



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 2021–22:

- 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).

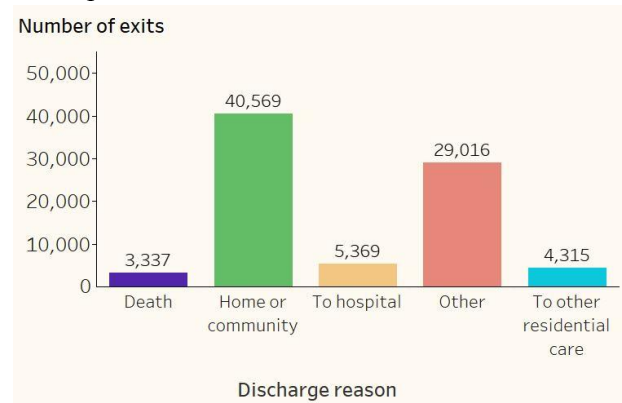
For exits that took place in 2021–22, over 72,100 were for permanent residential care, and nearly 48,100 were for home care. The largest proportion of exits during this time was for respite residential care (over 82,600), reflecting that people often use this temporary service for short periods of time 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 2021–22, people had the same median length of stay in home care whether they exited due to death or due to entering permanent residential care (over 18 months). For permanent residential care, the longest median length of stay was for those who died in care (almost 25 months). Most exits for permanent residential care were due to death (86% of exits), while most for home care were due to entering residential care (51% of exits). For respite residential care (Figure 1) and transition care, most common reason for exits were due to returning to community-based living (49% and 61% of exits, respectively).

Figure 1: Number of exits from respite residential care by discharge reason, 2021–22



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 2012–13 to 2021–22 indicate that the median length of stay increased by over 4 months for home care and by more than 5 and a half months for permanent residential care (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Length of stay by care type, 2012–13 to 2021–22

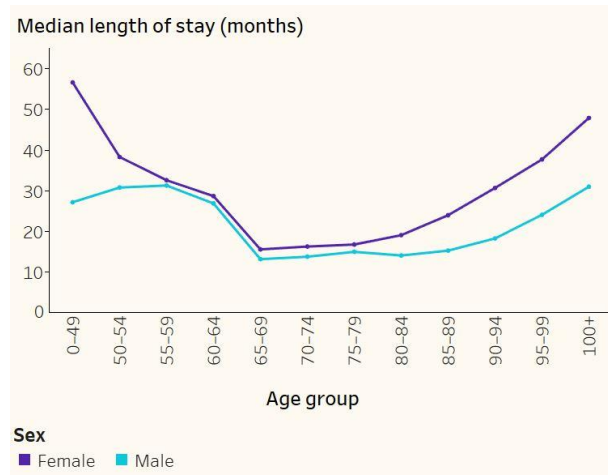


Between 2012–13 to 2021–22 the number of exits increased for most care types. The largest increase in exits was for home care (97% increase—from 24,400 to 48,000), followed by respite residential care (30% increase—from 63,800 to 82,600). This may be explained, in part, by increasing numbers of people 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 2021–22, 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, however the longest length of stay was for women aged under 50 (over 4 and a half years) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Length of stay in permanent residential care, by age group and sex, 2021–22



People leaving permanent residential care by dementia status

People with dementia typically have longer median lengths of stay. In 2021–22, the median length of stay in permanent residential care was over 9 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 over 11 months for women and over 8 months for men.



© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023

All material presented in this document is provided under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence, with the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms (the terms of use for the Coat of Arms are available at <https://www.pmc.gov.au/government/commonwealth-coat-arms>) or any material owned by third parties, including for example, design, layout or images obtained under licence from third parties and signatures. All reasonable efforts have been made to identify and label material owned by third parties.

The details of the relevant licence conditions are available on the Creative Commons website (available at <https://creativecommons.org>), as is the full legal code for the CC BY 4.0 licence.

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, including exits due to death. People in residential aged care were acutely impacted by COVID-19 because the close proximity of residents increased the risk of virus transmission. Older people also had an increased risk of death if they contracted COVID-19.

- Three-quarters (75%) of all COVID-related deaths in the first year (to 5 March 2021) of the COVID-19 pandemic were among people living in residential aged care.
- In the 2021–22 financial year there were 2,173 COVID-related deaths in residential aged care. As at 30 June 2022, 29% of all COVID-related deaths in Australia were among people living in residential aged care.

In May 2020, the Australian Government introduced measures for permanent aged care residents who temporarily return to the community because of COVID-19. This allowed residents to take emergency leave during outbreaks, rather than using and potentially exhausting their social leave entitlements. The Australian Government also provided funding for Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) providers to support residents who re-locate from aged care homes.

For further information on aged care services and the COVID-19 pandemic, see the Report on the Operation of the Aged Care Act and the COVID-19 outbreaks in Australian residential aged care facilities weekly report.

Where can I find out more?

GEN Topic: People leaving aged care

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

Suggested citation

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023. GEN fact sheet 2021–22: People leaving aged care. Canberra: AIHW.

Any enquiries about copyright and/or this fact sheet should be directed to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, GPO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601, Tel: (02) 6244 1000, Email: <info@aihw.gov.au>

Information and
data on aged care
in Australia

[GEN-agedcaredata.gov.au](https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au)

Contact

GPO Box 570, Canberra, ACT 2601
(02) 6244 1000 | GEN@aihw.gov.au

