

Continenence Care in Residential Aged Care

A Guide for Residents, Carers, Families, and Support People

This guide is for people living in a residential aged care home, as well as their carers, families, and support people. It provides information about:

- What is quality continence care?
- Your rights with respect to your continence care
- How your continence needs should be met in residential aged care
- Questions that you can ask to make sure you have all the information you need to ensure that you receive the continence care that is appropriate for you

What is quality continence care?

Continenence care is the support and assistance that is provided to people to support them in managing their bladder and/or bowel function. It's common for people who live in residential aged care to need this support and being able to access continence care is important for both mental and physical wellbeing.

Quality continence care is evidence-based, centred around you, responsive to your individual needs, safe, protects your dignity, and optimises your functional abilities. Quality continence care recognises the person not just the task.

Continenence care and your rights

The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights 2020 describes what you or the person you care for can expect when they receive healthcare. These rights apply to people with continence care needs who live in residential aged care.

Your choice, autonomy, safety, and dignity should be at the core of the continence care that you receive. It's also important that continence care aligns with your values, goals and personal preferences, and is respectful to culture, background, identity, and access needs.

You have the right to be provided with simple, understandable information about how your continence care needs will be met. You have the right to access interpreters and translation services if you need to. You should let staff at your residential aged care home know if you need to access these services when discussing your continence care.

You have the right to choose who is involved in discussions about your continence care. For example, you may or may not wish to have a family member, friend, or other support people present – it's up to you.

Any information that you choose to share with staff should remain private, and not be shared with anyone else without your permission.

You should have access to support and services to help you to manage your continence. This includes access to continence care products, assistance from staff, and specialist care when needed.

You should be supported to manage your continence in a way that enables you to fully participate in activities, both within and outside the home, and to maintain your social and personal relationships.

You should also be encouraged and supported to communicate your personal preferences to staff about continence care and how you would like to be supported.

You should always have the opportunity to give feedback about your continence care to staff and receive information about the outcomes of that feedback.



Getting the right continence care for you

When you first enter residential aged care, and at regular points throughout your stay, staff will discuss with you about how they can support and assist you with your continence care needs. This discussion is known as a continence assessment.

The purpose of a continence assessment is to understand your level of continence and what your preferences about continence care are, as well as to determine how the residential aged care home will meet your needs.

During the continence assessment, a Registered Nurse will ask you about your continence and how you currently manage it. This can include questions about sensitive information related to your bladder and bowel function.

Collecting this information helps staff to understand what continence care you may need and will assist them to prepare a personalised continence care plan for you.

Some questions you might expect to be asked include:

- How often do you pass urine?
- How often do you open your bowels?
- Do you have any difficulties using your bladder or bowel?
- Do you have difficulties reaching the toilet in time?
- What type of help do you need to reach and use the toilet?
- Do you need to get up to go to the toilet at night?
- Do you need help at night?
- Do you use any continence care products such as a pad?
- Do you currently take any medicines?

Rest assured, any information that you choose to share will remain private and will not be shared with anyone else without your permission.

In order to provide the continence care that is right for you, staff will discreetly collect information about your bladder and bowel function each day for a short period of time, usually seven days.

After this, staff will meet with you to develop a personalised care plan to help you manage your bladder and bowel function.

Care plans will differ from person to person. Some residents benefit from strategies that prevent the onset of bladder and bowel symptoms, whilst others benefit from continence care that restores bladder and bowel function. Other forms of continence care aim either to manage established symptoms and minimise decline or provide symptom relief and maximise quality of life. This is common in cases of end-of-life continence care.

Personalised approaches to continence care may include:

- Timely help to reach and use the toilet
- Access to incontinence products, such as a urinal, bedpan, incontinence pads
- Referral to a specialist such as a doctor, Nurse Continence Specialist, and other health professionals such as physiotherapists and dietitians.

Questions to ask during your continence assessment

It's not always easy to remember all the questions you want to ask during your continence assessment, and often people remember something they wanted to ask later. Here's a checklist of questions we recommend that you or your support person ask staff:

- What will staff do to determine my personal continence care needs?
- What is a continence assessment?
- What support and assistance can be provided to help me maintain bladder and bowel control?
- What assistance can be provided to ensure that I can reach the toilet in time?
- If I need a continence care products to help with my comfort or bladder and bowel control, will the home provide it?
- Will I be able to see a specialist about my bladder and bowel function if I want to?
- What continence care training do staff receive?
- Can I choose to involve my family or other support people if I want to?
- What happens to the information I provide?
- How can I give feedback about my care and what will happen when I do?

Remember

Residents, carers, families, and support people all have the right to ask questions and be reassured of how quality continence care will be delivered. Quality continence care is evidence-based, centred around you, responsive to your individual needs, safe, protects your dignity, and optimises your functional abilities. Quality continence care recognises the person not just the task.

Continence SMART Care

continence.org.au/Continence-SMART-Care

For further information, contact the National Continence Helpline

1800 33 00 66

The Continence Foundation of Australia

continence.org.au

