

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](http://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.

It's important there are enough registered nurses within the staff skill mix to meet everyone's needs. You should ask questions about how your individual care needs will be met.

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)** work under the supervision and direction of nurses and provide most of the care in residential aged care facilities and community. Their level of training and roles vary.

## 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](http://myagedcare.gov.au)

This leaflet has been developed and endorsed by:



For a full list of supporting organisations please visit  
[www.10questions.org.au](http://www.10questions.org.au)

If you have concerns about a residential aged care facility contact:

☎ 1800 951 822



**Australian Government**  
Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission

[www.agedcarequality.gov.au](http://www.agedcarequality.gov.au)

# 10 Questions to Ask

## ABOUT STAFFING IN RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE



[www.10questions.org.au](http://www.10questions.org.au)

1

**Is there a Director of Nursing?**

A director of nursing (however titled) is a registered nurse (RN) who provides clinical leadership for the home. A generic manager who is not also a nurse does not necessarily have the skills and expertise to manage a clinical team and assess the complex health needs of residents.

2

**Are RNs employed on site at all times?**

Most people needing residential aged care have high care needs. By law, there should be at least one RN on site at all times unless there is an approved exemption in place.

3

**Do you currently have an approved exemption to the requirement to provide at least one RN on site at all times?**

The law allows some places to apply for an exemption to the requirement to have an RN on site. There are certain conditions, including a time limit that must be complied with. It's important to know if one is in place because it may mean you won't have access to nursing care 24/7. If there is an exemption you should ask why, and how long it will be in place for.

4

**How many nurses are employed on each shift?**

You should know how many RNs, enrolled nurses (EN) and assistants in nursing (AINs) are employed on each shift including overnight and weekends. Research shows that health outcomes improve, and hospitalisation is reduced when higher numbers of RNs are available to supervise and deliver care.

5

**Are ENs included within your staffing skill mix?**

ENs help support RNs to deliver nursing care. They are licensed health professionals who work under the supervision of an RN. Only RNs and ENs can provide nursing care.

6

**What is your overall star rating and for the staffing component?**

Each place is given a star rating from the federal government of one to five stars<sup>^</sup> which takes into consideration how many direct care minutes staff provide to each resident. An overall three-star rating suggests the home is satisfactory but does not necessarily mean minimum direct care minutes requirements are being achieved. Ideally, you should choose a place that is consistently achieving a four, or five-star rating and always check the staffing component of the rating.

7

**Will my medications be administered by a nurse?**

An RN, or EN working under the supervision of an RN are the most appropriate staff member to manage and administer medication because of their level of training. AINs may assist you to self-administer your medications if you have been assessed as safe to do this. Some places allow AINs to manage and administer medicines, including dangerous drugs of addiction which is against government-set best practice guidance\*, so it's important to check.

\*<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/guiding-principles-for-medication-management-in-residential-aged-care-facilities?language=en>

8

**What minimum training do the AINs/care workers/care service employees have and do they only provide direct care?**

AINs (care service employee/care workers) provide most of the direct care to residents. Some places use AINs to undertake additional roles like housekeeping (sometimes called homemakers) but it's important they focus on direct care. Always consider this against the direct care minutes reported in the star rating (staffing section) to check the funding allocated for direct care is used to provide direct care. Their level of training is determined by the home's operator so check what basic training they receive.

9

**Will I be cared for by the same staff each day?**

It's important staff get to know your individual needs and preferences and that you receive continuity of care. High staff turnover may indicate there are problems and staff are unhappy, so check how long existing staff have working there and if there's frequent turnover of staff.

10

**Are there any plans to change the staffing arrangements in future?**

The current staffing arrangements might not be the same in future. Ask if there are any plans to reduce or increase staffing. Make sure your contract specifies the level of staffing that will be provided and whether this meets your needs.

<sup>^</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/star-ratings-for-residential-aged-care>