

How to choose a residential care home

Placing a family member into residential care can be stressful. Carers can feel an enormous amount of pressure to make the right decision. The family may not agree on what the best decision is. It is common to feel a lot of guilt.

You will need to consider the wishes of the person who is moving into residential care as well as their budget, and whether the location is close to family members.

It is a good idea to shortlist some residential care homes, and visit them to get a feel for how they care for people and see whether your loved one would be happy there. Where possible, take the person who is to move there with you, as well as someone else to be another set of eyes. Any care home should be more than accommodating of a request for a tour.

Ask to meet staff and residents. Join them for a cup of tea, a meal or an activity. Arrive earlier than your appointed time to observe the daily life of the care home, or plan another unscheduled visit to help you get a true feel for it.

Respite care (short stays) in the care home can help you and your loved get a good feel for the staff and how it is run. Above all, go with your gut feelings, as they are always the best.

Things to look for in a residential care home

- » What is your first impression, what is your gut telling you?
- » Does it smell clean or stale?
- » Does the care home appear well maintained and clean?
- » Is it a home like environment?
- » Is there clear signage, good lighting, space to be with others and alone?
- » Do staff appear happy and make you feel welcome, or do they seem overworked?
- » Do residents look content, engaged and included?
- » Ask to view a potential room, not just common areas.

Questions to ask

About the staff and care provided:

- » How long have staff and managers worked there?
- » What are the staffing ratios for different levels of care?
- » Are family members treated as partners in caring?
- » How do the care providers and other workers make the care home dementia friendly?
- » Is physical or chemical restraint used only as a last resort?
- » Is there a registered nurse on site 24 hours - not just 'available' or 'on duty'?
- » What is the basic level of training given to care workers who will be looking after your loved one? Are staff trained and skilled in dementia care?
- » What happens if you have a disagreement or a complaint about the residential care home?

About resident individuality and choice:

- » How will the person's cultural or religious beliefs be supported?
- » What is the variety and regularity of scheduled activities?
- » How are residents supported to take part in those activities?
- » Do residents have unrestricted access to gardens?
- » Can they have their own items in their room?
- » How are residents likes and dislikes shared with staff?
- » Can residents choose when they want to get up, have a shower, eat meals, or go to bed? Or is this scheduled around staff rosters?
- » When can residents have visitors, and are children or pets allowed to visit?

Also ask staff and residents how they enjoy working and living there.

For information about dementia or just to talk, call Alzheimer's WA on **1300 66 77 88** or visit alzheimerswa.org.au.