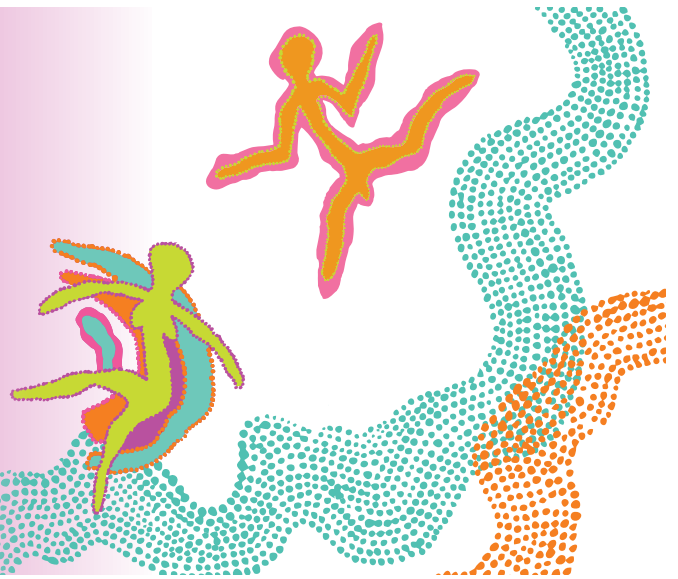


Supporting an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person with dementia move into aged care



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a deep spiritual and cultural connection to their Land, community and family. Moving into aged care is a difficult time because many people may not understand why they have moved and are separated from their Land and family. The unfamiliar environment may make the person feel confused, isolated and distressed. Also, many older people may have been part of the Stolen Generation and may have a deep distrust of institutions and official looking people.

This sheet provides tips and practical information to help you support an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person with dementia feel more settled in their new care environment.

Early connection with the person will assist them to feel supported and cared for. Information about the person can help you understand and respond to their care needs and help settle the person if they get upset or agitated.

- Talk to the person and family respectfully to understand their story, their history, culture and Country. Share some of your own story, this will make people feel comfortable and you may find a common connection e.g. you have visited their Country, or family that you know.
- Try to include a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person or staff member in the conversation. This will help people feel more comfortable to share stories.
- Explain why their story is important and how staff will use the information to best care for the person. Include the person's family in the care planning.

When speaking to the family and the person with dementia observe both the silence and body language to determine whether it is appropriate to start speaking and provide the person enough time to respond. Silent pauses are used to listen, show respect or harmony.

Avoiding eye contact can be a sign of respect, do not think the person is being rude, dishonest or trying to hide something if they do not look at you in the eye.

Care Staff Helpsheet

Points to consider when talking to the person and their family.

Having accessible information can help care staff understand how best to support the person's care.

- How does the person like to be referred to? Is there a cultural or family name they prefer?
- What makes the person upset, are there any past events/memories the person might relive and what does the family do to help calm them down.
- Does the person prefer to receive personal care such as showering, going to the toilet, or changing of clothes by someone of the same gender?
- Acknowledge their past routines, which may be incorporated into the person's care plan such as when does the person like to wake up, eat meals or have a shower.
- What are their likes and dislikes, favourite foods, interests and hobbies, such as fishing or favourite sporting team?
- Does the person have pain? How does the person manage their pain and does the family normally help the person manage pain?
- Seek clarification from the family to confirm what you asked or discussed was understood.
- Ask family what can the person is able to do, so staff can promote their independence.

Provide a care environment that is culturally sensitive and helps to maintain connection of the person to their Land, family and spirit.

- Involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in trying to ensure that the environment is culturally safe.
- Ask the family to bring in personal and cultural items that will make the person feel more at home such as a favourite blanket,

pictures of home or Country, a piece of art or flag. Display items in the care home and in their room.

- Ensure that the person can recognise and access their own room.
- Provide appropriate sleeping arrangements. Some people may not want to sleep in a standard bed.
- Provide access to outdoors.
- Due to past experiences the person may fear possible racism from other residents or staff. Consider education and training in cultural safety for all staff, so staff are equipped with strategies to deal with any possible racism and make the person feel safe.

What you can do if the person becomes withdrawn and anxious because they are not on their Land or with their community.

- Provide opportunities for the person to enjoy such as being able to visit their home and Land. The person may have community obligations they must participate in. Ensure choice and decision-making opportunities for the older person, treat the person respectfully as an Elder etc.
- Sit and talk (yarn) with the person. Talk about their Land, family and community and ask if there is anything you can do to help.
- Encourage family and community members to visit the person, provide/develop culturally safe spaces for family to feel welcome, and do activities that the person likes such as listening to music or yarnning.
- Acknowledge cultural events such as NAIDOC Week, and have activities such as a campfire.
- Play music that you know the person likes. Sing with them and encourage movement, if appropriate.

This resource was created in consultation with the DSA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expert review panel and champions group.