

THE C.A.R.E.

FRAMEWORK

by THE TURNING TIDES PROJECT

A **PRACTICAL GUIDE**
TO VISITING AND
CHOOSING AGED CARE
For A Loved One

BE **PREPARED** STAY **EMPOWERED**

THE C.A.R.E. FRAMEWORK

by THE TURNING TIDES PROJECT

POSITION STATEMENT

The C.A.R.E. Framework by The Turning Tides Project is a practical, easy-to-use guide designed to help families assess, compare, and choose a residential aged care home for someone they love.

Created from more than 20 years of lived caregiving experience, including navigating and evaluating multiple residential care facilities for family members.

This guide is designed to support real-world visits, reduce overwhelm, and bring structure to one of the most significant caregiving decisions you may face.

VALUE STATEMENT

It helps you look beyond brochures and polished presentations, ask the questions that truly matter, and gather the information you need to make a considered decision.

It is built around **The C.A.R.E. Framework:**

Culture - the tone of the home and how respect is demonstrated in everyday interactions.

Awareness – how individual needs, behaviours, changes, and vulnerabilities are recognised and responded to consistently

Responsiveness - how clearly questions, concerns, and changes in health are handled.

Environment - the safety, atmosphere, and physical setting where daily life unfolds.

Together, these four pillars provide a clear lens for visiting and comparing facilities, so your final choice is grounded in what you have genuinely seen, heard, and experienced.

Thank you

Thank you for choosing **The C.A.R.E. Framework** by The Turning Tides Project.

This resource was created to bring structure, clarity, and practical guidance to one of the most significant decisions you may face.

Choosing residential aged care is rarely simple. Having a clear process helps you move forward with confidence rather than uncertainty.

The purpose of this framework is straightforward:

- To help you observe carefully.
- To ask informed questions.
- To compare options thoughtfully.
- To make a decision grounded in what truly matters.

While the focus of this guide is your loved one's care, clarity also protects you. When you understand how a facility operates, what is included, and how decisions are made, you reduce surprises and strengthen your position as an informed advocate.

No framework can remove every unknown. But it can help you approach this stage with clarity and perspective.

Thank you for allowing The Turning Tides Project to support you during this process.

Warmly

JD

Founder

The Turning Tides Project

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A Note From The Author

I have helped choose residential aged care for three people I love. Each time, the circumstances were different.

In 2018, my father-in-law was living at home while managing Alzheimer's disease when he suffered a stroke and was rushed to hospital. During his hospital stay, it became clear that the stroke had accelerated his cognitive decline. At that point, the family recognised that caring for him at home was no longer manageable. The hospital team agreed with this assessment. It was decided he would move directly from hospital into residential aged care, to a home with a specialised dementia unit. This was an incredibly stressful and emotional time.

In 2019, my mum could no longer remain safely at home. She did not want to move into an aged care home and was understandably upset when the decision was ultimately taken out of her hands. However, a decline in her health, combined with several significant falls, meant it was no longer safe for her to live at home alone. The move came from necessity, not readiness.

In 2024, my mother-in-law's situation unfolded differently. After a serious accident, it became clear that remaining at home was no longer viable. With support and guidance from family, she made the decision to move into care herself. Even with choice and involvement, the transition was still emotional and confronting.

Each situation was different. None of them were easy. Yet each required the same difficult task - finding the right place for someone we loved.

We spoke with brokers, read brochures, reviewed websites, and visited multiple facilities.

A Note From The Author

What I learned is this:

What is presented and what is experienced do not always align. Information matters, but what you see, hear, and notice during a visit matters just as much.

This guide is not about approaching facilities with suspicion. It is about approaching them with clarity.

I created this document when I began visiting aged care facilities. It gave me structure during visits and helped me focus on what really mattered.

This guide is that same document, refined so it can support others facing the same decision.

It will not remove the emotion from the decision, but it will help you approach it with clarity. And when the decision is made, that clarity matters.

JD Brimblecombe

Founder

The Turning Tides Project

Section 1

*A Reality Worth
Acknowledging*

Before you begin comparing facilities, it is important to acknowledge something that often goes unspoken.

Most people entering residential aged care are leaving behind a lifetime. They are not simply moving house.

They are leaving a family home built decades ago, a place where children were raised and daily life unfolded over many years. Walls that have witnessed celebrations, ordinary routines, difficult seasons, and quiet moments that mattered more than anyone realised at the time.

A home holds more than furniture. It holds memories, familiar sounds, neighbourhood connections, established routines, and a sense of identity. Leaving that behind is not simply a logistical change. It is a personal one.

No residential facility will ever replicate that. Expecting it to can quietly set you up for disappointment.

Residential aged care is not designed to replace a lifetime. It is designed to provide safety, support, and care when someone can no longer manage independently.

It is also easy to assume that because aged care involves significant cost, everything should feel flawless. However, even well run homes operate within staffing models, funding structures, and human limitations.

Managing expectations does not mean lowering standards. It means recognising that you are not choosing between perfect and imperfect. You are choosing the safest, most respectful, and most suitable option available at this time.

Keeping that perspective from the beginning protects you from chasing something that does not exist and helps you stay focused on what truly matters.



Section 2

How To Use
This Guide

Choosing residential aged care for someone you love is not a small decision. It carries responsibility and sometimes urgency. This guide is designed to support you through that process. To get the most from it, here is what I suggest:

1. Read this guide from cover to cover

Do this before visiting any facilities. It will help you understand what to look for and why it matters.

2. What Matters Most | Pre-Visit Form

Complete the “What Matters Most” form. Clarify the level of care required, your non-negotiables, nice-to-haves, and deal-breakers before stepping inside any home.

3. Research.

Before visiting any aged care facility, review their website and any other available information so you arrive informed and prepared.

If you know someone who has a loved one living in a facility you are considering, ask about their experience. Would they recommend it? What do they think the facility does well? Are there any issues you should be aware of? Speaking with someone who has direct experience can provide helpful insight before you attend a visit.

4. On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

Print the On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist and take it with you when you visit facilities. Use it to guide your observations and conversations during each visit.

5. Visit Reflection | Post-Visit Form

Complete the Visit Reflection Post-Visit Form immediately after each visit. Capture what stood out while it is still fresh in your mind.

6. Follow-Up Email Template | For Additional Questions

Use the Follow-Up Email Template if you need clarification after a visit. It can help you request written responses to any questions that were unclear or not fully answered.

Work through these steps methodically. You do not need to rush, but you do need to be clear. The goal is not perfection. The goal is a decision you can stand behind.



Section 3

Preparing Yourself
Before You Visit

If you have never visited a residential aged care facility before, the experience can feel confronting.

Walking into a facility for the first time can make the situation feel very real.

You may feel sadness, guilt, or a sense that things are changing faster than you expected. These reactions are common.

Before any visit, remind yourself why you are there.

You are there to assess whether the facility is the right fit for your loved one, based on their needs, health, and wellbeing.

Strong emotions can sometimes cloud judgement. Take a moment, gather your thoughts, and focus on what you see during the visit.

The C.A.R.E. Framework will help you stay focused on what matters.



Section 4

Before You Visit
Any Facility

Before you step inside any facility, pause.

It is very easy to be influenced by presentation, timing, or pressure. A modern building can feel reassuring. A friendly facility guide can feel comforting. Immediate availability can create pressure to decide quickly.

But before any of that, you need **clarity**.

Clarity about what your loved one actually needs.

Clarity about what matters most.

Clarity about what you are not willing to compromise on.

If you don't define this first, it becomes much harder to stay grounded during a visit.

Take some time to think about:

- the level of care required
- your non-negotiables
- your nice-to-haves
- your deal-breakers

You will find a ***printable form*** at the end of this guide titled **"What Matters Most."** Completing it before attending visits can help you walk into each aged care facility feeling organised and focused.

Writing things down has a way of cutting through the noise.



Section 5

Preparing
For A Visit

Before booking visits, it can help to do a little groundwork. Not every facility will be the right fit for your loved one. Spending some time researching beforehand can save you emotional energy and unnecessary visits.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR BEFORE YOU VISIT

Start with the basics.

Website and Information

Take a look at the facility's website first. Most homes will outline their services, care approach, and general philosophy online.

If an information pack is available, request one. Some facilities provide detailed material before a visit, while others prefer to share full documentation in person. Be aware that you may not receive comprehensive information until you attend the visit.

As you review what is available, consider:

- Is the information clear and easy to find?
- Are care services explained and understandable?
- Does the content focus only on lifestyle and presentation, or is care discussed in practical terms?

Clear, straightforward information often reflects an organised and transparent approach.

Language Cues

Pay attention to the wording used. Phrases such as:

- "We aim to..."
- "We strive to..."
- "Where possible..."

These are not red flags on their own. However, if much of the language feels vague or non-specific, it may simply mean you will need to ask more detailed questions later.

Accreditation and Compliance

Residential aged care homes in Australia are required to meet national standards and maintain accreditation.

You can search for a facility on the My Aged Care website to view its Star Rating and quality information. This provides a useful overview before or after a visit.

If you are unsure, it is reasonable to ask directly:

- Is the facility currently fully accredited?
- Have there been any recent compliance concerns?

You are simply confirming that the home is operating within current standards.

Initial Questions to Ask (By Phone or Email)

Before committing to a visit, it can help to clarify a few practical points:

- Is a 24 Hour Registered Nurse onsite?
- What levels of care does the home currently support?
- Are there waiting lists for specific care needs?
- How are visits conducted, and who leads them?

These early conversations can quickly tell you whether a facility aligns with your loved one's needs.

Reviews and Online Feedback

Many families read online reviews before visiting. Reviews can provide useful perspective, but they should be read thoughtfully.

Experiences can vary widely within the same facility. Health needs, expectations, communication styles, and personal circumstances all influence how care is experienced.

When reading reviews, consider:

- Are similar concerns raised repeatedly?
- Do themes appear balanced?
- Does the facility respond professionally?

Use reviews as conversation starters rather than final conclusions.

Practical Deal Breakers

Sometimes a facility can be ruled out before you even visit.

For many families, practical factors such as location, accessibility, and cost are immediate considerations. If the facility is too far from family support, difficult to access, or financially unrealistic, it may not be the right option.

If you struggle to get clear answers during initial enquiries, it is reasonable to pause and reconsider.

Not every facility is right for every person. Ruling options out early is part of making a careful and informed decision.



Section 6

Location & Accessibility

Before focusing on the building itself, consider the location.

Distance and accessibility can influence how easy it is for people to visit. Public transport, parking, and safety after hours all play a role.

You might consider:

- Is the facility close to immediate or extended family?
- Can it be accessed easily by public transport?
- Is there adequate parking available?
- Would family members who do not drive be able to visit independently?
- Does the surrounding area feel safe and comfortable, including after hours?

Location can make visiting more convenient. However, convenience does not guarantee regular visits. People often intend to visit more than they realistically can. Work, family life, health, and distance all influence follow-through.

When thinking about location, be honest about who will most likely remain consistently involved.

Choose a setting that works for the people who will truly show up.



Section 7

On-Site Visit

Before you start the visit, pause for a moment.

This isn't about what feels appealing in the moment. It's about choosing a home that suits your loved one, as they are right now.

Cinemas, cafés, hair salons - they might sound lovely. And for some people, they will be. But ask yourself honestly: would your loved one use them? Or would they simply sit quietly in their room?

A visit is only a snapshot. It shows you one moment in time. It doesn't show you every day, every shift, or every challenge. As you walk through the home, take in both what you are told and what you observe. Notice what you see. Notice how it feels.

Each facility is laid out differently, but most visits move through similar areas. The sections below will help guide what to look for as you go.

7.1 Reception & Administration

Your first impression begins the moment you walk through the door. The reception area often sets the tone for the entire visit.

Notice:

- Is the receptionist friendly and welcoming?
- Does the space feel clean and well maintained?
- Is it clear where to go and what to do on arrival?
- Are visitors required to sign in?
- Are visiting protocols explained clearly?
- Is there an obvious security process in place?
- Is access straightforward for family and friends?
- How is after-hours access managed?

Reception should feel organised but not intimidating. Clear processes and a warm welcome can make a significant difference for families visiting regularly.



7.2 Common Areas

Common areas are where residents spend much of their day outside their rooms.

They are also the spaces where families often sit and spend time together during visits.

These areas give you insight into how daily life is supported and how connection is encouraged.

Consider:

- Is there a variety of spaces, such as television areas, quieter sitting areas, and places to read or engage with others?
- Do the spaces feel comfortable and welcoming for both residents and visitors?
- Are residents supervised appropriately, with staff nearby if assistance is needed?
- Does the environment feel calm and settled, rather than chaotic or neglected?
- Are staff interacting naturally with residents, or mainly moving quickly between tasks?

Common areas should allow residents to socialise, rest, or spend time with family in a way that feels natural and supported.



7.3 Dining & Meals

Mealtimes are an important part of daily life in residential care. Visits are rarely scheduled during meal service, so you may not see this in action.

Even so, it is worth understanding how dining works day to day.

You might ask:

- How are residents supported if they need help eating?
- Can they choose where they sit and who they sit with?
- How are preferences and dietary needs recorded and reviewed?
- Is there flexibility, or are meals tightly scheduled?

If the facility uses digital ordering systems, ask how residents are assisted with making their selections, particularly those living with memory changes.

It is also important to keep expectations realistic. Residential aged care facilities are not restaurants. Meals are prepared to meet the needs of many residents, often with varying health conditions and dietary requirements. The food may not reflect what your loved one once enjoyed at home or when dining out.

What matters most is that meals are nutritious, varied, well balanced, and served respectfully.

It is also worth remembering that many older people living at home struggle with poor appetite, limited variety, or inadequate hydration. In residential care, nutrition and hydration are closely monitored. Regular meals, snacks, and fluids are part of structured daily routines.

While the dining experience may be simpler than what your loved one once had, consistency and nutritional oversight can be a meaningful benefit.



7.4 Additional Facilities & Lifestyle Areas

Some facilities include cafés, cinemas, chapels, beauty salons, or dedicated activity spaces. These can absolutely enhance quality of life when they are used and enjoyed.

But pause for a moment.

Ask yourself whether your loved one would realistically use these spaces. It's easy to be drawn to features that sound impressive. The real question is whether they suit your loved one's personality, mobility, and current stage of life.

As you walk through, notice:

- Are these spaces active and lived in, or simply well presented?
- Do residents appear comfortable and engaged?
- Are activities adapted for different abilities?
- Does the lifestyle on offer feel aligned with who your loved one is?

Beautiful extras are a bonus. They should never outweigh safety, daily comfort, and consistent care.

7.5 Specialist Areas (If Relevant)

If your loved one requires dementia or high-level care, you may be shown a dedicated unit or secure area.

Seeing a secure area can feel confronting. For many families, this step carries an additional emotional weight.

These spaces are designed to provide additional supervision and safety. However, security alone is not the full picture.

As you walk through, consider:

- Is the area secure, with appropriate coded access?
- Is there safe and accessible outdoor space?
- How is wandering supported and managed?
- How are residents protected if behaviours escalate?
- Do staff actively engage residents, or are they mostly supervising from a distance?



7.6 Room Types & Accommodation

The room is where your loved one will wake, rest, and spend much of their time. It deserves careful attention. Take your time here.

A room might look fine during a visit, but small details can become daily realities once someone is living there. Try to picture your loved one in the space, not just the room itself.

Consider:

- Is the room private or shared?
- If shared, how is privacy managed between residents?
- Remember that shared rooms mean sharing space, including when a roommate has visitors.
- Is the size adequate, especially if mobility aids are needed?
- Is there natural light and a pleasant outlook?
- Is there a private ensuite or shared bathroom? Does it feel safe and accessible?
- Is the flooring safe and well maintained?
- Is there sufficient storage for clothing and personal items?
- Can the space be personalised so it feels familiar?
- Are furniture and electrical policies explained clearly?
- Is there adequate heating, cooling, or ventilation?
- How often are rooms cleaned, and what does that include?
- How are maintenance issues handled, such as replacing light bulbs or repairing small faults?
- Where is the room located in relation to the nurses' station, common areas, lifts, or busy corridors?

A room close to the nurses' station may offer quicker supervision, but it may also mean more noise from alarms, conversations, and foot traffic. A room further away may feel quieter but could require more time for staff to respond. Location within the building can affect sleep, privacy, and overall comfort.

Shared rooms are common in many facilities and can work well for some residents. Whatever the setup, privacy, dignity, and day-to-day comfort deserve careful thought.

Small practical details such as temperature control, cleanliness, maintenance, and room location can make a significant difference over time.

A room can be simple and still feel comfortable. Focus on suitability and how the space will feel once your loved one is living there.



7.7 Outdoor Areas

Access to outdoor space can significantly impact wellbeing, particularly for residents who enjoy fresh air, gardening, or simply sitting in the sun.

Some facilities have beautifully landscaped gardens designed to impress. Others have smaller, simpler outdoor spaces. What matters most is whether the space is realistically used and accessible in everyday life.

Notice:

- Is the outdoor area safe and secure?
- Is it accessible for mobility aids or wheelchairs?
- Are pathways even and well maintained?
- Are there shaded seating areas?
- Does the space feel inviting and easy to use?
- Are residents visibly using the space?

A large, impressive garden means little if residents rarely access it. A smaller, secure courtyard that residents use daily may offer far greater benefit.

If your loved one enjoys being outdoors, consider how easily they would be able to spend time there and whether staff are available to support them if needed.

Even simple outdoor access, when used regularly, can make a meaningful difference.



7.8 Clinical Care

As the visit progresses, the conversation will often turn to how care is delivered behind the scenes.

Handing over clinical responsibility can feel confronting. Moving a loved one into residential care often means handing over responsibilities you have carried for a long time. Ideally, you want to be able to step back from being the full-time carer and return to being a daughter, son, spouse, or family member again.

You do not need medical knowledge to ask good questions. You are simply trying to understand how your loved one would be supported if their health needs change.

It is reasonable to ask:

- Is a 24 Hour Registered Nurse onsite?
- How are medications managed and reviewed?
- How are falls monitored and prevented?
- What happens if health declines suddenly?
- How are hospital transfers decided?
- Are there in-house GP visits, and how often do they occur?
- How are vaccinations managed?
- Who organises external medical appointments, and what role does the family play?

Some facilities have regular visiting doctors and allied health professionals onsite. Others rely more heavily on family members to coordinate external appointments such as scans, specialists, dental, or optometry visits. Understanding what is included, and what may still require your involvement, helps you prepare for the practical realities ahead.

Most facilities also have preferred GPs who visit regularly. If you choose to continue with your loved one's existing GP, you may need to organise appointments and transport yourself. Clarifying this early gives you a clearer picture of how much coordination will remain your responsibility.

In addition, many homes work with a preferred pharmacy. Prescriptions are often dispensed and delivered directly to the facility, with invoices included in monthly accounts. It is worth asking how this arrangement works and what medication costs you will be responsible for.

You are looking for clarity and transparency in how care decisions are made.



7.9 Staffing & Family Communication

Strong care relies on consistent staffing and clear, transparent communication with families.

Once your loved one is living in the facility, much of your peace of mind will depend on how well you are kept informed and how approachable staff feel.

It is reasonable to ask:

- How many staff are on duty during the day, evening, and overnight?
- Will your loved one see the same carers regularly?
- What happens if staff call in sick?
- Who will be your main point of contact?
- How and when are families updated about changes in health or behaviour?
- How do families raise concerns if they arise?

Once your loved one moves in, communication becomes a two-way relationship. If something does not feel right, or your loved one expresses concern, it is important to seek clarification early rather than letting frustration build.

Most issues can be resolved through calm, respectful conversation. Approaching staff with kindness and fairness encourages cooperation and builds trust. These are the people caring for your loved one every day, not just when you are present.

At the same time, it helps to remain realistic. Residential care is busy and complex. Not every small delay is a failure of care. Understanding the difference between a minor inconvenience and a genuine concern can prevent unnecessary tension.

Clear communication and mutual respect create the strongest foundation for your loved one's ongoing care.



7.10 Administration & Accounts

Financial arrangements are rarely the most comfortable part of the conversation, but they are an important one.

Once your loved one moves in, this becomes an ongoing relationship, not just emotionally, but financially. Understanding how billing works from the beginning can prevent confusion or frustration later.

As you near the end of the visit, it is reasonable to ask how accounts are managed.

Consider asking:

- How often are invoices issued (weekly, fortnightly, monthly)?
- Are invoices itemised clearly?
- What payment options are available (online transfer, direct debit, credit card)?
- Is automatic payment required, or can invoices be paid manually?
- Who is the contact person for account enquiries?

It is also important to understand what is included in standard fees and what may be charged separately.

Many facilities have visiting providers such as hairdressers, beauty therapists, massage therapists, or other wellness services. These can be positive additions when chosen intentionally.

However, it is important to understand:

- Are written price lists available?
- How are residents' consent and understanding managed, particularly if they live with cognitive impairment?
- Are charges applied automatically, or only with family approval?
- How are subcontractor services billed?

Clarity here protects everyone.

You are not looking for the cheapest option. You are looking for transparency. Clear explanations and structured processes are signs of stable administration.

Like every other part of this visit, the goal is not perfection. It is understanding how things work day-to-day, so there are fewer surprises once your loved one moves in.



IMPORTANT NOTE

Before you attend any aged care facility, it can help to bring a simple structure with you, so you don't forget what matters. The **On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist** at the end of this guide is designed to support you. It brings together the key areas covered in this section into one practical, easy-to-use format that you ***can print and take with you.***

Use it as a guide, not a script. Your observations and instincts matter just as much as any checklist.



Section 8

After The Visit
Reflection

After visiting a residential aged care facility, it can be tempting to make a decision quickly, especially if there is pressure from time, health, or circumstance.

Before comparing options or discussing it with others, pause.

A visit is a snapshot. It shows you one moment in time, one staff mix, one atmosphere, one version of the day. Your impressions immediately afterwards are often the clearest you will have.

Take time to notice what stayed with you.

Did anything feel reassuring?

Did anything feel unsettled?

Did anything feel glossed over or unclear?

Your emotional response matters just as much as the information you were given.

It is also important to identify whether you are feeling pressure to decide quickly. Pressure can come from hospital discharge timelines, safety concerns, availability of places, or family expectations. Recognising it helps you respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

You do not need to resolve everything immediately. You simply need to reflect honestly before moving to comparison.

A structured **Visit Reflection Form** is included in the **Practical Resources** section at the back of this guide. Completing one for each facility will help preserve your impressions while they are still fresh.

Pausing is not hesitation. It is responsible decision-making.



Section 9

Comparing Facilities

Once you have visited more than one facility and completed a Visit Reflection | Post-Visit Form for each, it is time to step back.

When visits are close together, details can blur. Rooms begin to look similar. Conversations overlap. Emotions mix with facts.

Comparison is not about scoring facilities or searching for perfection. It is about alignment. Lay your reflection sheets side by side and look for patterns.

Ask yourself:

- Which facility consistently met my non-negotiables?
- Where did communication feel clear and transparent?
- Which concerns felt minor, and which would impact care day to day?
- Can I clearly explain why one option feels stronger than another?

Sometimes one facility will clearly stand out. Sometimes the differences are subtle.

If two facilities appear similar on paper, ground your decision in one simple question:

Where will my loved one receive the best care?

It is easy to become distracted by presentation, amenities, or impressive features. But the reason you are visiting residential aged care facilities in the first place is because your loved one can no longer care for themselves safely or independently.

That reality brings the focus back to what matters most. Not the extras. Not the marketing. Not the décor.

Care.

Consistent, attentive, respectful care.

When you return to that question, many smaller considerations begin to fall into place.

Clarity does not always arrive as certainty. Sometimes it arrives as quiet confidence.



Section 10

Managing Expectations

By this stage, you may have gathered a significant amount of information. You may also feel torn between options.

It is natural to hope that one facility will clearly stand out. Sometimes that happens. Often, it does not.

You may find yourself weighing trade-offs.

For example:

- A home that feels warm and personal but less modern
- A beautifully presented building that feels more clinical
- Strong clinical systems paired with a quieter social atmosphere
- A vibrant activity schedule that may not suit your loved one's personality

No facility will be strong in every area. The key is understanding which strengths matter most for your loved one right now.

You may also notice attractive extras such as cinema rooms, cafés, cocktail hours, or lifestyle programs. These features can feel reassuring during a visit.

Pause and ask yourself:

- Will my loved one realistically use these features?
- Do they suit their personality, energy levels, and current stage of life?
- Am I drawn to this because it feels impressive to me, or because it genuinely aligns with them?

Amenities are meaningful when they are accessible and actively used.

Often, what matters most is quieter and less visible:

- Consistent staff
- Transparent communication
- Calm routines
- Kind, familiar faces



Before making a final decision, return to what you clarified earlier in this guide.

Ask yourself:

- Are my non-negotiables clearly met?
- Are the concerns I noticed minor, or more significant?
- Do the strengths meaningfully outweigh the limitations?
- Can I realistically picture my loved one settling here?

It is also important to distinguish emotional discomfort from genuine warning signs. Feeling confronted by frailty, ageing, or illness does not automatically mean the care is poor.

However, patterns such as:

- Repeatedly unclear or inconsistent answers
- Limited transparency
- Communication that feels dismissive
- Ongoing signs of rushed or disrespectful behaviour

All deserve careful consideration.

Managing expectations does not mean lowering your standards.

The goal should never be to choose the perfect environment.

The goal should always be to choose the best possible option suited to your loved one that is available at this time.

That distinction matters.



Section 11

Final Reassurance

Choosing residential aged care for someone you love is significant. It is rarely simple. Timing is not always ideal. Options are not always perfect.

That does not prevent you from making a sound decision.

You do not need absolute certainty.
You need clarity.

Clarity about:

- What your loved one needs now
- What you will not compromise on
- Which concerns were minor
- Which concerns would impact care day to day
- Which facility consistently demonstrated respectful, competent care

This is not about finding flawless. It is about finding appropriate.

Return to what matters:

- Care.
- Safety.
- Dignity.
- Consistency.

Not décor.

Not marketing.

Not impressive extras that may never be used.

There will always be unknowns. That is the nature of any major transition. Your role is not to eliminate every risk. Your role is to choose the safest and most suitable option available at this time.

If you have approached this process thoughtfully, asked direct questions, compared facilities carefully, and stayed focused on your loved one's real needs, then you have done what responsible decision-making requires.

You are not aiming for perfect. You are aiming for appropriate. And that is enough.



Practical Resources

PRACTICAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR DECISION

The following resources are included to help you stay organised, focused, and prepared as you visit aged care facilities.

They are designed to support you before, during, and after each visit.

- **What Matters Most | Pre-Visit Form**
- **On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist**
- **Visit Reflection | Post-Visit Form**
- **Email Follow-Up Template | For Additional Questions**





What Matters Most | Pre-Visit Form

This worksheet is designed to help you define the level of care required, identify your non-negotiables, and separate essential needs from preferences. Completing it before attending visits will help you stay focused on what truly matters for your loved one. Take your time with this. There are no right or wrong answers.

Understanding the Level of Care Required

What does your loved one need right now?

Type of care

- ☐ Low support
- ☐ Moderate support
- ☐ High or complex care
- ☐ Dementia-specific support
- ☐ Palliative or end-of-life care

Medical support

- ☐ 24 Hour Registered Nurse required
- ☐ Regular GP involvement
- ☐ Access to specialists
- ☐ Behavioural support

Mobility and safety

- ☐ Mobility aids required
- ☐ High falls risk
- ☐ Secure environment required
- ☐ Close supervision needed

Is their condition stable, or likely to progress in the near future?

Accommodation Preference

Consider what type of living space would feel most comfortable, dignified, and realistic for your loved one.

Room type

- ☐ Private room required
- ☐ Shared room acceptable
- ☐ Shared room temporarily acceptable

If a private room is not immediately available, am I willing to accept a shared room temporarily?

Notes



What Matters Most | Pre-Visit Form

Defining Your Boundaries

Now that you've thought about needs, it's time to define priorities.

My Non-Negotiables

If these are not met, the facility is not suitable.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Examples might include:

- 24 hour Registered Nurse onsite
- Secure dementia specific area
- Private room (or clear pathway to upgrade if not immediately available)
- Clear clinical oversight
- Strong communication with family
- Close proximity to home

My Nice-to-Haves

These would enhance quality of life but are not essential.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Examples might include:

- Modern decor or updated rooms
- Cafe, cinema, or lifestyle programs
- Larger outdoor spaces
- Close to extended family
- Specific cultural or religious services

My Deal-Breakers

If this is present, the facility is not suitable.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Examples might include:

- No Registered Nurse onsite overnight
- Vague answers to clinical questions
- Dismissive communication
- Unsafe environment
- Limited dementia safeguards
- High staff turnover

Pressure Check

Are you feeling pressure from:

- ☐ Hospital discharge timelines
- ☐ Safety concerns at home
- ☐ Family expectations
- ☐ Limited availability of places
- ☐ Exhaustion
- ☐ Other

Recognising pressure helps you respond thoughtfully, rather than react.

Final Grounding Question

If presentation, amenities, and urgency were removed from the equation, what would still matter most for your loved one? Take a moment before answering.



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

Facility Name: _____

Person Conducting Visit: _____

Date: _____

1. RECEPTION & ADMINISTRATION

(a) Welcoming and organised reception (friendly greeting, clear direction)?

Yes / No

(b) Visitor sign-in process explained (logbook or digital check-in)?

Yes / No

(c) Security processes clear (coded doors, visitor identification, after-hours access)?

Yes / No

(d) Access is manageable for family and friends?

Yes / No

(e) Initial impression felt calm and professional?

Yes / No

Notes:

2. COMMON AREAS

(a) Variety of spaces available (TV areas, quiet seating, visitor areas)?

Yes / No

(b) Spaces comfortable for residents and visitors?

Yes / No

(c) Residents appear supervised appropriately (staff nearby if needed)?

Yes / No

(d) Environment felt calm and settled?

Yes / No

Notes:



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

3. DINING & MEALS

(a) Meal process explained clearly (ordering, serving, assistance)?

Yes / No

(b) Dietary needs accommodated (allergies, texture-modified diets, cultural needs)?

Yes / No

(c) Support provided for residents who need help eating?

Yes / No

(d) Residents able to choose where they sit (where possible)?

Yes / No

(e) Digital ordering supported appropriately (if applicable)?

Yes / No

(f) Nutrition and hydration monitoring explained?

Yes / No

Notes:

4. SPECIALIST AREAS (IF RELEVANT)

(a) Secure access for dementia or high-care areas (coded entry, monitored exits)?

Yes / No

(b) Safe and accessible outdoor space within secure area?

Yes / No

(c) Staff actively engaging residents (conversations, music, activities)?

Yes / No

(d) Behaviour management approach explained respectfully?

Yes / No

Notes:



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

5. ROOM & ACCOMMODATION - Private or Shared (circle one)

(a) If shared, privacy arrangements explained?

Yes / No

(b) Room size suitable (space for walker, wheelchair, mobility aids)?

Yes / No

(c) Natural light and ventilation adequate?

Yes / No

(d) Bathroom safe and accessible (grab rails, non-slip flooring)?

Yes / No

(e) Heating / cooling available (air conditioning, fan, temperature control)?

Yes / No

(f) Room location suitable (noise levels, proximity to nurses' station)?

Yes / No

(g) Cleanliness standards explained (room cleaning, linen changes)?

Yes / No

(h) Maintenance process clear (light bulbs, minor repairs)?

Yes / No

(i) Personalisation permitted (furniture, photographs, bed linen, artwork, clocks)?

Yes / No

(j) Will someone from maintenance hang any artworks etc.?

Yes / No

(k) Can my loved one have their own small fridge in their room (bar fridge)?

Yes / No

Notes:



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

6. PERSONAL CARE & EVERYDAY ITEMS

(a) Basic toiletries provided (toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, tissues)?

Yes / No

(b) Incontinence products provided?

Yes / No

(c) Brand or type discussed (if relevant)?

Yes / No

(d) Families expected to supply additional personal items (deodorant, moisturiser, preferred brands)?

Yes / No

(e) Responsibility for restocking clarified?

Yes / No Circle one - **Facility / Family / Shared**

(f) Labelling and storage of personal items explained?

Yes / No

Notes:

7. OUTDOOR AREAS

(a) Safe and secure (gated where required)?

Yes / No

(b) Accessible for mobility aids (ramps, even pathways)?

Yes / No

(c) Realistically usable day to day (easy access, shaded seating)?

Yes / No

(d) Residents observed using outdoor space?

Yes / No

Notes:



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

8. CLINICAL CARE

(a) Registered Nurse on-site 24 hours?

Yes / No

(b) Medication management process explained clearly?

Yes / No

(c) Preferred pharmacy used by facility?

Yes / No

(d) Prescription delivery and invoicing explained?

Yes / No

(e) Preferred GP visits facility regularly

Yes / No

(f) If using your own GP, who arranges transport?

Circle one - **Facility / Family/ Shared**

(g) In-house allied health available (physiotherapy, podiatry, occupational therapy)?

Yes / No

(h) Process for sudden health decline explained?

Yes / No

(i) Hospital transfer process clarified?

Yes / No

(j) Vaccinations managed on-site?

Yes / No

(k) Family role in external appointments clarified (scans, specialists, dental, optometry)?

Yes / No

Notes:



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

9. STAFFING & FAMILY COMMUNICATION

(a) Staffing levels explained (day, evening, overnight)?

Yes / No

(b) Consistency of carers addressed (familiar staff vs rotating)?

Yes / No

(c) Main point of contact identified?

Yes / No

(d) Process for raising concerns explained?

Yes / No

(e) Communication felt transparent and respectful?

Yes / No

Notes:



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

10. ADMINISTRATION, ACCOUNTS & ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Billing Structure

(a) Billing frequency explained (weekly, fortnightly, monthly)?

Yes / No

(b) Invoices itemised clearly?

Yes / No

(c) Payment methods explained (transfer, direct debit, credit card)?

Yes / No

(d) Automatic deductions required?

Yes / No

Notes:

Additional & Optional Charges

(a) Clear explanation of what is included in standard fees?

Yes / No

(b) Optional services explained (hairdressing, beauty salon, massage, visiting providers)?

Yes / No

(c) Written price list available?

Yes / No

(d) Are optional services only provided with family consent?

Yes / No / Clarified

(e) How are these services billed (separately itemised on invoice)?

Explained / Not Explained

Notes:



On-Site Visit | C.A.R.E. Checklist

(Print and take with you)

10. ADMINISTRATION, ACCOUNTS & ADDITIONAL CHARGES ... continued

COMMUNICATION & QUERIES RELATING TO ACCOUNTS

(a) Primary contact for account queries identified?

Yes / No _____

(b) Preferred method for raising account concerns clarified (phone, email, written)?

Yes / No

(c) Response timeframe explained?

Yes / No

Notes:

11. OVERALL IMPRESSION

(a) Felt safe?

Yes / No

(b) Felt respectful?

Yes / No

(c) Would I feel comfortable leaving my loved one here today?

Yes / No / Unsure

Additional Notes:



Visit Reflection | Post-Visit Form

(Print One Per Facility)

Facility Name: _____

Facility Location: _____

Date: _____

First Impression

What stood out most?

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How It Felt

Overall feeling:

- ☐ Calm
- ☐ Reassuring
- ☐ Busy
- ☐ Clinical
- ☐ Homely
- ☐ Unsettling
- ☐ Unsure

Non-Negotiables Met?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Partially
- ☐ No

Can I picture my loved one
living here?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Partially
- ☐ No

Pros

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Cons

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Notes

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Follow-Up Email Template | For Additional Questions

(To be sent post-visit)

If you need written clarification after a visit, you may adapt the template below to request further detail.

Tip: Sending follow-up questions in writing allows you to compare responses from different facilities side by side.

Subject: Follow-Up Questions After Our Recent Visit

Dear (Insert Name)

Thank you for taking the time to show me through your facility on (insert date). After reflecting on the visit, I have a few follow-up questions:

- Insert question 1
- Insert question 2
- Insert question 3
- Insert question 4

Any additional information you can provide would be appreciated and will help me make an informed decision for my loved one.

Kind regards

(Insert your name)

(Insert your contact details)

Notes

A series of 25 horizontal lines for writing notes, each with arrowheads at both ends. The lines are evenly spaced and span the width of the page.

Disclaimer & Copyright

The C.A.R.E. Framework has been created to support families navigating one of the most significant decisions in caring for someone they love.

It provides structure, guidance, and practical questions to consider when visiting and choosing an aged care home. It does not replace personalised legal, financial, medical, or clinical advice. Every person's circumstances are different, and professional guidance should be sought where appropriate.

Aged care regulations, funding arrangements, and facility policies can change over time. While every effort has been made to ensure the information contained in this resource is accurate at the time of publication, The Turning Tides Project cannot guarantee ongoing accuracy and accepts no liability for decisions made using this framework.

This guide is designed to help you think clearly, ask informed questions, and approach visits with confidence. The final decisions remain your responsibility.

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