Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Residents' Experience Survey
A guide for providers

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Section 1

Introduction

1. Introduction

The Residents' Experience Survey is an important initiative of the Australian Government to empower older people by inviting them to share their experiences and views about the quality of the care they receive in residential aged care.

The Government is committed to understanding the resident's perspective about what is working well and what areas need improving at their residential aged care home.

We acknowledge the work by providers and their staff and thank you for your ongoing commitment to a practice of continuous quality improvement.

Your ongoing support of the Residents' Experience Survey demonstrates this commitment to your residents.

This guide has been developed for residential aged care providers and staff to support your participation in the annual Residents' Experience Survey.

The guide will be periodically updated to ensure you have access to the latest information. We encourage you share this guide with your staff. You can download the guide on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the Department)'s website at health.gov.au/our-work/residents-experience-survey.

Section 2

What is the Residents' Experience Survey?

2. What is the Residents' Experience Survey?

2.1 Purpose

The experiences of older people living in residential aged care homes provide insights into the quality of the services they receive. The annual Residents' Experience Survey offers your residents an opportunity to share feedback on their care.

We use the survey feedback in a number of ways to encourage transparency, connection and a commitment to quality improvement in residential aged care. The survey also supports the rights-based approach of the *Aged Care Act 2024*.

A summary of the survey responses is shared with providers via a Residents' Experience Report, which is sent directly to each aged care home provider. We encourage you to discuss the report with your staff, residents, and the family members and carers.

The survey presents you with a valuable opportunity to understand how your residents feel about their care and to actively engage them in quality improvement planning.

The results are also used to calculate a home's Residents' Experience rating as part of Star Ratings. You can read more about Star Ratings in Section 6.

2.2 Background

The Residents' Experience Survey was introduced in response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, released in 2021. The survey addresses recommendation 94 of the Final Report – that greater weight should be attached to the experiences of people receiving aged care.

The survey has been conducted annually since 2022. At least 20 per cent of residents in each aged care home are surveyed in each round.

2.3 The independent survey team

We heard through consultation with older people, their families, and carers, that they feel most comfortable sharing feedback with a person independent of their aged care provider or the Government.

That's why we engage an independent third party HealthConsult, in consortium with Access Care Network Australia (ACNA), with a qualified survey team to deliver the annual survey on behalf of the Government.

The survey team visits each participating residential aged care home and completes the survey in person with each participating resident, allowing them to reflect on their lived experience at their residential aged care home. The survey is voluntary, and the survey team seeks informed consent from residents that have been randomly selected on the day. This process ensures participants are comfortable with proceeding with the survey, and the feedback collected is representative of all the residents at the home.

The survey team is qualified and experienced in:

- conducting surveys
- engaging with older people.

They have also undergone current:

- police checks
- Working with Vulnerable People checks
- COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations.

Each survey team member must complete a suite of training modules, including modules in privacy, dementia, diversity.

2.4 The survey questions

The survey consists of a set of 14 simple questions developed by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission with the help of La Trobe University's Lincoln Centre for Research on Ageing.

The questions include:

- 12 Likert-scale questions that require participants to choose their preferred response from a set of options ('always', 'most of the time', 'some of the time' or 'never')
- two open-response questions that enable participants to provide more detail about their experiences and views.

This allows both qualitative and quantitative analysis to be performed on the response data.

The 12 Likert-scale questions are:

1. Do staff treat you with respect?
2. Do you feel safe here?
3. Is this place well run?
4. Do you get the care you need?

5. Do staff know what they are doing?
6. Are you encouraged to do as much as possible for yourself?
7. Do staff explain things to you?
8. Do you like the food here?
9. Do staff follow up when you raise things with them?
10. Are staff kind and caring?
11. Do you have a say in your daily activities?
12. How likely are you to recommend this residential aged care home to someone?

The two open-response questions are:

13. What would you say is the best thing about this service?
14. What is one thing you would suggest as an improvement at this service?

2.5 Timing of the survey

The Residents' Experience Survey is conducted at aged care homes annually so that we can measure and monitor general resident satisfaction over time.

The survey team will contact each aged care home at least 4 weeks in advance to schedule a survey visit.

The survey itself takes between 10 to 30 minutes for each resident to complete.

The length of a survey visit at an aged care home depends on the number of surveys that need to be undertaken. This can vary from a few hours to 2 days. All efforts are made by the survey team to reduce any service disruption during the process.

2.6 How we use the survey results

We use residents' responses to inform the Residents' Experience Report for each participating aged care home. The report is sent to the provider-level primary point-of-contact and the approved residential care home point-of-contact listed on the Government Provider Management System (GPMS). We encourage providers and their staff to review the report and use it to inform discussions with their residents and their quality improvement activities.

The survey results are also used to calculate the Residents' Experience sub-category rating of an aged care home's Star Rating. You can find the Star Ratings for your service on the My Aged Care website at myagedcare.gov.au/find-a-provider.

More information about the Residents' Experience Report and Star Ratings for residential aged care can be found in Section 6 of this guide.

The Department also produces a sector-wide analysis of trends captured from the Residents' Experience Survey results. You can read the latest findings on the Department's website at health.gov.au/our-work/residents-experience-survey/findings.

Section 3

A guide to supporting resident participation

3. A guide to supporting resident participation

3.1 Engaging residents and seeking consent

The survey team visits your aged care home and conducts the survey in person with participating residents. Participants are randomly selected by the survey team to ensure all residents have a similar chance to participate and have their voices heard. Participation in the survey is voluntary.

On approaching a resident, the survey team member will introduce themselves, explain the purpose of the survey and answer any questions they may have. The resident will then be asked for their consent to participate in the survey.

Residents can request to have someone they trust, like a family member or a registered supporter, to sit with them or join by telephone.

A resident can change their mind after agreeing to participate in the survey. Residents can stop the survey and withdraw consent at any time before the survey is completed. Information already received will be deleted.

If a resident is unable to provide informed consent and does not have an active appointed decision-maker (as per section 28 of the *Aged Care Act 2024*) that is registered with My Aged Care, the survey will not proceed. The survey team member will thank the resident for their time and invite the next eligible resident to participate.

3.2 Maintaining resident privacy

To ensure the integrity of the survey and to respect participants' comfort and right to anonymity, it is important that workers (including aged care staff, contractors and volunteers) are not present when a survey is being conducted.

When approaching a resident about participating in the survey, the surveyor will invite them to speak in private where the conversation cannot be overheard.

Workers at the aged care home will not be told who is invited or takes part in the survey. Information collected from the survey will be de-identified, kept strictly confidential, and securely stored.

3.3 Reporting incidents during surveys

It is the responsibility of the provider to have an incident management system in place and notify the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission if an incident reportable under the Serious Incident Response Scheme occurs.

When the survey team visits an aged care home, they will notify the aged care home management team if they witness or are notified of an alleged incident that involves a resident. The survey team will:

- encourage the resident to report the incident to the manager and/or clinical manager of the aged care home
- provide the resident with information on the Aged Care Advocacy Line and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and encourage them to seek support
- notify the manager and/or clinical manager of the aged care home of the alleged incident, so they can report the incident as per their obligations.

If the survey team perceives the aged care home's response to the alleged incident is insufficient, the survey team may report the incident to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission as a matter of concern.

3.4 Enabling resident participation

Promoting the survey date

Ahead of the scheduled visit, the survey team will provide a hard copy pack of posters and booklets to promote the survey date. To support the success of the survey visit, we ask you to display the posters and distribute booklets to residents and their families.

Translations and aids

The survey approach has been developed to ensure it is inclusive and sensitive to the needs of residents. The survey team is trained and qualified to engage with older people from diverse backgrounds in an appropriate manner. Where needed, language interpreters are engaged to assist the resident. Residents can also have a trusted person, such as a family member, friend or registered supporter, present to assist them in completing the survey.

Visual images such as smiley and frowning faces may be used to assist residents to complete the survey. The survey team member may also present the questions in written form to help the resident.

Residents can participate in the survey in multiple sittings. The residents or the survey team member can stop the survey at any time to allow the resident to rest

before continuing answering the remaining questions later that same day, as long as consent is not revoked.

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents

The survey team can offer several options to encourage greater participation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, including:

- offering group discussions to support a community approach to the questions
- asking the aged care home to organise a known Elder to support the surveys
- completing the survey in paper format to avoid any privacy concerns.

At the time of scheduling the survey, aged care homes with a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents (for example, when three or more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents might be expected to be surveyed) will be presented with these options to decide on the best method for their residents.

Cognitive impairment

In developing the Residents' Experience Survey process, we consulted a range of dementia experts and advocates. They confirmed the importance of older people with cognitive impairment having the opportunity to provide feedback to shape the care they receive.

The survey team is trained to work with older people with cognitive impairment and to determine if a person can meaningfully engage in the survey process. The survey methodology is also designed to support the needs of residents with cognitive impairment. For example, there is the option for the surveyor to return later in the day if a resident has not been able to complete the whole survey in a single sitting.

If a person is unable to participate (for example, if they are at an advanced stage of illness) then the survey team may seek a proxy to complete the survey on their behalf.

Proxies

While the primary aim of the survey is to gather feedback directly from residents, there are instances where they may be unable to take part in the survey. In this case, the survey may be completed by a proxy.

Proxy surveys are only sought from an active appointed decision-maker (as per section 28 of the *Aged Care Act 2024*) that is registered with My Aged Care (also referred to as a Supporter Guardian). The appointed decision-maker will require an active decision-making authority that extends to personal and care matters.

Prior to being surveyed as a proxy, the survey team member will introduce themself and ask if they are willing to participate in the survey on behalf of the resident. The active appointed decision-maker can decline to participate. To maintain resident anonymity, the survey team will not request appointed decision-maker details from the provider.

Section 4

A guide for aged care home teams

4. A guide for aged care home teams

4.1 Participation requirements

It is voluntary for your aged care home to participate in the Residents' Experience Survey.

If an aged care home declines to participate or does not facilitate the survey team's access to undertake the survey, the home will not be invited to participate in the survey until the following year.

4.2 Provider exemptions

Unable to participate

We may grant an exemption to an aged care home when non-participation in the survey is outside of your control, for example, when non-participation is due to an outbreak of COVID-19 or other infectious illness, or a natural disaster.

This means your aged care home will not receive a Star Ratings Residents' Experience rating.

When your aged care home's Star Ratings are updated on the My Aged Care website, you will only have a rating published against the other 3 subcategories as appropriate. Your aged care home will not receive an Overall Star Rating due to the absence of the Residents' Experience rating.

New aged care home

Aged care homes that have been operating for less than 12 months are automatically exempt from participating in the annual Residents' Experience Survey and from publication of Star Ratings.

A new aged care home that has been operating for less than 12 months can volunteer to participate in the survey if:

- at least 5 permanent residents have been living in the aged care home for at least 6 weeks, and
- the home has been in operation for at least 3 months.

Once the Residents' Experience Survey has been conducted, the Residents' Experience rating will be calculated and published as part of a subsequent update to Star Ratings.

Offline services

If an aged care home's status changes from offline to operational, the Department will assess whether the home's previous Residents' Experience rating is less than 12 months old and can be published on the My Aged Care website. If the survey data is more than 12 months old, the home will be invited to participate in the current survey round (or the next survey round if the visit is unable to be scheduled by the survey team).

No withdrawal of consent after participation

Participation in the Residents' Experience Survey is voluntary for both aged care homes and residents. However, an aged care home is unable to withdraw consent after the survey has been completed.

This is because withdrawing participation after residents have completed the survey unjustly takes away the resident's opportunity to share their lived experience as consented and agreed.

4.3 The survey process

The survey process has been made as simple as possible to minimise impact on your staff. Before the Residents' Experience Survey begins, the survey team will send all aged care homes an information pack containing a poster and a resident booklet to distribute within your home. This information pack is to help your residents, their families and carers to understand the purpose of the survey.

Each year, the survey team will contact aged care homes in advance to schedule a visit, confirm resident information via a checklist, and give you an opportunity to ask any questions that you may have. On the day of the scheduled visit, the aged care homes will need to provide an updated resident list to ensure the survey team has the most up to date information about all residents.

Aged care homes might be asked to assist the survey team in gaining access to the site and navigating around the premises. Workers are not required to chaperone the survey team and are not to be present during the survey interviews, to maintain resident confidentiality.

4.4 Scheduling the survey

The survey team will contact aged care homes to schedule the survey at least four weeks in advance of a visit. The aged care home is advised of the survey's purpose and is given the opportunity to provide insights on the status of each resident, including identifying residents who may require additional support to participate. This information allows the survey team to arrange alternative communication supports in advance, for example ensuring an interpreter can be present for residents who speak

a language other than English, or aids to assist residents who may be deaf, vision-impaired, or non-verbal.

Cancelling a scheduled visit

An aged care home can cancel a scheduled visit if there is a genuine emergency or unforeseen event that would restrict the ability of the survey team to visit the home and conduct the survey. However, the home is responsible for rescheduling the visit, noting that non-participation may impact the home's Star Rating.

The visit needs to be rescheduled to occur before the end of the survey period. This period is communicated to all aged care homes at the start of the survey round.

4.5 On the day of the survey

The survey team will arrive at your aged care home early on the morning of the scheduled visit.

We request that you offer them an appropriate area to base themselves, such as a meeting room. The survey team will request a resident list, along with a map of your home, to support the randomised selection of residents to survey (see section 5.2).

The survey team will also request the advice of an appropriate staff member (manager, clinical nurse, etc) to identify any residents that are not eligible to participate in the survey (see section 5.1). In addition, the survey team will seek assistance in identifying residents who may have behaviours that could impact the interaction between the survey team and resident.

To maintain residents' privacy during the survey, we ask that aged care workers not be present while the survey interviews are being conducted with the residents.

The survey team members will follow this process to initiate the survey interviews:

- knock on the resident's door, or approach the resident in a common area, and introduce themselves
- explain the purpose of the survey
- invite the resident to participate and seek a private setting as needed
- ask for the resident's verbal consent
- ask the resident if they require assistance such as a support person or language interpreter.

The survey team member will use a tablet or similar, to share the questions and document the answers from each participant.

Each survey interview will take approximately 10 to 30 minutes to complete.

Participation is voluntary so participants can stop at any time throughout the process.

Once all the survey interviews have been completed, the aged care home will receive an invitation to participate in an online survey to share their experiences of the Residents' Experience Survey. All responses are anonymous and will be used for quality improvement of the survey processes.

Section 5

How participants are chosen

5. How participants are chosen

5.1 Sampling

A random sampling methodology is used to select the residents who are invited to participate in the Residents' Experience Survey. At least 20 per cent of residents at each participating aged care home are surveyed. The survey rate varies depending on the size of the home to ensure enough residents are surveyed to give statistically meaningful results, and to ensure resident anonymity.

The sampling methodology is also designed to ensure the survey sufficiently captures the views of residents with diverse backgrounds. This includes:

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons, including those from stolen generations
- veterans or war widows
- people from culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- people who are financially or socially disadvantaged
- people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness
- parents and children who are separated by forced adoption or removal
- care - leavers, including Forgotten Australians and former child migrants placed in out of home care
- people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/transgender or intersex or other sexual orientations or are gender diverse or bodily diverse
- people who live in rural, remote or very remote areas.

For each home, 40 per cent of the sample will be randomly selected from the population of residents with diverse backgrounds, where these can be identified.

The remaining 60 per cent will be randomly selected from the population of residents not identified as having a diverse background.

Participating residents

Permanent residents who have been residing in the aged care home for at least six weeks are eligible to participate in the survey. This timeframe ensures that residents participating in the survey have spent enough time in the home to meaningfully comment on their experience.

Exclusions

The following exclusion criteria applies for residents:

- on leave
- living at the aged care home temporarily receiving respite

- who are in active palliative care
- who are no longer a resident due to being deceased, discharged, or relocated to a different home.

5.2 Randomisation approach

The survey team use a digital randomisation tool to select residents to participate in the survey. On the day of the survey, the surveyor will input data from the resident list and the map of the home into the randomisation tool. The tool creates a sequence of room numbers across wings. The surveyor will follow the sequence of rooms to conduct the survey interviews until they meet the home's survey target.

This tool randomly selects residents to meet the minimum participation target (refer to section 5.3).

5.3 Participation targets

Participation targets are based on the total resident number at each aged care home, to ensure that the survey outcomes are both representative and unidentifiable.

The methodology requires no less than 20 per cent of residents being surveyed at each aged care home. Where there are fewer than 12 residents in the aged care home, all residents will be invited to participate.

Where the participation target at an aged care home is not met, a follow-up visit is scheduled to survey additional residents to meet the target.

Where all residents have been approached and the target is still not met, the survey is considered finalised. To reduce the risk of identification, a Residents' Experience Report is only provided to aged care homes where a minimum of four residents have completed the survey. We will either provide an exemption or will partially publish the aged care home's Residents' Experience rating (see section 6.2).

The participation table below shows the survey targets based on the number of residents living in the home:

0 – 11	12 – 39	40 – 59	60 – 70	71 or more
All residents	12 residents	13 residents	14 residents	20% of the total number of residents

Section 6

Understanding the survey results

6. Understanding the survey results

The Residents' Experience Survey is conducted annually. This allows aged care homes time to review the survey results and implement changes over time to improve the quality of care they deliver.

6.1 Residents' Experience Reports

The de-identified survey responses are combined and summarised into a Residents' Experience Report and sent to the provider to share with the aged care home. The report is provided within six weeks of the survey being finalised.

From 2027, the Residents' Experience Reports will include findings from the two open-ended survey questions (Questions 13 and 14). These questions give residents an opportunity to share their experiences in their own words and provide additional context to their survey responses. The main themes and definitions which will be reported are:

- Activities & engagement
- Atmosphere & community
- Building, room & amenities
- Cleanliness, laundry & maintenance
- Clinical & personal care
- Communication with residents & families
- Cultural & spiritual needs
- Food: dietary & cultural needs
- Food: general
- Food: meal service & dining
- Food: quality & temperature
- Food: variety & choice
- Independence, choice
- Location
- Management & leadership
- No concerns / general satisfaction
- Other
- Privacy & personal space
- Safety & security
- Staff kindness & attitude
- Staff training & skills
- Staffing levels & responsiveness

Government Provider Management System

Residents' Experience Reports are sent directly to provider and home contacts listed in GPMS. The following GPMS fields are used to identify these contacts:

- Provider primary point-of-contact
- Approved residential care home point-of-contact

Aged care homes are encouraged to make sure their contact information in GPMS is current, so the Residents' Experience Report is sent to the right contact.

You can access GPMS through the platform at provider.health.gov.au. If you need help, please call the My Aged Care Service Industry, Provider and Assessor Helpline **via phone on 1800 836 799** for help. It is open Monday to Friday (8am to 8pm) and Saturday (10am to 2pm) local time across Australia.

There are resources available to help you with the GPMS system on the Department's website at health.gov.au/resources/collections/government-provider-management-system-resources.

6.2 Star Ratings for residential aged care – the Residents' Experience rating

Star Ratings provide a nationally consistent benchmark to monitor, compare and improve residential aged care. It makes it easier for older people, their families and carers to compare the quality and safety of aged care homes and make informed choices about their care.

All aged care homes receive an Overall Star Rating between 1 and 5 stars as well as a rating across four sub-categories:

- **Residents' Experience** – based on the results of the annual Residents' Experience Survey.
- **Compliance** – based on compliance information from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and the Department (as the System Governor).
- **Staffing** – based on the amount of care per resident being provided by nursing and personal care staff.
- **Quality Measures** – based on information on the quality and safety of care across five key areas of care, including pressure injuries, restrictive practices, unplanned weight loss, falls and major injury, and medication management.

Residents' Experience is the heaviest weighted sub-category, accounting for 33 per cent of the Overall Star Rating. This reflects the value placed on the experiences and views of residents in measuring quality of care. You can learn more about Star Ratings at health.gov.au/our-work/star-ratings-for-residential-aged-care.

Publication

An aged care home's survey results and Residents' Experience rating are updated on the 'Find a provider' pages on the My Aged Care website following the completion of the survey.

Where only a small number of residents at a home have taken part in the survey we apply the following publication thresholds to reduce the risk of resident identification:

- **Full publication:** An aged care home's Residents' Experience rating and the responses to individual survey questions will be published on the My Aged Care website where a minimum of four residents have completed the survey.
- **Partial publication**: An aged care home's Residents' Experience rating, but not the responses to the 12 individual questions, will be published where 3 residents have completed the survey.
- **No Publication**: neither the Residents' Experience rating nor the responses to the individual survey questions will be published where fewer than 3 residents have completed the survey.

6.3 Sharing your results with residents, staff and families

The Residents' Experience Report provides insights into how residents experience care and services at your aged care home. Sharing and discussing the results can help ensure resident feedback is understood, valued and used to support ongoing quality improvement.

Survey results should be considered alongside other sources of feedback and quality information.

Sharing survey results and responding to resident feedback supports person-centred care, continuous improvement and consumer engagement under the Aged Care Quality Standards.

The Star Ratings Improvement Manual provides guidance on how to identify opportunities to improve the experience of residents. This guide is available on the Department's website at health.gov.au/resources/publications/star-ratings-improvement-manual.

Providers can share key findings and planned actions through their usual communication channels and involve residents, families and staff in improvement activities.

Sharing results and communicating planned actions helps to "close the feedback loop" by showing residents how their feedback has influenced decisions and improvements. This can encourage ongoing participation, strengthen trust and support a culture of transparency and continuous improvement.

6.4 Reviewing your results

Aged care homes are unable to dispute the Residents' Experience Survey results as these are driven by the responses provided by their residents.

If you believe that there is a mistake with the survey results, you are encouraged to contact the Department at ACRES@Health.gov.au.

6.5 Feedback

We encourage you to share your thoughts on the Residents' Experience Survey process.

To support continuous improvement, the independent survey provider will request your feedback via an online survey that will seek detail on what is working well and what we can improve. The online survey can be accessed via a QR code that will be provided on the day of the survey at your home.

If you have any concerns about how the Residents' Experience Survey is conducted, you are encouraged to contact the Department directly. Find more information at health.gov.au/our-work/residents-experience-survey.



Visit **health.gov.au/our-work/residents-experience-survey**