Caring for and supporting your parent or partner as they age

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 can be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, friends or children. Some carers are eligible for government benefits while others are employed or have a private income. These people all provide unpaid, informal care.

No one ever thinks it will happen to them, yet one in five households in Australia is providing support to a family member or friend.

All people age differently and the needs of most people change as they grow older. While many people are able to keep their independence, others become increasingly dependent as they age, especially those moving into very old age. Most people need assistance by the time they reach 85 years or over. The transition from independence to needing the support and care of others is not necessarily an easy one.

This booklet is designed to help you plan ahead to care for and support your parent or partner as they age.
■ **Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres**

The Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre in each state and territory provides carers with referral to services and tailored information and resources to support them in their caring role.

Carers can receive services and free information on a range of topics, including:

- Support services
- Counselling, through the National Carer Counselling Program
- Emotional support
- Home help
- Respite
- Health and well-being
- Financial entitlements
- Legal matters
- Safety at home and managing medications
- Carer support groups
- Loss and grief

Commonwealth Carer Resource Centres can be contacted on 1800 242 636*

The Centres have local knowledge about:

- The range of services available and how to contact them
- Who is eligible to receive the services
- Whether there are any costs associated with receiving the services
- Aged care assessment services for access to Community Aged Care Packages or entry into aged care homes

Commonwealth Carelink Centres can be contacted on 1800 052 222*

■ **Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres**

There are over 90 Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres and outlets around Australia to support carers to access respite or ‘take a break’.

The Centres can:

- Provide information and advice about respite options
- Help with organizing emergency or planned respite
- Purchase appropriate short-term or emergency respite services

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres can be contacted on 1800 059 059*

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*An Australian Government Initiative
Free call except from mobile phones. Calls made from mobiles are charged at mobile phone rates.
1 Deciding whether to take on a caring role

If you take on the role of providing care to your ageing parent or partner, you may find:

- Providing care and juggling all your responsibilities are more difficult than you had first anticipated
- It is not easy to ask others for assistance
- Some family and friends are not as supportive or helpful as you would like
- The changes in your parent or partner may give you a strong feeling of loss of the person you once knew
- You feel you are on your own

You may also find that:

- Caring for your parent or partner is very rewarding. Lots of special times are shared
- Unexpected people may provide encouragement and assistance
- Sharing your experience with others can help

The impact of caring

If you decide to take on a caring role it is important to look after yourself as it is likely to affect your home and family life, your work and your social life. The way that each person responds to, or reacts to, caring is different.
Your feelings may vary over time and as the daily situation changes. You will need to take time for yourself so that you do not become physically or emotionally run down.

Relationship changes

Your relationship with your parent or partner may change if, as they age, they become increasingly dependent on you.

The right to choose

Becoming a carer is not usually something that most people plan to do. It is important to think about whether this is the best option for you and whether there are other ways to provide this care.

Consider contacting the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre for information about what other options may be available.

2 Taking on a caring role

Becoming a carer

The amount of care you give to your parent or partner may develop gradually as they slowly lose their independence, or it may happen suddenly because of an accident or illness.

Some people remain intellectually alert and retain their vitality and drive as they age. Some need little or no assistance with everyday tasks, while others need emotional support or companionship. Most people prefer to retain their independence for as long as possible.

Other people will experience deteriorating health. There are some conditions or illnesses which are more common in people who are ageing. They include incontinence, dementia, diabetes, arthritis, stroke, heart disease, osteoporosis and depression.

Your parent or partner will have needs that are unique to them as they age.
Talk to your parent or partner

Talk to your parent or partner about lifestyle changes and their thoughts for the future. Discuss their preferences on care, health and financial matters. Find out if and how they may require assistance, either from you, from the family or from the community. This can be very challenging if they do not see the need for support, even though their physical, mental or emotional decline is apparent.

The need for planning and the urgency to plan for the future varies in each circumstance. Most people who care for an ageing parent or partner do so gradually by taking on more and more of the responsibilities. But when there is a sudden onset of an illness, accident or health condition, the change comes quickly and planning is more difficult.

The following tips might be helpful when planning:

Identify the needs of your parent or partner

- Find out as much as you can about the illness or condition and the implications it has for their future care needs
- Identify their needs and how often help is needed, whether it is nursing care, assistance with household tasks or simply companionship
- It is also important to identify the amount and type of assistance you and your family network can and are willing to provide

Include family members and friends

It may be of benefit when your parent or partner is making major decisions relating to their need for assistance, to include the family in the decision-making. If planning a family meeting:

- Include everyone who will be affected and may have a part in providing support at some stage to your parent or partner
- Another option is to organise a meeting with the immediate family and have individual discussions with other relatives and friends
• Consider having the meeting facilitated by an outside member or professional, such as a social worker. This may be particularly useful if there are past family relationships which could make family discussions difficult.

• If you have no family support, there are a number of services that can help you. Contact the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre for information, support and advice.

Identify the services needed

There are a number of services available to assist your parent or partner to continue to live independently. Keep in mind that the services available will vary from area to area and you may need to be persistent when asking for support. Contact a Commonwealth Carelink Centre for information on appropriate services for your ageing parent or partner and where these are in your local area, including:

• Assistance with practical tasks at home, such as house cleaning, gardening, shopping and laundry

• Assistance with essential home repairs, yard maintenance, and safety modifications

• Aids to assist with mobility and daily living tasks

• Delivery of meals to the home or meals at a centre

• Assistance if unable to use or have no access to regular transport

• Community Aged Care Packages (i.e. planned and coordinated packages of community care services) available to those who wish to remain living in their own homes and who are assessed as eligible by an Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) as having complex care needs

  - Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs) can help you decide which services you need. They can help you to get residential care or a Community Aged Care Package (CACP), refer you to community care services, or help you arrange respite care in a residential setting.
• Residential aged care for frail aged people who cannot live at home and who have been assessed by an ACAT as needing such care
• Palliative care assistance for people whose illness is life threatening and who can no longer be cured

There is normally a charge for most of the above services. However, all these services are subsidised and this fee can vary from service to service. Please keep in mind there may be waiting lists and eligibility requirements.

For more information and details on what local services are available, contact the Commonwealth Carelink Centre.

Seek financial and legal advice

• Check whether your parent or partner has arrangements in place to finance long-term care and to protect them if they become incapable of making decisions
• Confirm if arrangements have been made for a Power of Attorney or an Enduring Power of Attorney
  - A Power of Attorney is a legal document used to appoint a person chosen to make financial decisions, under certain conditions, on behalf of the person giving the authority. The person appointed is called an attorney

  The decisions the attorney makes on behalf of that person have the same legal power as those made by the person themselves.

  A Power of Attorney is normally given only for specific purposes or events. It might also only be given for a specific period of time.

  - An Enduring Power of Attorney, like a Power of Attorney, is a legal document that gives another person the legal authority to make financial and legal decisions on their behalf

    The Enduring Power of Attorney cannot be created after a person is incapacitated; it can only be made by the person while they are still capable of making decisions for themselves. The document must be signed while they have the legal capacity to do so.
The Enduring Power of Attorney remains effective after the person becomes incapacitated. It cannot be revoked.

- Banks and other organisations, such as medical benefits and telephone companies, allow for another person to be nominated to operate the account or act on behalf of the person. This can be arranged through operating the Power of Attorney or through the person you are caring for giving signed or, in some cases, verbal consent.

If no arrangements are in place, consider the appointment of a Guardian or Administrator

- **Guardianship** is the legal appointment of a guardian. The guardian may be the carer or some other person.

  The role of the guardian is not to provide the day to day care but to make personal, medical and lifestyle decisions on behalf of an adult with a disability who cannot make those decisions for themselves. (In some states the words impaired capacity or incapable of making their own decisions are used instead of disability).

  The decisions made by the guardian are always to be made in the best interest of the person with the disability.

- **Public Guardian** is a public official who can be appointed by the Guardianship Board (or state/territory equivalent) to be the guardian of a person with a disability if there is no other person suitable or able to be the guardian.

  Your family solicitor or the Guardianship Board can help you draw up an Enduring Power of Attorney.
Check if a nominee has been appointed through Centrelink

Centrelink has nominee arrangements for people eligible for the age pension who need assistance to manage their affairs. The nominee can receive correspondence, make enquiries, change information and receive payment on the age pensioner’s behalf. (This is not the same as a Power of Attorney).

For more information refer to the Carer Support Kit ‘Legal Arrangements’ fact sheet (available from the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre)

Ask for information about financial assistance that you and your parent or partner may be entitled to

Financial assistance is available, particularly for those caring full-time for their ageing parent or partner.

Carers may be paid a Centrelink payment if they are caring for someone who is old, has a disability, or someone who is sick for a long time. These payments are:

- **Carer Payment**
  
  This is paid if you need to care for someone most of the time and you cannot work full-time.

  Conditions apply and you will need a doctor’s or health professional’s report to help establish eligibility.

- **Carer Allowance**

  This can be paid in addition to the income you already get. It is specifically there to help you in your caring role.

  Conditions apply and you will need a doctor’s or health professional’s report to help establish eligibility.
There are many other benefits and entitlements that provide financial support including:

- Concession and health care cards
- Rental assistance
- Telephone allowance
- Pharmaceutical allowance
- Mobility allowance
- Continence Aids assistance
- Assistance with the cost of patient travel
- Taxi concessions
- Concessions on car registration and driver’s licence
- Reduced Council rates
- Reduced Utilities costs – electricity, gas and water

A good starting point for help and information about financial assistance is your Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre.

Fully consider the financial circumstances and available assets of your ageing parent or partner and what that may mean for long-term care options.

For more information refer to the Carer Support Kit ‘Managing Money’ fact sheet (available from the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre)
Other support services

- **Department of Veterans' Affairs**
  This Department offers a number of programs for the veteran community that may provide flow-on benefits for partners and carers to assist them in their caring role. Programs include Veterans' Home Care (VHC), community nursing, allied health services, rehabilitation appliances, home modifications, and HomeFront falls prevention.

- **Veterans’ Home Care (VHC)**
  The VHC program helps veterans, war widows and widowers with low care needs to remain in their own homes for longer and provides a range of home care services including domestic assistance, personal care, respite care and safety-related home and garden maintenance.
  The provision of services is based on assessed need. To be assessed for VHC services a person must be a war widow/widower or a veteran of the Australian defence forces and have a Gold or White Card.

- **Services for partners and carers**
  Partners and carers may receive respite care if they are caring for an eligible veteran or war widow/widower. They are not eligible for VHC services unless they have their own Gold or White Card. However the needs of the household are considered as part of the assessment process.

- **Aids and equipment**
  The Rehabilitation Appliances Program provides equipment, aids and home modifications to help people to remain in their own home. The provision of these services is based on assessed clinical need of eligible Gold and White card holders. Safety items and modifications may also be available through the HomeFront accident and falls prevention program.

For more information and details on the services available contact The Department of Veterans’ Affairs
3 Taking care of yourself

As a carer, you may find that you spend so much time caring for your ageing parent or partner that there is little or no time at all for considering your own needs, looking after your own health or maintaining friendships.

We all need to take care of ourselves. This is especially so for carers.

The following hints from other carers might be helpful:

• As a carer for your parent or partner, it is vital to take time to take care of yourself and follow your own interests outside your caring role. Get into the habit of making time for yourself as a regular part of your day

• If family and friends offer to help, provide them with opportunities to share in the caring role. Share the tasks. For example:
  – Keep all the family members informed on a regular basis
  – Delegate appropriate and specific tasks to each member of the family eg paying the bills, maintaining the garden, etc

• You also need to take a break if you provide the majority of care to your parent or partner. Few people can care constantly without a break. Even though it is often not easy to ask for help, ask family and friends, or contact a Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre to help arrange regular breaks

  You can get information on the full range of respite services and assistance available to carers by calling your Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre.

• Coping with difficult caring situations. Some carers speak about feeling under a lot of strain, unappreciated, put down and even ‘abused’ by the person they are providing care for. This could be due to a wide range of reasons, such as the family member’s illness (e.g. dementia or brain injury) or poor family relationships. If this is happening, it is important that you discuss your feelings with trusted family members or friends
Alternatively discuss your feelings with staff at the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre or your local Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre. They are there to help. They may be able to assist you with strategies to improve your situation.

An independent ‘outsider’ – for example, an aged care professional, your local doctor or social worker may be able to assist you.

National Carer Counselling Program services are also available (face-to-face or by telephone) where you can receive practical help and support by a professional – just call the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre.

For more information refer to the Carer Support Kit – ‘Taking Care of Yourself’ fact sheet (available from the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre).

### Useful contacts

For information about many local services and National Information Lines see the Age Page in the Emergency, Health and Help Section of your White Pages telephone book.

**CARERS AUSTRALIA**

(with links to state and territory Carers Association sites)

www.carersaustralia.com.au

**COMMONWEALTH CARER RESOURCE CENTRE**

1800 242 636*

An information, referral and counselling service for all carers auspiced by the Carers Association in each state and territory

www.carersaustralia.com.au

**COMMONWEALTH CARELINK CENTRES**

1800 052 222*

Provides referrals to community care, disability and other support services

www.commcarelink.health.gov.au

**COMMONWEALTH CARER RESPITE CENTRE**

1800 059 059*

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres coordinate access to respite services in your local area. They can give you advice about respite services and find the service closest to you. They can also help you get the right respite services. Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres work with carers to plan sensible approaches to respite and other support needs and also arrange 24 hour emergency respite care.
AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS’ AFFAIRS
1300 551 918
Offers support services for veterans and their families
www.dva.gov.au

CENTRELINK
13 27 17
For enquiries on Carer Payment and Carer Allowance
www.centrelink.gov.au

AGED AND COMMUNITY CARE INFORMATION LINE
1800 500 853*
Provides information on Community Aged Care Packages and residential care fees in Australian Government funded facilities

WWW.SENIORS.GOV.AU
Provides older Australians with information about the services, programs and benefits that are currently available to them across Australia. It addresses the needs of both dependent older people and healthy older people.

TECHNICAL AID TO THE DISABLED
02 9808 2022
Make and supply custom-designed aids, where commercial equipment is not suitable
www.technicalaidnsw.org.au

ALZHEIMER’S AUSTRALIA
(includes Dementia)
www.alzheimers.org.au

DEMENTIA HELPLINE
(24 hr service)
1800 639 331

NATIONAL DEMENTIA BEHAVIOUR ADVISORY SERVICE
(24 hr service)
1300 366 448
Provides advice on managing behaviours of concern to those who care for a person with dementia

ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA
1800 011 041
www.arthritisfoundation.com.au

LIFELINE’S JUST ASK
1300 13 11 14
Rural information and referral service for people with mental health problems (including depression) and their families and friends
www.justask.org.au

CANCER COUNCIL AUSTRALIA
(Cancer Helpline)
131 120
www.cancer.org.au

CONTINENCE FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA
(Helpline)
1800 330 066
www.continence.org.au

DIABETES AUSTRALIA
(Helpline)
1300 136 588
www.diabetesaustralia.com.au
5 Resources

**Carer Support Kit**
Available from the Commonwealth Carer Resource Centre
www.carersaustralia.com.au
Includes factsheets on:
- Services for You
- Taking a Break
- Managing Money
- Feelings
- Legal Arrangements
- Safety at Home
- Loss and Grief
- Taking Care of Yourself
- Managing Health Care
- Emergency Care Kit and Medications

**Australian Department of Health and Ageing**
www.ageing.health.gov.au
- ‘Aged Care – make the choices that are right for you’
- ‘Quality Care for Older Australians – Home and Community Care (HACC)’
- ‘Quality Care for Older Australians – Community Aged Care Packages’
- ‘Quality Care for Older Australians – How Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs) Can Help You’
- ‘What you need to know about residential aged care’

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• The Carer Experience
  a book which provides carers of people with dementia with
  information, advice and support. The carer information, stories and
  ideas in this book come directly from carers and service providers
  throughout Australia.

Australian Department of Veterans’ Affairs Fact Sheets
www.dva.gov.au
• About Veterans’ Home Care
• Home and Garden Maintenance
• Personal Care
• Domestic Assistance
• Respite Care

International Resources
Family Caregiver Alliance Fact Sheets
www.caregiver.org
• ‘Holding a Family Meeting’
• ‘Work and Eldercare’
• ‘Caregiving’
CarePathways Fact Sheets
www.carepathways.com
• ‘Caring for Mom and Dad is a Family Affair’
• ‘More Dos and Don’ts When Caring for Mom and Dad’

Disclaimer
Information contained in this Booklet is intended as a guide only. Carers Australia and the
state and territory Carers Associations cannot be held responsible for any damage or loss
arising out of the contents of this Booklet.

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