

ACCESS TO THE OUTDOORS

How can a person living with dementia be enabled to see and access the outdoors?

Research shows that being able to see and get out into nature can improve a person's health and wellbeing. For a person living with dementia, being able to look out to an attractive view can have all sorts of benefits: it can be stimulating, prompt conversation, help with orienting the person to the time of day and season, and also help with improving mood and sleep. An attractive outlook will also encourage movement towards the outdoor area. If a person does venture outside, they also need to be able to find their way back easily and sometimes quickly (e.g. for the toilet).

Unfortunately, in many residential care homes, outdoor areas have often become associated with risk. Doors to outside areas may remain locked. Staff are busy; outdoor time for residents is reduced or overlooked. It's important to remember that in Australia the Aged Care Quality Standards require that residential aged care organisations provide an environment that supports residents to move freely around their environment both inside and out (see Standard 5, Requirement 3b). In order for this to happen, outdoor areas need to be made as safe and as accessible as possible.



Enabling a person with dementia to look out to an appealing view and to access nature can make a vital contribution to their overall emotional, social and physical wellbeing.



What you can do now

- ☐ To begin, review residents' outdoor areas and plan for their improvement.
- ☐ Check all access points to these areas. Are the doors:
 - ☐ unlocked during the day?
 - ☐ easy to open by residents?
 - ☐ easy to see from inside and outside?
- ☐ Involve the whole care team in developing new ways to support residents to get outdoors.
- ☐ Check what you can see when looking outside from different locations. Try sitting in various chairs, or on the bed, or walking along the corridor.
- ☐ Remove or replace any mats at exit and entry points that may discourage movement by residents.
- ☐ Make sure the way to a toilet can be seen easily by residents when they are outside.



What you can plan for the future

- ☐ Before building or renovating outdoor spaces, consult a design professional with knowledge and experience in implementing the principles of dementia-friendly design.
- ☐ Plan outdoor areas that are safe, secure and easily accessible in all weather; this includes verandahs, courtyards and small sitting nooks.
- ☐ When designing or renovating outdoor spaces, aim for all residents to have access and views to the outdoors.
- ☐ Create an unobstructed walking route between inside and outside, without dead ends.
- ☐ Plan how staff can supervise residents who are using outdoor spaces (technology may be useful here).

Key Design Principles: Principle 1 Unobtrusively reduce risk, Principle 3 Allow people to see and be seen, Principle 5 Optimise helpful stimulation, Principle 6 Support movement and engagement <https://dta.com.au/resources/environmental-design-resources-introduction/>

Aged Care Quality Standards: Standard 5 Requirement (b) (ii) enables consumers to move freely, both indoors and outdoors. Standard 1 Requirement (d) Each consumer is supported to take risks to enable them to live the best life they can.

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Consult the DTA Environments team for advice and support in making your environment dementia friendly

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