



People leaving aged care

People leave aged care services for a number of reasons, including moving to another service for the same or a different program type. This topic presents data on the length of time people spend using aged care services, and the number of people who exited these services, during 2020–21.

- The time that a person spends using an aged care service in a single episode is referred to here as 'length of stay', regardless of whether they used community or residential care. Here we describe length of stay using the median value: around half of people have a length of stay longer than the median, and around half of people have a length of stay shorter than the median.
- When a person leaves an aged care service it is referred to here as an 'exit' (excluding short periods of leave, such as for family visits or hospital stays).

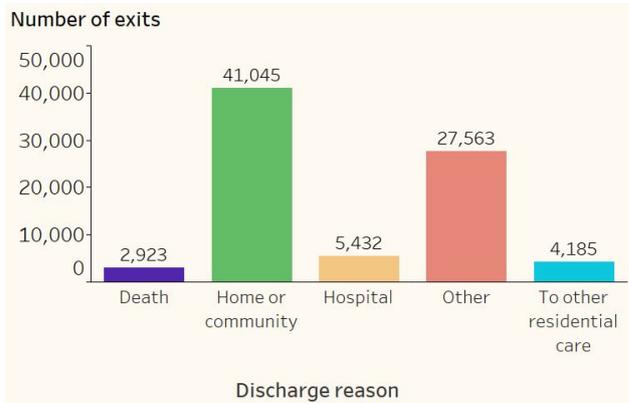
For exits that took place in 2020–21, over 67,000 were for permanent residential care, and nearly 38,000 were for home care. The largest proportion of exits during this time was for respite residential care (over 81,000), reflecting that people often use this temporary service for short periods of time and on multiple occasions.

Reasons for leaving aged care

People can leave aged care services for varying reasons. Reasons for exit include death, moving to another care service, or returning to living in the community. How long people stay in aged care services and the reasons for leaving are likely to differ among care types.

In 2020–21, people had a similar median length of stay in home care whether they exited due to death or due to entering permanent residential care (almost 17 months). For permanent residential care, the longest median length of stay was for those who died in care (almost 24 months). Most exits for permanent residential care were due to death (83% of exits), while most for home care were due to entering residential care (54% of exits). For respite residential care (Figure 1) and transition care, most exits were due to returning to community-based living (51% and 52% of exits, respectively).

Figure 1: Number of exits from respite residential care by discharge reason, 2020–21



People leaving aged care over time

There have been changes in the typical length of stay and the number of exits for different care types over the last 10 years. Trends over the decade from 2011–12 to 2020–21 indicate that the median length of stay increased by 4 months for home care and by more than 4 and a half months for permanent residential care (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Length of stay by care type, 2011–12 to 2020–21



Between 2011–12 to 2020–21 the number of exits increased for most care types. The largest increase in exits was for home care (62% increase—from 23,400 to 37,900), followed by respite residential care (30% increase—from 62,600 to 81,100). This may be explained, in part, by increasing numbers of people using these services over time.

People leaving aged care by age and sex

Although the majority of people using aged care services are people aged 65 and over, younger people also access and exit these services. For exits that took place in 2020–21, the median length of stay in permanent residential care and home care was longer for women than men. For both men and women, the median length of stay in permanent residential care generally increased with age from age 70 onwards, with the longest length of stay for people aged 100 and over (just over 3 and a half years) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Length of stay in permanent residential care, by age group and sex, 2020–21



People leaving aged care by dementia status

People with dementia typically have longer median lengths of stay. In 2020–21, the median length of stay in permanent residential care was over 8 months longer for people with a record of dementia than for people without a record of dementia. The difference in length of stay between people with dementia and without dementia was 10 months for women and over 6 months for men.

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COVID-19 and people leaving aged care

Australia has faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 illness can be more serious for people who have pre-existing health conditions, including older Australians.

The number of people leaving aged care services is likely to have been impacted by COVID-19. In some cases, people temporarily leaving permanent residential aged care for community living with extra supports provided may have been recorded as exits. In addition, approximately one-third of COVID-19-related deaths in Australia have occurred in people living in residential aged care facilities. The extent of pandemic-related impacts will be clearer in future data releases.

For further information related to older Australians and COVID-19, including access to advice and support resources, see the Australian Government's My Aged Care website. For more information regarding COVID-19 outbreaks in Australian residential aged care facilities, see the latest national snapshot.

Where can I find out more?

GEN Topic: People leaving aged care

<<https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/Topics/People-leaving-aged-care>>

My Aged Care

Information for older Australians on Coronavirus (COVID-19). <<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/news-and-updates/information-older-australians-coronavirus-covid-19>>

National Snapshot - Australian Government Department of Health

<<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/covid-19-outbreaks-in-australian-residential-aged-care-facilities>>

Report on the operation of the Aged Care Act 1997:

<<https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/Resources/Reports-and-publications/2021/November/2020-21-report-on-the-operation-of-the-aged-care-a>>

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Information and
data on aged care
in Australia

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