



Australian Government

# Information for Carers

## Managing Health Care and Medications

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 may be parents, partners, brothers, sisters, friends or children of any age.

Carers may care for a few hours a week or all day every day. Some carers are eligible for government benefits, while others are employed or have a private income.

Carers are usually responsible for managing the health care and medications of the person they care for. This can be a huge responsibility. As well as managing someone else's health care, carers need to look after their own health. The demands of caring may mean that as a carer you are very vulnerable to stress related illnesses.

### Working with health professionals

You will most likely have a lot to do with health care professionals as part of your caring role. This may sometimes be very difficult, especially if you have not had a lot of previous experience working with health professionals.

One way of thinking about working with them is to consider yourself as an important part of a team. The team can include district or community nurses, pharmacists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech pathologists, dieticians, psychologists and social workers as well as GPs and medical specialists.

*'Having a good GP who understands my situation helps. I see him on a regular basis.'*

## ? What is a care plan?

A care plan is a list of services that your GP and other health or community care professionals will provide for the person you care for.

Your GP can prepare a care plan for the person you care for after a full assessment. The plan may help give the people involved a better idea of the care needs of the person you care for and can help you in your caring role. Ask your GP for further information about care plans and other ways he or she can help.

## ? What about my own health?

Your health is important too and your doctor can be a key person in your own support network. If at all possible, find a doctor you have confidence in, can talk to and feel comfortable with. Make sure your doctor knows about your caring role and the demands it makes on you. Don't forget to arrange regular health check ups for yourself. You may also want to know whether the doctor will do home visits.

*'GPs should make it a requirement for all carers to have their health checked, as it is too easy to put aside your own wellbeing.'*

## ? How can I get what I want from health professionals?

Some tips that have worked for other carers dealing with health professionals include:

- Know who the health professional is. Get written information about names, organisation and titles and the role they have in the treatment of the person you care for.
- Take someone with you to appointments to be an extra listener.
- Make up a list of questions so you won't forget anything.
- Keep a diary of the person's problems or symptoms.
- Ask for information to be written down, particularly about diagnosis or about medications.
- Take notes.
- Ask if your doctor can give you any printed material or tell you where to obtain further information or support.
- Make an appointment without the person you are caring for. Even though the doctor may not be able to discuss patient details you will be able to talk about your concerns.
- Ask the receptionist to book a longer appointment if you feel there is never enough time. Some doctors charge extra for a longer consultation.
- Speak up for yourself.





## **? What if I want a second opinion?**

You have the right to see another doctor, either to ask for a second opinion or to change doctors. You can ask for a second opinion at any stage even if you still want to be treated by your first doctor. Your doctor or specialist will normally be happy to refer you to somebody you have heard of or someone else they recommend.

## **✓ Medi-list**

A Medi-list form is available from your pharmacist or as part of the Carer Information Pack to list all the drugs a person is taking, when to take them and the dosages. The pharmacist can help you fill out the Medi-list and keep it up to date. Taking it whenever you go to see any health professional will save a lot of time and confusion. Consider having a Medi-list for yourself as well as for the person you care for.

## **? I'm worried about managing medications**

There are two types of medication: those that require a doctor's prescription and those that do not. It helps to have an understanding of why the person you care for needs to take any medication and be aware of any potential side effects.

Always read the medication label and accompanying leaflets carefully. Ask for the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) for all medications and contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice if necessary.

Some questions you might want to ask the doctor or pharmacist about medications include:

- What is the name of the medicine and what is it for?
- Are there any possible side effects? Will they fade with time or continue as long as the person is taking the drug? What should I do if there are side effects?
- How long should the person take the medicine?
- What should I do if a dose is missed?
- Will the medicine interfere with other medicines taken?
- Will the medicine affect other medical problems the person has?
- Is there anything the person should avoid while taking the medicine? What about alcohol?
- Can you help me fill in my Medi-list?
- You may also want to ask whether your prescription is for the lowest priced brand of medicine.

The person you care for may be on more than one type of medication and knowing when to take each one can be confusing. A pharmacist can divide the week's medication in a way that makes it easy to monitor the dosage. Drugs can interact with each other. Remember that mixing drugs, including over the counter medications, can be dangerous. It can be useful to use only one pharmacy in order to ensure that any possible problems are picked up. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you are concerned.

## What about over the counter and alternative medications?

There has been a huge increase in the availability of over the counter and alternative medications that do not require a prescription. These are available at supermarkets and local shops as well as at pharmacies. If the person you care for is already on prescription medication or you have any doubts about the medications you are buying you should always seek the advice of a pharmacist or doctor.

## Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Medicare Safety Net

Most medicines available on prescription are subsidised under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

If you or the person you care for need a lot of medications there is a PBS Safety Net to help reduce the amount of money you have to spend. To be eligible you need to keep a record of your spending on PBS medicines. Ask your pharmacist for a Safety Net Concession Card.

If you or the person you care for is a concession cardholder ask your pharmacist for a Safety Net Entitlement Card which will entitle you to further savings when PBS medicines are prescribed.

For more information about the PBS call **1800 020 613\***. For questions about Medicare call **13 20 11\***.

## Where can I get more information?

There is a lot more information for carers available on a range of topics. Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centres in each state and territory provide carers with referral to services and practical written information to support them in their caring role. Contact your **Commonwealth Respite and Carelink Centre** on **1800 052 222\***. Alternatively, carers can use the services provided by the carer association in each state or territory. More information on these services can be found by contacting **1800 242 636\***.

The **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** can help you if you need assistance with a language other than English. TIS can be contacted on **13 14 50#**.

**COMMONWEALTH RESPITE AND CARELINK CENTRE**  
**1800 052 222\***

\*Free call from local phones, mobile calls at mobile rates

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