

Preparing for a Natural Disaster



Guide to using RediPlan for carers of people living with dementia

Acknowledgments

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An online version of this guide is available at research.qut.edu.au/gettinghomesafely. Please email any comments or feedback to dementia@qut.edu.au

How to use the Carer Ready Guide

- Everyone in Australia should prepare for natural disasters. If you are a carer of someone living with dementia, you need to think carefully about how to best help them and protect both of you from harm.
- The **Carer Ready Guide** can help you think about these issues. Read it when completing your **Red Cross RediPlan** (download at redcross.org.au).
- The **Carer Ready Guide** has three colour-coded sections with relevant dementia-specific advice:



Section 1: Preparing for a natural disaster

Section 2: During a natural disaster

Section 3: After a natural disaster

1.0 Preparing for a natural disaster

1.1

Plan ahead

Advice and tips for being prepared for an emergency

1.2

Get connected

Advice for getting connected to your community to protect yourself and the person you are caring for

1.3

Get organised

Advice and tips for organising the things that will help you gain a sense of control during and after an emergency

1.4

Get packing

Advice and tips for preparing practically for an emergency

1.1 Plan ahead

Tick the box when you have completed these steps

- Be aware of the best escape and evacuation routes. Keep escape routes clear at all times. Check if emergency exits are wheelchair accessible. Practise evacuation procedures.
- Find out if there is a disaster plan or evacuation centre specifically for people living with dementia.
- If you don't own a car or drive, find out what plans there are for evacuating people without private transport.
- If the person you care for attends a day care facility or respite care, find out what their emergency and evacuation plans are. Talk to them about what they (and you) are expected to do in case of an emergency.
- Plan for how you and the person living with dementia might cope during and after a natural disaster. This can help you feel more in control and better able to follow emergency plans when a disaster does happen.

1.2 Get connected

- Identify a support network to help you in emergency situations. Ask family, friends, neighbours, community and carer groups, professionals or volunteers.

Include several people from the places the person living with dementia regularly spends time. Talk to them and the person you care for about the type of help you might need. Make sure everyone has a copy of your emergency plan.

- Include people who:
 - you know and trust
 - know and are known by the person you care for
 - are able to understand and communicate with the person living with dementia
 - are physically and emotionally able to provide care and follow your emergency plan.

- Ask to person you care for to wear an identity bracelet with their name, address and telephone number in case they go missing. If available in your state, sign up to the **Safely Home Program**.

For information on the Safely Home Program, call the National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500

- Sign up to **MedicAlert** so healthcare professionals can access the person's electronic health record. Keep a copy of the person's health needs and medications handy.

To sign up, call the MedicAlert Foundation Helpline on 1800 882 222

1.3 Get organised **Tick the box when you have completed these steps**

When you create your **RediPlan** discuss with the person and write down their specific needs. Include:

- their likes and dislikes e.g. what name they like to be called, things that calm them, things that may upset them
- their day to day routines e.g. mealtimes, activities, sleeping
- their day to day care needs e.g. help with going to the toilet
- their hearing and communication needs e.g. do they need people to maintain eye contact or speak slowly and clearly
- the language spoken in their home
- their mobility needs e.g. do they need a walker or help getting up and down stairs
- their psychological and behavioural needs e.g. strategies to manage anxiety, depressive symptoms, agitation, confusion, or wandering
- other needs e.g. diet, vision, continence aids, medical conditions, medication and medical aids, cultural or other personalised support needs
- important contact details e.g. emergency contacts, out-of-town contacts, doctor, pharmacist, out-of-hours services
- a current photo of the person in case they get lost

Keep this document up-to-date and revise it whenever the person's needs change. Discuss it with your General Practitioner (GP) and pharmacist. Share it with your support network.

1.4 Get packing **Tick the box when you have completed these steps**

- Put together an emergency kit. Follow the advice in your **RediPlan**.
- Include specific information about the person living with dementia to go with them if they are evacuated.
- Include contact information about yourself in case you are separated.

- Make sure the emergency kit is ready to go with everything you need.
- Keep the emergency kit handy and updated so it meets the person's current needs.
- Include a list of medicines and perishable or limited items that you can quickly add to the kit before evacuating.

- Include simple activities or comfort items that the person prefers to help keep them calm (e.g. books, magazines, puzzles, games, music, photos).
- Pack a battery-operated radio or portable music player and their favourite music.



2.0 During a natural disaster

2.1 If you stay at home during a natural disaster

Advice to help you prepare yourself, the person you are caring for, and your home in case you have to stay at home during a disaster or are unable to leave

2.2 If you need to evacuate

Advice to help if you and the person you are caring for have to evacuate

2.3 If the person you care for becomes lost

Advice to help if the person you are caring for becomes separated from you or lost during an emergency

2.4 If the person living with dementia becomes agitated

Advice to help if the person you are caring for becomes distressed, anxious, agitated and confused during a disaster

2.1 If you stay at home during a natural disaster

- Be psychologically prepared. Prepare yourself, the person you care for and your home in advance of the disaster. Keep your emergency kit and supplies to hand.
- Ask your support network to help you prepare your home e.g. with supplies, sandbags, storm shutters, yard clearing, moving furniture.
- You may have to move to a safer area within your home e.g. to a basement or higher floor. If the person resists moving, try distracting them with a favourite activity or item. Try not to be forceful or overbearing.
- Make the home as safe and comfortable as possible. Try to keep to usual mealtimes, medication and sleeping routines. The person living with dementia may need extra help and reassurance.
- Music from a battery-operated radio or portable music player may help calm and distract them. Or use familiar and favourite activities and comfort items.



2.2. If you need to evacuate

- Stay calm. Leave as early as possible. Take your emergency kit.
- Give the person living with dementia brief explanations and lots of reassurance.
- Use distraction strategies. Think about who to contact if the person refuses to evacuate.
- Prioritise evacuation preferences. Staying with family and friends can be better than a crowded and noisy evacuation centre.
- People living with dementia often find it hard to cope with changes in routine, travelling and unfamiliar places. They may become distressed, anxious, agitated or confused. They may not remember or understand why they had to leave home.
- If you are struggling to cope, ask someone from your support network to meet you at the evacuation centre. Talk to staff or volunteers if you need extra help.
- Let others know the person is living with dementia and needs additional support.
- Stay together at all times to avoid getting separated or lost. If you have a mobile phone, take a photo of yourselves for identification.
- If the person you care for becomes upset, distract them with a favourite comfort item or activity. Move to a quieter place and limit stimulation.
- Try to maintain regular routines for mealtimes and sleeping. Make sure they take regular medications as directed.
- Watch out for any signs that they are becoming overwhelmed.

2.3 If the person you care for becomes lost

- Stay calm. Thoroughly search the house, building and outbuildings. If it's safe to go outside, search any places they may visit.
- Immediately notify the police, your support network, neighbours, evacuation centre or hotel staff, and emergency services workers. Provide a current photo. Note what the person was wearing when they went missing.
- If possible, have someone stay back in case the person returns. If found, notify the police and emergency services immediately.
- Once found, provide lots of reassurance. Return to the person's regular routine.

For more information on identification products and Safely Home services, call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500



2.4 If the person living with dementia becomes agitated

- Stay calm to help the person living with dementia remain calm too.
- Be sensitive and supportive of their feelings - they may be feeling scared or anxious. Assure them of your continued presence and support.
- Be aware that a disaster may trigger past experiences or traumas for the person living with dementia. If they've experienced displacement, war or deprivation in the past, this may trigger feelings of fear related to people in uniforms, being watched, queuing, hunger, being cold, identity tags, corridors and shared spaces for sleeping or eating.
- Try to recognise any verbal and non-verbal cues that indicate the person is becoming increasingly upset.
- De-escalate or change the situation where possible. Use distraction to divert their attention.

**For further support, contact the Dementia Support Australia (DSA) Helpline
on 1800 699 799**



3.0 After a natural disaster

3.1 Returning home

Advice for returning home after a disaster.

3.2 Psychological support

Advice for getting psychological support for both the person living with dementia and you as a carer.



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3.1 Returning home

- Return home only when advised to do so by emergency services.
- If possible, leave the person living with dementia with a friend or relative while you check for any damage. You may need to make alternative plans, such as respite care, if your home is unsafe.
- There may be lots of work and cleaning up to do. Ask your support network to help. Contact your insurance company for help assessing damage.
- It may be very difficult for the person living with dementia if familiar cues in the home and community are damaged or destroyed. They may start to wander or become lost in a previously familiar place. Provide constant supervision, keep handy a current photo of the person you care for, know what they are wearing and make sure they wear or carry identification e.g. Safely Home bracelet.
- Try to keep to normal routines as much as possible.

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3.2 Psychological support

- After a disaster, both you and the person with dementia may feel a mixture of emotions such as anger, anxiety, sadness or distress. For the person living with dementia, this could be expressed in non-verbal ways such as withdrawal, apathy or agitation. Whilst this is a normal reaction, you may both benefit from professional help or counselling. Talk to your general practitioner (GP) and ask for a referral to a qualified counsellor or psychologist.
- Dementia Australia also provides a free counselling service.

Call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500

- The person you care for may need additional help from Dementia Support Australia (DSA). This is a free national service, which provides support for people living with dementia with changed behaviour and psychological symptoms.

Call the Dementia Support Australia (DSA) Helpline on 1800 699 799

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