



# Living with Dementia



How Allied Health and Dementia  
Rehabilitation can help

**National Centre  
for Healthy Ageing**

A partnership between



## Key points

People with dementia may benefit from opportunities to:

- Eat well and stay physically active
- Continue activities that are meaningful and enjoyable
- Stay socially connected and mentally active

Some people stay socially, mentally and physically active by joining a local exercise, dance, hobby or support group. Some people do paid or volunteer work. Others keep active with friends and family. Some people access allied health professionals to help.

## Allied health professionals

Allied health professionals can help people living with dementia to maximise mobility, meaningful activities and relationships. This is called dementia rehabilitation. Rehabilitation targets cognitive, psychological, social and physical aspects of functioning. Rehabilitation also supports families and care partners.

## How to access allied health professionals

- Ask your GP about options (e.g., a chronic disease management plan or funding available through My Aged Care or the NDIS)
- Fund yourself or use private health insurance

### Other Allied Health

- Counselling
- Social work
- Dietetics
- Art therapy
- Music therapy
- Podiatry
- Audiology
- Optometry/orthoptics

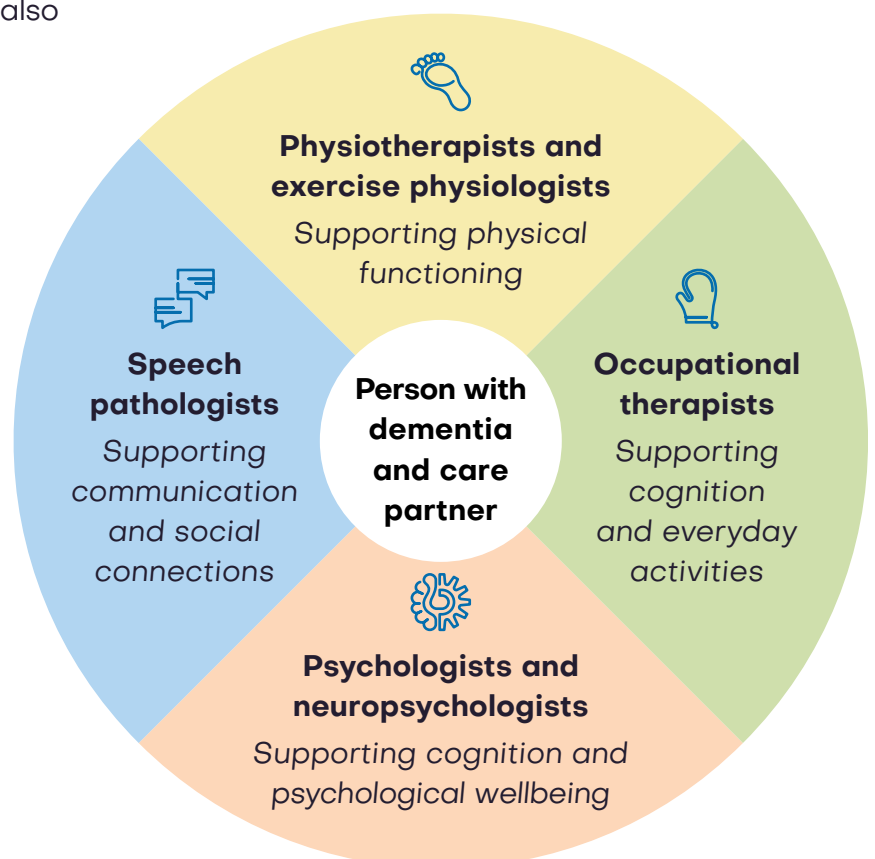
## Tips for finding an allied health professional

Search for a therapist with experience in dementia, neurology or gerontology. Many professional association websites have a search function. For example: Occupational Therapy [otaus.com.au/find-an-ot](http://otaus.com.au/find-an-ot)

## Below are questions you might ask your GP

- Are there community exercise or social groups I could join?
- Could an allied health professional help me to continue to do activities at home, communicate better and/or improve my walking?

It can help to be prepared when you visit an allied health professional—you might want to use this form to help you: [forwardwithdementia.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/My-life-plan-worksheet-1.pdf](http://forwardwithdementia.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/My-life-plan-worksheet-1.pdf)



## Allied Health Professional



### Occupational therapists

Supporting cognition and everyday activities

## How they can help you

(this list is just some examples)

- Strategies for everyday activities like dressing and cooking
- Strategies to help support work, hobbies and leisure
- Advice around driving and community access
- Adapting environments to support activities and safety (e.g. colour contrasting cups, labelling kitchen cupboards, installing rails and night lights)
- Assistive technologies for safe use of the stove, medication management or locating misplaced items.
- Supporting carers and families to learn how and when to provide 'just enough' assistance, and when to step back to support independence



### Speech pathologists

Supporting communication and social connections

- Speech and language exercises to improve or maintain skills
- Strategies to support effective communication for independence
- Communication aids (e.g., apps, communication or life story books)
- Advice to create supportive communication environments
- Support and advice with eating, drinking and swallowing
- Education and support to family and carers to facilitate communication



### Physiotherapists and exercise physiologists

Supporting physical functioning

- Exercise to improve balance, mobility, sleep, mood and thinking
- Exercise to reduce the risk of falls

#### Physiotherapy

- Prescribe a walking aid if appropriate
- Help diagnose and manage pain
- Help find types of physical activities that are safe and enjoyable (e.g. dancing, bowls or a gym program)
- Support family and carers with transfers and safe walking



### Psychologists and neuropsychologists

Supporting cognition and psychological wellbeing

- Provide emotional and psychological counselling, strategies and support
- Assess what may underpin behavioural changes
- Cognitive training and strategies to support memory and thinking

More information on the role of these and other allied health professionals can be found at [ahpa.com.au/allied-health-professions](http://ahpa.com.au/allied-health-professions) or from Dementia Australia phone **1800 100 500**.

# Anna's story



**Anna's GP asked Anna what matters to her.** Anna identified cooking and maintaining her veggie garden as things she loved and wanted to continue to do. Her GP contacted My Aged Care to make a referral to **allied health**.



An **occupational therapist** with experience in dementia came to Anna's home to help her with strategies and environmental modifications to optimise cooking and maintaining her veggie patch.



After gaining confidence, Anna mentioned she would like to get back to playing bowls.

A **speech pathologist** helped Anna work on strategies to remember people's names. With Anna's permission, the speech pathologist provided members of the bowls club with communication training.



The community **physiotherapist** helped Anna with exercises for her knee arthritis and provided her with a bowls specific stick to take the load off her knee when playing.

Lawn mowing and shopping assistance through **My Aged Care** made it easier for Anna to continue gardening and cooking.



Anna's mood and frustration improved as her physical and social activity increased.

Anna's daughter was happy knowing that there was equipment to help with stove safety, medication reminders and a personal alarm.



Anna's daughter read the **Dementia Guide** produced by Dementia Australia and looked through the **Forward with Dementia** website ([forwardwithdementia.au](http://forwardwithdementia.au)). From these she was able to implement other strategies to help Anna stay at home.

Anna found peer support (available through **Dementia Australia** and **Dementia Alliance International**) a good way to learn more about dementia and made her feel less alone.