident's usual routine
- Encourage family and friends to drop off care packages with letters from family or encourage local school children to write letters or draw pictures to send to residents
- Encourage the person to consider doing some gentle exercises, either in a chair or around their room
- Access online exercise or music programs for older people
- Use technology, such as iPads to access online games and social engagement. Options include 'A better visit' app (**[dementialearning.org.au/technology/a-better-visit-app/](https://dementialearning.org.au/technology/a-better-visit-app/)**), a virtual zoo (**[zoo.org.au/animal-house](https://zoo.org.au/animal-house)**) or virtual museum (**[artsandculture.google.com/](https://artsandculture.google.com/)**)
- Provide other activities such as colouring-in, magazines, folding, sock matching, movies, talking books

## **Recognise and address emerging behaviours**

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- Increase staffing levels to spend more time engaging with residents. Encourage your residents to participate in everyday activities when providing one on one care
- Maintain regular routine as much as possible
- Keep residents active to avoid boredom and reduce napping during the day
- Maximise access to natural light

- For residents whose usual routine is to walk around the service independently, provide regular walks and access to outdoors
- Seek to respond to changed behaviours in a timely way should they emerge
- Use non-pharmacological approaches to respond to changed or heightened behaviours
- Use visual prompts to remind residents of restricted access
- Avoid the use of restrictive practices
- Apply a sequenced problem-solving approach to changed behaviours (e.g. CAUSEd – for more on that, see **dementialearning.org.au** and search for ‘behaviours’)
- Or contact the Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS) on **1800 699 799**

For further advice contact our **National Dementia Helpline** on **1800 100 500**.

The Centre for Dementia Learning has a comprehensive range of education programs to help aged care providers address many of the issues raised above. For further details contact **1300 DEMENTIA**. You can also find a wide range of resources at the Dementia Australia library: **dementia.org.au/library**

The above information was based on information provided by Alzheimer’s Disease Chinese (ADC) and shared by Alzheimer’s Disease International. You can find the full presentation here: **[www.alz.co.uk/news/covid-19-sharing-experience-and-advice-from-adis-member-association-in-china](http://www.alz.co.uk/news/covid-19-sharing-experience-and-advice-from-adis-member-association-in-china)**

The coronavirus situation is rapidly evolving. This information is provided as a guide only and may not be appropriate for every situation. For up to date information on the coronavirus, visit **[www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert](http://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert)**

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