

Caring for someone with dementia

The legal and practical steps, stage by stage.

Dementia changes over years. Work top to bottom — the early legal steps matter most, because they can only be done while capacity remains.

AFTER DIAGNOSIS — THE LEGAL WINDOW

- ☐ **Set up Enduring Power of Attorney** URGENT — WHILE CAPACITY IS INTACT
This is the single most important task. EPOA must be signed while they have legal capacity. Once capacity is lost, the only option is a costly, stressful application to the tribunal.
- ☐ **Check or update their will** URGENT — WHILE CAPACITY IS INTACT
Capacity to sign a will is a legal test. Do this now with a solicitor who can assess capacity and document it.
- ☐ **Complete an Advance Care Directive** URGENT — WHILE CAPACITY IS INTACT
Their values and treatment wishes for the future, while they can still shape them. Covers resuscitation, feeding tubes, hospital transfers.
- ☐ **Get a formal diagnosis documented** FIRST MONTH
See a geriatrician, neurologist, or memory clinic. Written diagnosis matters for Centrelink, insurance, and aged care access later.
- ☐ **Call Dementia Australia** THIS WEEK
1800 100 500 (National Dementia Helpline, 24/7). Free counselling, education courses, local support groups.
- ☐ **Talk to close family** FIRST MONTH
Everyone needs to hear the diagnosis directly. Plan together. Roles, time, money — nothing is off the table.
- ☐ **Organise their paperwork** FIRST 3 MONTHS
Bank accounts, super, insurance, passwords. Get everything in one place now while they can help you understand it.

GOVERNMENT & FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- ☐ **Apply to My Aged Care** FIRST 3 MONTHS
Call 1800 200 422 or apply online at My Aged Care. You don't ask for a type of assessment — an assessor works out what you need. This is the gateway to home care and residential care. Waiting lists are long — start early.
- ☐ **Apply for Centrelink Carer Payment / Allowance** FIRST 3 MONTHS
If you're caring for them, you may be eligible. Carer Allowance is non-means-tested; Carer Payment is income-support. Check current rates with Services Australia.
- ☐ **Apply for a Companion Card** EARLY STAGE
Lets a carer go with them to venues, events, and public transport free of charge. State-based, free.
- ☐ **Get a Disability Parking Permit** EARLY STAGE
Applied for through your state transport authority with a GP letter. Makes appointments and outings much easier.

EARLY STAGE — STILL INDEPENDENT

- ☐ **Build the medical team** EARLY STAGE
Regular GP appointments. A geriatrician or memory clinic. Discuss medications (cholinesterase inhibitors like donepezil may help early stages).
- ☐ **Make home safer** EARLY STAGE
Remove trip hazards. Add grab rails, motion-sensor lights, locks on dangerous cupboards. An OT home assessment through My Aged Care is free.
- ☐ **Set up tech safety** EARLY STAGE
GPS trackers in wallets/shoes. Medic-alert bracelets. Consider an automatic stove shut-off. Lock down internet banking if scams are a concern.
- ☐ **Keep a daily routine** ONGOING
Routine reduces confusion and anxiety. Same wake time, same meals, same activities where possible.
- ☐ **Connect to social activities** EARLY STAGE
Memory cafes, dementia-friendly groups, men's sheds, church. Isolation accelerates decline.

AS IT PROGRESSES — MIDDLE STAGE

- ☐ **Have the driving conversation** WHEN SAFETY IS A CONCERN
One of the hardest. A medical assessment through the GP is the easiest path — doctors are required to report unsafe drivers in most states.
- ☐ **Take over medications** MIDDLE STAGE
Use a Webster-pak from the pharmacy (dose-administration aid). Dementia increasingly makes self-medication unsafe.
- ☐ **Take over finances** MIDDLE STAGE
Use the EPOA. Monitor for scams — dementia patients are targeted. Consider automatic bill payments. Freeze credit cards if needed.
- ☐ **Increase home care hours** AS NEEDS GROW
Request a re-assessment when needs grow. Support at Home has eight funding classifications, and a higher one provides substantial support.
- ☐ **Arrange carer respite** BEFORE YOU BURN OUT
You cannot do this alone indefinitely. Respite is non-negotiable. Book it before you need it — same-day crises are common.
- ☐ **Prepare for wandering** MIDDLE STAGE
Register with MedicAlert's National Dementia Register (free). Install door alarms. Keep a recent photo.
- ☐ **Consider aged care** MIDDLE TO LATE STAGE
Start touring facilities early — waiting lists are months or years. Understand RADs (Refundable Accommodation Deposits) and means testing.

LATE STAGE

- ☐ **Involve palliative care** LATE STAGE
Dementia is a terminal illness. Palliative care supports comfort and dignity. Ask the GP for a referral — it's not only for cancer.
- ☐ **Review the Advance Care Directive** LATE STAGE
Check the ACD still reflects current wishes. Make sure staff and family know where it is. Put a copy in their aged care file.
- ☐ **Be present in the ways that work** ONGOING
They may not remember your name but can still feel love. Music, touch, familiar smells — these reach past the disease.

- ☐ **Plan for hospital avoidance** LATE STAGE
Hospitals disorient dementia patients badly. Discuss with the GP and aged care staff when NOT to transfer — aligned with the ACD.
- ☐ **Talk about funeral wishes** ANY TIME
While they still can, if possible. Otherwise, you decide based on what you know of them.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- ☐ **Recognise anticipatory grief** ONGOING
You grieve them while they're still alive. That is normal with dementia. Talk to a grief counsellor who understands this — it is different from other losses.
- ☐ **Join a carers support group** ONGOING
Other carers understand in a way no one else can. Dementia Australia runs online and local groups. Free.
- ☐ **Protect your own health** ONGOING
Carers die younger than non-carers. Regular GP checks for yourself. Move your body. Eat. Sleep when you can.
- ☐ **Have crisis numbers ready** KEEP HANDY
Dementia Australia: 1800 100 500 (24/7). Lifeline: 13 11 14. Carer Gateway: 1800 422 737.