

## Tips to support a person with dementia during a COVID-19 outbreak



### Background

This tip sheet provides practical information about what care staff can do to be prepared in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak and how to support a person with dementia.

Restrictions in aged care due to a COVID-19 outbreak can be disruptive and stressful for staff and residents. For a person living with dementia, changes to the environment, increased noise and activity, new staff and heightened anxiety can increase the likelihood of behaviours and psychological symptoms of dementia.

**In the event of a COVID -19 outbreak, DSA can provide on the ground support, video-conferencing and phone support. Access COVID specific helpsheets as part of our resource library at [dementia.com.au](https://dementia.com.au).**

### Have accurate information about the person

Prepare a quick 'about me' tip sheet for easy handover:

- Use simple easy to understand language with bullet points and aim to limit it to one-page.
- Keep information in an easily visible and accessible location so new care staff can see it.
- Add the person's preferred name, photo, language capacity, and physical health such as mobility status, and sensory changes.
- Include likes and dislikes, such as doesn't like loud noises, likes to go for a walk.

- List preferences such as music and television programs.
- Preferred meal and showering times.
- Make additional copies that can be given to staff at handover or to patient transport/paramedics if they are taken to hospital.

### Being away from people who are familiar due to restricted access can be distressing

- Create clear communication plans for staff to keep family up to date about their family members health and wellbeing.
- Think about alternative ways to communicate such as recorded messages, FaceTime and window visits. Remember to monitor for signs of additional distress.

# Care Staff Helpsheet

## It is important that all staff caring for the person are up to date with information about the person

- Ensure a daily handover sheet is readily available that summarises the information sheet of the person, what worked well today and what might need to be focused on tomorrow.

## PPE can be confusing for a person with dementia who may not be able to recognise familiar care staff

- Laminate a picture of yourself in your work clothes with your name. Show this to the person to help them recognise you. This could be cleaned frequently.
- Use different movements and hand gestures to communicate such as thumbs up, waving.
- Use touch where appropriate, this may help reassure the person. For example: gently squeezing hand, rubbing shoulder.
- When approaching the person, offer them something like a glass of water, this will show that you are there to help.

## If you need to relocate someone

- Create a 'reminiscence or memory box' with copies of important photos, letters from family, activities they enjoy (colouring books, cards) or items of cultural significance. They can take with them.
- Have photos of family or pets in the room.
- Ensure the physical environment is appropriate for the person. Check the temperature of the room, noise levels, lighting (is it too light or too dark), mirrors or window reflections.
- The person may have difficulty finding their room. Clearly identify the person's new room with a large photo of the person with their name clearly readable. Laminate the photo and attach with blue tack, so it can be cleaned and moved easily. Ensure the door number is clearly visible.

- If possible provide opportunities to access outdoor areas. Residents may try to gain access to outdoors on a more regular basis especially when other activities and visitors are restricted, or excursions cancelled.
- Restricted areas where there is lots of activity can become points of interests - think about how you might temporarily disguise these.

## Other factors to consider if the person does not want to go in their room or appears agitated

- Is the person in pain – consider position changes, pillow, seating, chronic injuries, analgesia administration.
- Does the person need to go to the bathroom or have a pad change.
- With changes to routine and environment the person may have not had enough to eat or drink – think about increased checks and providing additional snacks and drink opportunities.

