

COVID-19

Planning for disruption to help at home

This document is current as at 31.03.2020 and will be updated if there are significant changes to its content.

Please note: This document should not replace other information available from State or Commonwealth Governments but aims to provide some useful information specifically relevant to people who usually require help at home. We encourage you to review further general information about COVID-19 in Australia at this website <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>

It is wise to make a plan for what you will do if your usual level of support is reduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, even if you don't end up needing it. Being able to stay safe and well at home and avoid hospitals is encouraged, to reduce your risk of exposure to the virus.

If you become unwell and need medical care your usual GP and hospital services may still be able to help and they may use other options such as phone or video consults. They will be very busy as a result of the pandemic.

In an emergency, you can call an ambulance.

Why could help at home be reduced?

- Your helpers may be required to self-isolate or quarantine.
- You may be required to self-isolate or quarantine.
- Your helpers may need to care for their own children or family members who are sick.
- There may also be a normal level of staff sickness from the usual cold and flu season.

How could you manage safely with less support at home?

What do you need?

Think about what help and services are **essential** to keep you **safe and healthy**. This will not be the same for everyone. Consider:

- bladder management
- bowel management
- medication management
- respiratory management
- getting in and out of bed, or preparation to stay in bed
- pressure relief and wound care
- basic personal hygiene
- access to food and water
- access to a phone or emergency call system
- reliable internet and telehealth / video call options
- someone to help ensure bills for vital services are paid.

V1.0 Effective: April 2020 Review: June 2020

What could you change or do without?

- Think about services that could be reduced or replaced such as community or social outings. You may be able to get groceries home delivered or dropped off.
- What appointments or therapies can be changed to telephone or video calls?
- Could you safely consolidate shifts e.g. combine two shifts into one? Think about the impact this has on you. If it means spending longer in your bed or chair, consider how you will prevent pressure injuries.
- If you have a two-person care routine, are there any ways that this can be safely done with one person? Raise this with your service providers. Can a family member or informal helper be trained to assist as the second person?
- Could you access medication, food and drink independently if it was set up for you? For example, a water bottle, particular cup, leaving snacks that you can manipulate out on a bench, ready meals, adapted cutlery, or putting food or medications into containers you can open yourself?
- Consider ways that someone could assist you from a distance or remotely, such as having a helper pick up a bag of laundry left at the door and return it there, asking someone to assist with your banking or other admin tasks remotely, or doing some tasks outside and from a distance if possible.

Planning for different helpers

- Talk to your service providers to ask about their COVID-19 planning:
 - Can they provide backup staff if your regular helpers can't attend?
 - What training will these helpers have and how can they be quickly upskilled for your needs?
 - Can any of your helpers do 24hr/extended lock down if needed?
- Talk to your funding body such as NDIS, NISSQ, or My Aged Care:
 - Can they connect you with other service provider agencies if needed?
- If you employ your helpers directly, how many do you have? Do you need to recruit additional staff?
- What informal help is available to you?
 - Do you have family, friends, neighbours or community members that can assist you with the essentials? Do they need training?
 - Talk to your funding body about whether there is the option for family members or friends to be paid for work they provide if your formal helpers are unavailable.

The [Queenslanders with a Disability Network](#) (QDN) has some useful resources to help you make a plan. Find them [here](#).

Training new helpers

- Make a clear "How to meet my critical needs list" that a new, possibly untrained worker could follow. Have this in a hard copy and electronic copy. This might include:
 - short videos on your own phone or tablet of some of the key parts of your care routine
 - written information or pictures of how to assist with your essential care needs such as rolling, transferring, positioning in a chair or setting up equipment
 - a list of medications and their timing
 - important contact phone numbers and emails.
- Disability Services Consulting has a [tool](#) that might help you to think about your needs.

Have a plan for to make sure your helpers take infection control seriously

We know that people who need hands-on personal care cannot practice social distancing during these tasks. Some strategies might include:

- a phone call, text or email ahead of time to ask new helpers to wash their hands properly when they enter, to cough into their elbow, and to use social distancing for tasks that allow it
- a handwashing sign on the door
- an outside washing station
- having a supply of soap, clean towels, gloves and hand sanitiser (but don't stockpile)
- asking helpers if they have completed the Australian Governments' COVID-19 free training module <https://covid-19training.com.au/index.php> .

Do you regularly use medications, health supplies or consumables?

It is wise to have an adequate supply of your usual medications and health supplies or consumables available in case you have a period of self isolation but avoid stockpiling.

Think about the examples below but they won't be the same for everyone:

- Medication
- Continence supplies such as catheters and leg bags
- Respiratory supplies such as suction catheters and tracheostomy tubes
- Wound care items such as dressings

Talk to your health professional, service provider or supplier about your needs and any supply issues.

Can equipment, assistive technology and consumables help you?

Think about whether you can source equipment or assistive technology to assist you to stay safe and healthy at home with a reduction in support workers. Ask your funding body if they can help. For NDIS participants, ask if they can make funding available in your core budget or if they can change your management option to self-managed to make funding available to you easily. Some ideas might include:

- pressure relieving mattress or cushion to accommodate longer periods of time in bed or chair, or other items to protect your skin such as heel protectors
- hiring an electric bed to assist with turning or skin care if spending longer in bed
- manual handling equipment such as slide boards, slide sheets and hoists
- emergency call systems or smart technology
- over bed tables to allow you to access essential items from bed such as phone, remote controls, food and water
- alternative continence aids
- alternative wound dressings.

Should I go to the Hospital Emergency Department because I don't have enough helpers available to meet my essential needs?

You can, but this should be the last resort after you have exhausted all the options in your plan.

What else can I do?

- Find the latest information about COVID-19 recommendations from reputable sites like the Queensland and Australian Government health sites. (see below).
- Try to eat well, stay active and get enough sleep.
- Look after your mental health. Here are some resources that may be helpful.

Lifeline

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

Beyond Blue

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

Who can I contact for help?

Queensland Health <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/>

QLD Government Community Recovery Hotline for people who are self-quarantined and cannot access essential food and medication

1800 173 349

<https://www.qld.gov.au/community/disasters-emergencies/queensland-disasters/novel-coronavirus-covid-19>

13 HEALTH

13 43 25 84

National Coronavirus helpline

1800 020 080

NDIS

1800 800 110

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/news/4659-new-measures-support-ndis-participants-and-providers-through-covid-19>

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/ndis-and-other-government-services/ndis-and-disaster-response>

NIISQ

1300 607 566

<https://niis.qld.gov.au/>

My Aged Care

1800 200 422

<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/>

Australian Department of Health

<https://www.health.gov.au/>