

## Dementia - support services are available

Caring for someone with dementia can be difficult and, at times, overwhelming. Many organisations provide services for people with dementia and for their families and carers.

### Obtaining information

It is best to find out about dementia and the immediate help available as soon as a diagnosis is made.

Alzheimer's Australia in each State and Territory can help you understand what is happening and can provide emotional support, information, advice and counselling. You can contact them directly on the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

Another source of information is Carers Victoria, which provides information about support services that are available and how to contact them. A *Carer Support Kit* is available in a number of community languages. This provides a range of practical information for carers. Kits can be obtained by contacting Carers Victoria on 1800 242 636.

### Support

There are a large number of support groups throughout Australia for people with dementia, and for their families and carers. Many people gain enormous comfort and practical assistance from attending these meetings with others who share similar experiences.

Carer support groups bring together carers, relatives and friends of people with dementia on a regular basis under the guidance of a group facilitator. This is usually a health care professional or someone with first-hand experience of caring for a family member. There is no charge for attending. To find the location of your nearest support group, contact the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

### Counselling

Alzheimer's Australia provides a free specialist counselling service for people with dementia, family members and carers. This provides the opportunity to talk through emotional, practical and family issues in confidence.

### Health services

These services will also offer help and support:

- **Your family doctor** – only a medical practitioner can make a diagnosis of dementia. The family doctor is often the first person that people talk to about their concerns. A doctor may assess the person for dementia and can refer them to a specialist. The family doctor will most likely be the main health professional providing ongoing health care for both the person with dementia and their family member.
- **Cognitive Dementia and Memory Services (CDAMS)** – these specialised services provide expert assessment and diagnosis to people with memory loss or changes to their thinking. The family doctor can refer a person to CDAMS, or CDAMS can be contacted directly where there are concerns about cognitive impairment.
- **Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS)** – the family doctor can refer a person with cognitive impairment to the ACAS team, or they can be contacted directly. ACAS teams are made up of doctors, social workers and other health professionals who can help work out what kind of care will best meet needs when extra assistance is required. They will ask a series of questions in order to find the best care option for the person with cognitive impairment.

- **Royal District Nursing Service (RDNS)** – this service provides home nursing, assistance with medication, advice and referral.
- **Other health services** – such as physiotherapy, podiatry, speech and occupational therapy are available to assist people with dementia and to advise their carers.

## Home support services

There are many services that help people live more comfortably in their own home by offering extra support. Some of the most commonly used services for people with dementia living at home include:

- **Home help** – can provide assistance with personal care and housekeeping.
- **Meals on Wheels** – provides home-delivered meals.
- **Community Aged Care Packages** – individualised packages of care services, which help people to stay living at home.
- **The Independent Living Centre** – in each State or Territory offers a number of services designed to promote safe living. Advice is available on home modifications.

## Respite care

Taking a break is often known as respite. Respite can give family members a break from caring and a chance for the person with dementia to take part in social or recreational activities.

Respite can be provided in local day activity centres. Some centres offer specialised activities for people with dementia. Day centres offer care for a few hours to five days a week. Some centres offer weekend or overnight care.

Another way to take a break is to have a respite carer come to the house of the person with dementia or accompany the person with dementia to an activity they enjoy. This enables the family to do things outside the house or take a break. This is often called in-home respite.

Respite can also be used to provide care in an emergency or arranged for a longer period in a residential facility.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your community health service
- Your local council
- Carers Victoria Tel. 1800 242 636
- Cognitive Dementia and Memory Services (CDAMS) clinics – ask your doctor for details of the one nearest to you
- National Dementia Helpline Tel. 1800 100 500
- Carer Respite Centres Tel. 1800 059 059
- Carer Resource Centres Tel. 1800 242 636
- Aged Care Assessment Services – contact your regional Department of Human Services office
- *Carer Support Kit* – for information about the support and services that are available to carers, and offers practical assistance. A copy of the *Carer Support Kit* is available by phoning Carers Victoria. Tel. 1800 242 636

## Things to remember

- Try to find out about the help and services available as soon as a diagnosis of dementia is made.
- Carer support groups can offer practical help as well as comfort.
- Different types of respite are available to give carers and families a break.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Alzheimer's Australia Victoria

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