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## Who's who in aged care

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### Summary

- Each member of your aged care team will have a unique role in your care.
  - If you are not sure about the role of the person who is caring for you, just ask them.
  - Your aged care team is made up of skilled and experienced healthcare professionals who may have training in medicine, nursing and allied health.
  - There is a range of different support staff who may help with your care including managers, personal care workers, leisure and lifestyle staff.
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If you or someone you are caring for is receiving aged care services at home or in a residential aged care home, it is likely you will come across a range of aged care support staff. Each member of your aged care team will have a unique role in your care and daily life.

If you are not sure about the role of the person who is caring for you, just ask them. You may want to know about their education and relevant experience. In some roles within aged care homes, formal qualifications vary and educational backgrounds differ.

The following 'who's who' list will help you understand who does what in the aged care sector.

### Your doctor or general practitioner

Most people have a local doctor or 'GP' (**general practitioner**) who is their first point of contact for health concerns. It is a good idea to build a relationship with your GP over time. This will help you feel comfortable talking to them about sensitive issues and it will also give them a good knowledge of your medical history. Your GP is best placed to look after your overall healthcare, including making referrals for blood tests or scans, or to a medical specialist, if needed.

### Nurses

Nurses check and plan your care, and manage your general health. Speak to your nurse about your care needs and preferences, as well as any health concerns you have. They can also direct you to the right people to speak to about specific medical issues.

Nurses can help you with:

- managing your medicines
- taking blood tests
- checking your blood pressure
- changing wound dressings
- caring for you catheter
- managing your continence.

Like doctors, nurses have different roles and responsibilities based on their experience, education and medical specialties. Their different roles include nurse practitioners, registered nurses, enrolled nurses and specialist nurses.

### Geriatricians

Geriatricians are medical doctors who specialise in healthcare for older people. Your doctor may refer you to a geriatrician to get their opinion on a specific age-related health concern or you may come across geriatricians who work in residential aged care and support services.

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## **Psycho-geriatricians**

Psycho-geriatricians are psychiatrists who specialise in psychiatric care for elderly people. If you or someone you are caring for is dealing with a mental health issue, you may be referred to a psycho-geriatrician for therapy and medical treatment. Psycho-geriatricians are trained medical doctors who have specialised in psychiatry for the older people and they are able to prescribe medication.

## **Dentists**

As you get older you are more likely to have problems with your teeth and may also need to consider getting dentures. Dentists provide many dental and oral health treatments to prevent tooth decay, gum disease and tooth loss. Common dental treatments may include scaling and cleaning, fissure sealants, fillings and restorations, removing teeth, fitting of dentures and orthodontic treatment.

For more information read our [\*\*Seeing a dentist or dental health practitioner\*\*](#) fact sheet.

## **Allied health professionals**

Allied health professionals are university-trained practitioners who work as part of your aged care team, often to help in your recovery following illness or injury or in managing chronic conditions.

## **Podiatrists**

Podiatrists treat and manage foot conditions. Foot care is especially important for elderly people with mobility problems and specific conditions like diabetes or arthritis. Podiatrists sometimes prescribe orthotics, which are custom-made shoe inserts that help support the feet.

For more information see the [\*\*Foot Care – Podiatrists\*\*](#) fact sheet.

## **Physiotherapists**

As you get older you may experience problems that limit your movement or make getting around harder or even painful. Physiotherapists use manual therapies, exercise programs and electrotherapy techniques to treat musculoskeletal conditions (such as arthritis, sports injuries or back pain), neurological conditions (such as stroke, multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injuries) and cardiothoracic conditions (such as emphysema, asthma or chronic bronchitis).

For more information see the [\*\*Physiotherapists\*\*](#) fact sheet.

## **Occupational therapists**

If an older person is affected by an illness, accident or workplace injury, an occupational therapist can help them on the road to recovery. They may help with the return to home and work life through the development of new skills for daily living, such as household tasks and personal care, return-to-work or leisure programs. They may also make or facilitate changes to the work or home environment to make life easier and safer.

For more information see the [\*\*Occupational Therapists\*\*](#) fact sheet.

## **Speech pathologists**

Speech pathologists work with people who have communication or swallowing difficulties, such as those who are recovering from an accident or a stroke. They often work in a multidisciplinary team of professionals to assess and treat people with a range of difficulties. These may include problems with speech, voice, using and understanding language, fluency, reading, writing and swallowing (dysphagia).

For more information see the [\*\*Speech Pathologists\*\*](#) fact sheet.

## **Dietitians**

What you eat and how much you eat can have a big impact on your overall health. Dietitians can provide you with food and nutrition information to help you improve your health and manage your lifestyle. Qualified dietitians also have the clinical training to change a person's diet to treat or manage conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, overweight and obesity, cancer, food allergies and intolerances. When choosing a dietitian, look for someone with the Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) credential.

For more information see the [Dietitians](#) fact sheet.

### **Other allied health professionals**

You may see other allied health professionals in residential aged care or in local medical centres including:

- Art or music therapists – use visual art (such as drawing, painting, sculpture or collage) and creative play or music as a form of psychotherapy.
- Audiologists – use a range of tests to check a person’s ability to hear the loudness and pitch of different sounds.
- Chiropractors – use manual treatments, referred to as spinal adjustments, to realign the joints of the spine and treat problems such as back pain.
- Exercise physiologists – help people to change their physical activity and lifestyle habits to prevent and manage injuries or chronic conditions. These may include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, depression, cancer, arthritis or COPD (a lung disease).
- Medical radiation practitioners – use medical radiation (for example, x-rays and ultrasounds) to study internal body structures and diagnose or treat disease or injury. Examples include medical imaging technologists, nuclear medicine technologists, radiation therapists and sonographers.
- Osteopaths – use a range of manual techniques including soft tissue massage, stretching and manipulation of the skeleton and muscles to promote mobility and balance.
- Orthotists – design, make and fit braces and other appliances to help protect and support an injury as it heals. They also provide mobility and help with rehabilitation.
- Pharmacists – may prepare and give medicines, as well as advise on what the medicine is and how to take it. They may also carry out pharmaceutical (medication-related) research.
- Prosthetists – design, make and fit artificial devices to replace absent body parts for example, a prosthetic leg.
- Social workers – help a person to deal with personal or social problems by offering services such as counselling or referral to other agencies.

### **Complementary medicine practitioners**

Complementary medicine is also known as alternative therapy, alternative medicine, holistic therapy and traditional medicine. The term covers complementary medicines such as vitamins, minerals, Chinese medicine and herbal and homoeopathic products, and therapies such as acupuncture and Reiki.

Many people use complementary medicine as well as conventional medical care. It is very important to let your doctor know about any complementary medicine products and therapies you are using so they can incorporate these therapies into your overall care plan.

For more information see the [Complementary Therapies](#) fact sheet.

### **Aged care support staff**

There is a range of different support staff who may take care of any day-to-day tasks that are not directly associated with your medical care.

#### **Personal care or community care workers**

**Personal care workers** support the work done by nurses and are there to provide personal care to you in your own home or in a residential aged care home. The role varies from person to person but they can help you get showered and dressed in the morning, go to the toilet or get in and out of bed. They can also help you with your shopping or with transport.

#### **Counsellors**

‘**Counsellor**’ is a generic term for various professionals who offer some type of ‘talking therapy’. A counsellor may primarily work as, for example, a nurse, social worker or psychologist. Some have a specific counselling qualification such as a Bachelor or Master of Counselling degree.

Counsellors help people work through personal problems. They help people to recognise and define their emotional

health, mental and lifestyle problems and to understand themselves and their behaviour better. They help people by:

- explaining options
- setting goals
- providing therapy
- supporting them to take action.

Not all counsellors have specific training in treating mental health conditions like depression and anxiety and services offered by counsellors usually do not attract a **Medicare** rebate.

### **Non-direct care roles**

There are many workers who are not directly involved in caring for you, but who do play a big part in making sure you have everything that you need. These non-direct care roles include residential care managers, caterers, cleaning companies, laundry staff and gardening and maintenance contractors.

### **Aged Care Assessment Service (ACAS) assessors**

Your local ACAS assessor will be a nurse, social worker, occupational therapist or other health care professional. They will visit you in your home or in hospital to ask you about how you are managing from day-to-day and about your overall health situation.

At the visit, ACAS assessors will give you information about the types of aged care services that are available. You need an ACAS assessment to find out if you are eligible for a Commonwealth Home Care Package, Transition Care Program or Residential Aged Care Home.

ACAS is known as the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) in states other than Victoria.

For more information see ACAT assessments on the **My Aged Care** website.

### **Home and community care (HACC) assessors**

If you have requested help at home through the HACC Program, HACC assessors will come and visit you in your home to talk through what kind of help you need. They will work through the details with you, including your eligibility and how much HACC services might cost.

For more information see Home and Community Care on the **My Aged Care** website.

### **Aged care volunteers**

Volunteers play an important role throughout Victoria's aged care system, especially in regional and rural areas. An aged care volunteer can help with everything from food shopping and social activities to transport and household chores.

### **Where to get help**

- Your GP (doctor)
- **Aged Care Assessment Services**
- **My Aged Care**, call 1800 200 422
- **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre**, call 1800 052 222
- Your **local council** (HACC Program)
- Your **local community health centre** or district nursing service (HACC Program)
- Your migrant resource centre or ethnic or Koori organisation (HACC Program)
- **Carers Victoria**, call 1800 242 636 - for free information for older Victorians, call 1300 13 50 90
- **Seniors Information Victoria**
- **Seniors Rights Victoria**, call 1300 368 821
- **Council on the Ageing Victoria**, call (03) 9654 4443
- **Aged Care Complaints Scheme**, call 1800 550 552

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