



# Informed consent: what families need to know

about antipsychotics and  
benzodiazepines in residential aged care.

**People with dementia often have changes in their behaviour. They can be aggressive, shout, wander, change their sleep pattern or seem anxious. These changed behaviours can come and go. This is common, but it can be upsetting for you and your loved one.**

It's important to respond to your loved one's behaviours in the way that works best for them. This is called person-centred care, and you should expect your loved one to receive it in residential aged care.



## Behavioural strategies come first

Most behaviours can be safely supported without medication. Staff can try simple things like asking the person what they want, physical activity, reassurance, music therapy, or something else your loved one enjoys.

**You can help by telling staff about your loved one as a person – their personality, history, likes and dislikes. Remember to update staff if things change. This helps staff understand what might trigger the behaviour and how to give person-centred support.**



## Prescribers need informed consent

Sometimes medication can help. The prescriber (a doctor, specialist or nurse practitioner) might prescribe your loved one medicines called antipsychotics or benzodiazepines.

Before they can do this, the residential care service must have tried person-centred behavioural strategies. They also need to keep using these strategies even if your loved one is taking medication.

The prescriber also needs informed consent from your loved one, or from you if you are their decision maker. Informed consent means being given clear information about the available choices, in a way that you can understand, so you can make the right decisions about your loved one's care.

**Questions you can ask to make sure you have all the information you need:**

- **What is the medicine?**
- **Why are you suggesting this? What happened?**
- **What person-centred behavioural strategies have been tried?**
- **How effective is the medicine? What are the risks and side effects?**
- **What are the other options? What are the benefits, risks and side effects of these options?**
- **What would happen if they don't take it?**
- **How long will the medicine be needed for? When will it be reviewed? Who will review it?**
- **What happens if they have a reaction to the medicine?**
- **What are the options if I don't consent?**
- **Can I have some time to discuss with the family before I decide?**



## Need more information?

**Dementia Australia** ([www.dementia.org.au](http://www.dementia.org.au)) has lots of short, practical help sheets and other resources about people with dementia, in more than 40 languages.

**Dementia Support Australia** has experts who can help with changed behaviours – call 1800 699 799 (24 hours).

The **Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission** has more information about psychotropic medications used in Australia. Go to [www.agedcarequality.gov.au/resource-library](http://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/resource-library) and search for 'medication'.