This leaflet is part of a series written by nurses, doctors and experts with experience in aged care. The series aims to make your journey into residential aged care easier. Look for other leaflets on questions to ask about specific care needs. These can be downloaded at: www.10questions.org.au

You may find these leaflets useful when:
- Searching for a high quality residential aged care facility
- Reviewing the quality of your current residential aged care facility
- Deciding between two residential aged care facilities that appear similar.

By law, residential aged care facilities are not required to have registered nurses so it’s important to ask the right questions if you need nursing care.

Many staff wear similar uniforms. Just because someone looks like a nurse does not mean they are. Here are the differences:

A Registered Nurse (RN) has undertaken a minimum three-year Bachelor of Nursing course. They can undertake nursing procedures, manage pain medication and help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions.

An Enrolled Nurse (EN) works under the direction of an RN. Both are registered by a regulatory body. Registration ensures professional standards are maintained and protects the public.

Assistants in Nursing (AIN)/Care Workers/Care Service Employees (CSE) are unlicensed. They provide most of the care in residential facilities and community but their level of training is variable.

It’s your right to ask

The best way to find a residential aged care facility that suits you is to visit a few.

To find your local ones, or for more information about aged care services contact

My Aged Care
1800 200 422
myagedcare.gov.au

This leaflet has been developed and endorsed by:

For a full list of supporting organisations please visit
www.10questions.org.au

If you have concerns about a residential aged care facility contact:
1800 951 822
www.agedcarequality.gov.au
Palliative care provides the best quality of life when someone has an illness that’s likely to cause death within the foreseeable future. This may vary from a few days to years. For many residents, the staff in the aged care facility will be able to provide the care needed. Others will need specialist palliative care involvement. The following questions will help you find out whether the facility can manage your changing needs in the final stage of your life.

1. **Are you able to provide a palliative approach to care in the facility?**
   A palliative approach aims to maximise your quality of life in the facility. It focuses on your comfort and wishes, taking into account your health condition. It may mean that some possible treatments that do not enhance or support your quality of life are declined.

2. **Do I need an advance care plan?**
   It’s not compulsory but a written advance care plan can tell the staff about your wishes, values and any treatments you do or do not want. This is particularly useful in an emergency or should you be unable to communicate them yourself as your needs change. Ideally this would be decided with you on admission.

3. **What palliative care training do staff receive?**
   Knowledge and experience may vary depending on whether a staff member is a care worker or an experienced Registered Nurse and the length of time they have worked in the field. Ideally all staff should be trained in palliative care when they are first employed and then given regular updates.

4. **How will staff recognise when I’m close to dying and what processes are in place for this?**
   Your health may deteriorate suddenly or so gradually that it can be hard for staff to recognise. Ask if the staff have the skills to notice changes and respond appropriately. Check what arrangements are in place to respond to changes as they are noticed.

5. **What support will there be for my loved ones when I’m close to dying?**
   Ask how your loved ones will be told about your changing condition and whether they can stay overnight if you need them. Check if there are restrictions on visiting times.

6. **What arrangements are in place for my spiritual and cultural needs?**
   Ask how you’ll get support for your spiritual, religious, psychological, social and family needs. If you need a pastoral care worker or other outside support people to visit, ask how this will be arranged. If you are from a particular cultural group make sure there are arrangements for your cultural needs to be met.

7. **Will I be able to have specialist palliative care if I need it?**
   Palliative care specialists can help if your problems become more complex, and they can also support your family. They carefully check everything that is affecting you but do not take over day to day care. They provide expert advice and guidance to your GP and the staff so they can continue caring for you. Ask whether the staff will be able to tell when you need a palliative care specialist, and how a visit will be arranged.

8. **Will I get the medicines I need if things change suddenly, and how long will it take?**
   If your health changes suddenly your medication may need to be adjusted. Ask how quickly this can happen, especially out of hours and on weekends. Not all aged care facilities have medical and nursing staff on site at all times.

9. **How many staff are present on evening and night duty?**
   Ask how many care workers are present on each shift and how many residents they look after. Also ask if there are registered nurses present at all times to provide clinical assessment and ‘as required’ medications.

10. **If I need equipment to help with my comfort or problems, will the facility provide it?**
    Ask how equipment, such as a pressure relieving mattress or a device for medication, will be arranged if needed. Not all specialist equipment may be included in your basic fees, so check what additional costs will be payable by you.