



Australian Government

Information for Carers

Services for You

Carers are usually family members or friends who provide support to children or adults who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition or who are frail aged. Carers may be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, friends or children of any age.

Carers may care for a few hours a week or all day every day. Some carers are eligible for government benefits, while others are employed or have a private income.

Caring for someone can be a demanding job and some people need extra assistance to manage. There are an increasing number of services out there for you and the person you care for, although this will vary from area to area.

Sometimes it can be hard to know or to explain what you really need. Some people feel very strongly that everything should be kept in the family and outside help is not necessary. Others find it hard to admit they can't do everything, all the time, for the person they care for. Services are there to help you so don't feel ashamed, guilty or embarrassed about contacting them.

? What services are available?

Carer Support Groups: Carer support groups allow people of similar circumstances to get together, let off steam and relax by sharing experiences, feelings, ideas, concerns, information and problems. It is an opportunity to have a break, socialise and learn from other carers. Many groups welcome any carers while others focus on a specific disability or illness.

Community Health Centres: Community health centres offer a variety of services that may include child health, counselling, speech therapy, physiotherapy, community nursing and mental health.

Food Services: When people have difficulty preparing their own meals at home food services can deliver nutritious meals (fresh or frozen) to their homes or provide meals at a centre. Each service will vary in the range of support provided. People with particular dietary needs for health, religious or cultural reasons may have special meals arranged.

Home Help: Home help services may assist you with practical tasks at home. Services may include house cleaning, shopping, laundry and personal care such as bathing, dressing or toileting.

Home Maintenance and Modification: Assistance can be provided for essential home repairs and modification. Help may include installing safety ramps and support rails, changing light globes and widening doorways. Referrals can also be made to reliable tradespeople for other work.

Home Nursing: A trained nurse may visit people in their homes to improve or maintain their health. They may provide assistance with personal hygiene, medication, give injections or change dressings. Care may be provided regularly or occasionally when you need it.

Palliative Care: Palliative care is for people with a terminal illness to relieve pain, reduce stress and aims to optimise personal dignity, independence and choices around dying. Your local hospital or community health centre can provide details of the closest palliative care service, or contact the Palliative Care Association.

Respite: Respite is a form of support for carers enabling them to attend to everyday activities and have a break from their caring role. Respite may be given informally by friends, family, neighbours or by formal respite services.

Respite services can supply a trained person to provide support at home, called in-home respite, or at facilities such as day care centres and

aged care homes. Respite may be for a few hours, days or longer periods. Respite is important for the carer's long-term health and well-being.

'I was able to get a paid worker to come in for a few days to get my husband up, dressed, get his breakfast and make lunch. This gave me a chance for a break.'

If you need help or advice to organise respite call your **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** on **1800 052 222***. Finding respite that suits the carer's needs and the needs of the person they care for is a priority. Limited financial assistance towards respite may be available in cases of emergency or one-off situations. For emergency respite support outside standard business hours, call **1800 059 059***.

Transport: Transport services can assist people who are unable to use or have no access to regular transport. Transport could be to and from appointments, shopping and social activities. If you need to attend appointments at your local hospital or community health centre transport may also be available through these services.

Volunteer Programs: Volunteers carry out home visits, help with food shopping and provide transport to medical, dental and hospital appointments as well as many other services that may help carers.

How do I find out what services can help me?

A good starting point for any information about services is your **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** which can provide you with information about the range of community care and other aged care services available in your local area. They can be contacted on **1800 052 222***.





You can also get information about services that may help you by contacting:

**National Carer
Counselling Program** 1800 242 636*
**Translating and
Interpreting Service** 13 14 50#
Kids Helpline..... 1800 551 800*
**Veterans' Affairs
Network (VAN)**..... 1300 551 918#
**Aged and Community Care
Information Line** 1800 500 853*
Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500*

Check your local telephone directory for your State and Territory Government Departments and your local council. Your doctor and community health service may also help with information about suitable services.

✓ Getting started with services

Most services will want to assess whether their service is suitable for you and the person you care for. Sometimes this will mean a comprehensive assessment of the person's care situation. You may need to provide detailed information such as reports from your doctor. Due to privacy regulations a service may have to ask the same questions that you have already answered for another service.

It can be frustrating to have to answer the same questions again and again. However, if you get the help you need it is worth being persistent.

Remind the service about your needs as a carer too. Ask for referrals to other services if they don't offer what you want in the way you want it.

✓ Working with services made easy

Having to work with different services may add to the demands made on you – having to make and keep appointments, arranging travel and getting the information you need from workers may be an extremely time consuming, and often frustrating, part of caring.

'Accept help if it is offered but plan your own life and remain in control'.

Some tips from other carers that have helped them get the most from services may help you:

- Develop a relationship with a key worker who can help communication with other services.
- Prepare your questions. Make a checklist of questions in advance so you don't forget anything.
- Fill in forms carefully. Ask for assistance if anything is unclear.
- Keep copies of all forms so you have a record and you can use the information for other forms.
- Keep records in one place, perhaps in a folder or envelope.
- Be assertive about appointment times and places that suit you.
- Organise a time to speak to a worker without the person you care for.

? What if I have special needs because of my language or culture?

There are sometimes services available to cater for people's special cultural needs such as diet or types of activities. Other services may have non-English speaking workers. If you have special needs contact your Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre and ask them about if appropriate services are available.

? Can I complain about services if I'm not happy?

It's not always easy to complain about how a service is provided. You might not like the way staff treat you or the person you care for or you might not like the service. Many carers don't complain if they are unhappy with a service because they are worried it might be stopped.

Even if a service is free or there is only a small fee you still have the right to complain.

Although you may be reluctant to speak up you can do something about it. Complaints can actually help improve services.

If you want to make a complaint:

- approach the service provider directly about your concern;
- ask to speak to a senior person;
- ask if there is a complaints policy for the service;
- put your complaint in writing; and
- consider having someone to support you to raise your concerns.

? What is advocacy?

When their rights are denied some people are unable to stand up for themselves and rely on others to help them. Helping someone stand up for their rights is often called advocacy. If you feel unable to make a complaint yourself an advocate may be able to help you. An advocate can be a friend, relative or an independent organisation.

There are local advocacy groups in many areas and you can find out about them by calling the **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** on **1800 052 222***.

? What if services aren't available in my area?

Try to let people know you need a service. If there is no demand the service will never be there. Some carers have contacted their local newspaper or Member of Parliament when they have found services they need are not available in their area and this has led to some improvements for them.

? Where can I get more information?

There is a lot more information for carers available on a range of topics. Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres in each state and territory provide carers with referral to services and practical written information to support them in their caring role. Contact your **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** on **1800 052 222***. Alternatively, carers may use the services provided by the carer association in each state or territory. More information on these services can be found by contacting **1800 242 636**.

The **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** can help you if you need assistance with a language other than English. TIS can be contacted on **13 14 50#**.

COMMONWEALTH RESPITE AND CARELINK CENTRE
1800 052 222*

*Free call from local phones, mobile calls at mobile rates

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