



Home care and CHSP services: caring for older people in heatwaves

Home care service providers need to be aware of the risks of heatwaves, especially during the Australian summer. A heatwave is a period of unusual and uncomfortable hot weather that can affect human health, community infrastructures and services.

Older people who live alone without regular contact from others are more at risk of suffering from heat stress.

Heatwave checklist

This checklist serves as a guide to help you support older people before, during and after a heatwave. It is important that you train and support your staff to manage both the health of older people, and their own health, during heatwaves.

Before a heatwave

- Assess which older people are at risk and will need extra support. This will include where family and friends are not available.
- Include emergency management provisions in individual care plans.
- Encourage the older person or their families to check that the cooling systems are working efficiently and regularly serviced.
- Organise the older person's shopping. Check they have an adequate supply of their medication in their home and that all scripts are up-to-date.
- Create a register of local emergency services and store them in a readily accessible place.

During a heatwave

- Where possible, visit the older person's home on days of predicted heatwaves or contact their family or friends to check in.

- Encourage older people to keep windows, curtains and blinds closed to reduce heat, particularly for windows facing the sun during the day. If it is cooler outside, open the windows to allow fresh air inside.
- Offer extra lukewarm showers, sponging, cool wraps and packs, wet towels or foot baths to help older people to cool down.
- Review which room is the coolest at night. If appropriate and safe to do so, suggest the older person considers moving rooms for the night.
- Encourage older people to drink small amounts of fluid often to prevent dehydration. Older people can become dehydrated if they drink large amounts of fluid infrequently. Offer different forms of fluid. Discourage alcoholic and caffeinated drinks because they can cause dehydration.
- Encourage older people to drink cool, rather than cold water. This helps to regulate body temperature and reduce the risk of stomach cramps.
- Support older people to eat frequent small meals to provide nutrition as heat can lessen appetite. During a heatwave encourage an older person to avoid high protein food. Foods high in protein can increase body temperature as it is metabolised.
- Encourage older people to use sunscreen and wear a hat, sunglasses and loose clothing that covers skin when exposed to direct sunlight.
- Monitor physical signs of heat stress, such as nausea, red, pale or severely dry skin, and changes in urine colour. Darker urine can suggest dehydration.
- Recommend older people avoid going outside between 11 am and 3 pm. If an older person leaves the house during this time frame, encourage them to seek a cooled location. For example, the library, cinema or shopping centre.
- Arrange a clinical assessment if the older person shows any signs of health decline.

After a heatwave

- Support older people to rest. Heat can cause extreme tiredness.
- Help open the windows of an older person's home to release trapped hot air.
- Review emergency provisions and management plans. Where appropriate, apply changes to better support the older person during the next heatwave.

Clinical assessment

For concerns about an older person's wellbeing, contact their doctor immediately. You must organise a clinical assessment if an older person shows any signs of health decline. The effects of heat-related illnesses can range from a rash or cramps to severe confusion or heat stroke.

More heatwave information

For more information, visit state and territory health department websites.