



palliAGED Aged Care Standards Insight

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Assessment in Aged Care

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Assessment and care planning processes are common in both health and aged care systems. Assessment can occur at the individual, the service and the system level. In aged care, assessment processes determine whether an individual person can have access to aged care services and the nature of their service¹. The Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission assesses aged care services. This assessment process protects aged care consumers by checking and monitoring the quality of care and services².

Many things can affect assessment and care planning practices in aged care services such as population diversity, relevant evidence and practice knowledge, service culture and organisation arrangements, assessment tools and techniques, and consumer and community preferences³.

Assessment is also a crucial part of clinical and personal care provided by health professionals and the aged care workforce. Assessments can be a pre-determined and structured review such as the Over 75 Health Assessment, which covers a specified set of questions and areas and requires documentation of follow up actions and care

requirements⁴. An assessment can also arise in response to a new concern or be a follow up to see how a treatment or care plan is working. Person centred care and consumer directed care remind us that any assessment should take into account the whole person and their preferences relating to care⁵. Therefore, initial and ongoing assessment should inform and update the care services to be provided and how these services, activities or therapies will lead to the desired outcome.

This is particularly important in the end of life context where there may be a range of physical, psychosocial and spiritual concerns needing discussion and planning. Assessment and care planning also needs to respect the person as an individual and their preferences and needs at the end of life. The National Palliative Care Strategy highlights that palliative care is a person-centred approach where the person affected by a life-limiting illnesses should be placed at the heart of care planning and delivery⁶.

Familiarity with assessment and care planning in the context of end of life and palliative care needs will be increasingly significant for aged care services as the number and proportion of the population that is over 65 years is increasing.

Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows us that the majority of deaths in Australia, like other developed countries, are older people. Sixty-six per cent of deaths registered in Australia in 2017 were among people aged 75 or over (60% for males and 73% for females). The median age at death was 78 years for males and 85 years for females⁷. This indicates that the aged care workforce needs to recognise palliative care as part of the aged care environment⁸.

While the nature of the assessment and care planning will vary according to the type of aged care services involved, the aged care workforce need to ensure assessment and care planning process are sensitive to the end of life context. Health professionals working in aged care will need to be able to communicate about future changes and elicit the preferences of the person. They will need to recognise change and emerging palliative care needs as well as address and manage common symptoms and end of life concerns. Work with others in a team will be needed to provide individualised care and to ensure that there is appropriate care during dying and bereavement. Services and facilities will need to have governance processes that support training and education of staff about palliative care and end of life, that capture the person's preferences for care at the end of life, and that facilitate the person's voice to be heard in their care at the end of life.

Assessment and care planning is not just a standard in the Aged Care Quality Framework, it is a critical component of compassionate and comprehensive care for a person at the end of their life.

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