



# After-hours healthcare support planning toolkit

For residential aged care homes  
South Western Sydney 2026

**phn**  
SOUTH WESTERN  
SYDNEY

An Australian Government Initiative

## Acknowledgements

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South Western Sydney PHN (SWSPHN) has adopted this after-hours toolkit to assist in supporting residential aged care homes within the South Western Sydney PHN region which consists of the local government areas of Bankstown, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly.

## Disclaimer

This document was prepared with the assistance of funding from the Australian Government. However, the Australian Government has not reviewed its content and accepts no responsibility for any injury, loss, or damage that may result from the use of or reliance on the information contained herein.

## More information and feedback

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## Document control

Review every (choose most applicable)  1 year  2 years  3 years

Version	Date commenced	Owner	Change description	Review date	Authoring executive
V2.0	January 2026	Manager Integration and Priority Populations Manager	Replaced Aged Care Strengthened Standards with Strengthened Quality Standards	February 2027	Ben Neville
V1.0	May 2025	Manager Integration and Priority Populations Manager	New	April 2026	Ben Neville

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# Background

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) have been funded to support the Australian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. The Royal Commission highlighted challenges faced by senior Australians living in residential aged care homes including difficulties in accessing after-hours care. These issues contribute to poorer health outcomes for older Australians and place additional strain on the healthcare system. As a result, improving after-hours medical support for people living in residential aged care and reducing unnecessary hospital transfers has become a key focus for PHNs.

After-hours care plans aim to guide the management of residents who need after-hours medical care. By including details on general practice and pharmacy opening hours and availability in the after-hours period, these care plans play a crucial role in preventing avoidable hospital transfers.

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing tasked PHNs with creating a resource to enhance and expand the delivery of after-hours medical support in RACHs.

## Streamlining after-hours plans

Helping services create and centralise detailed after-hours plans, including individual plans for residents.

## Guidance for plan development

Offering a clear framework covering clinical governance, workforce management, systems, resident care needs, service access, and infrastructure.

## Mapping current services

Analysing and documenting the after-hours services available in specific local areas or regions.

## Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards alignment

Demonstrating how these interventions align with the Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards, (see Figure 1).

## This toolkit includes:

- A comprehensive guide featuring self-assessment questions designed to encourage exploration of current after-hours plans at both the service level and for individual residents
  - » Includes resources and recommendations for elements to incorporate into after-hours plans
- Two dedicated workbooks to assist RACHs to centrally document after-hours plans for both RACH-wide and individual resident care
- User-friendly templates to serve as quick references to implement effective after-hours support

## The purpose of this toolkit is:

- to assist facilities to identify, document and centralise plans they have in place for the after-hours period both for their service and for each individual resident
- to consider components of an after-hours support plan including clinical governance, workforce, systems and processes, meeting needs and accessing services, and infrastructure
- to explore after-hours support services currently available in the local area or region
- to demonstrate how after-hours support interventions align with the Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards (see Figure 1)

# Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards

## Expectations for aged care workers

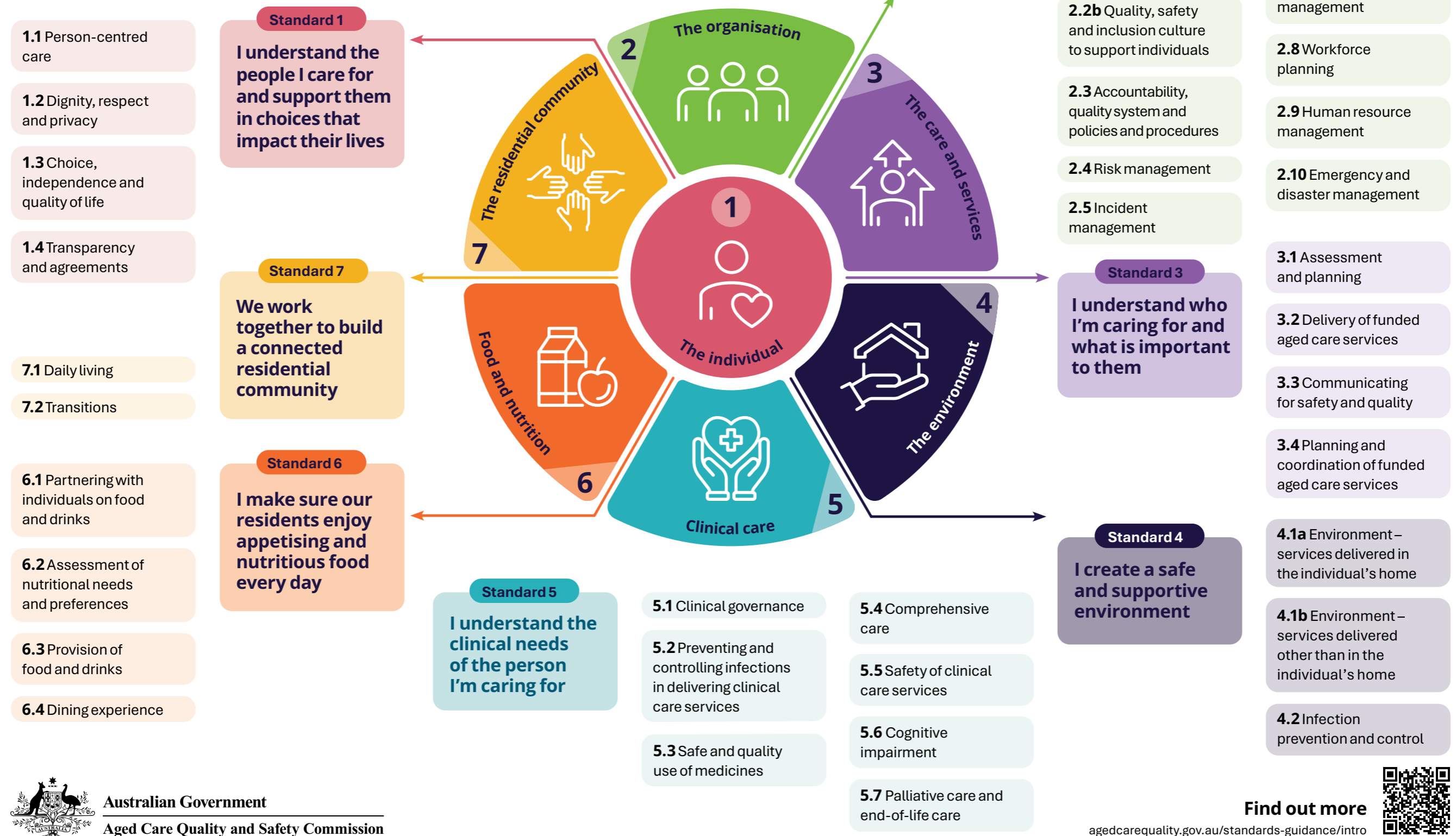
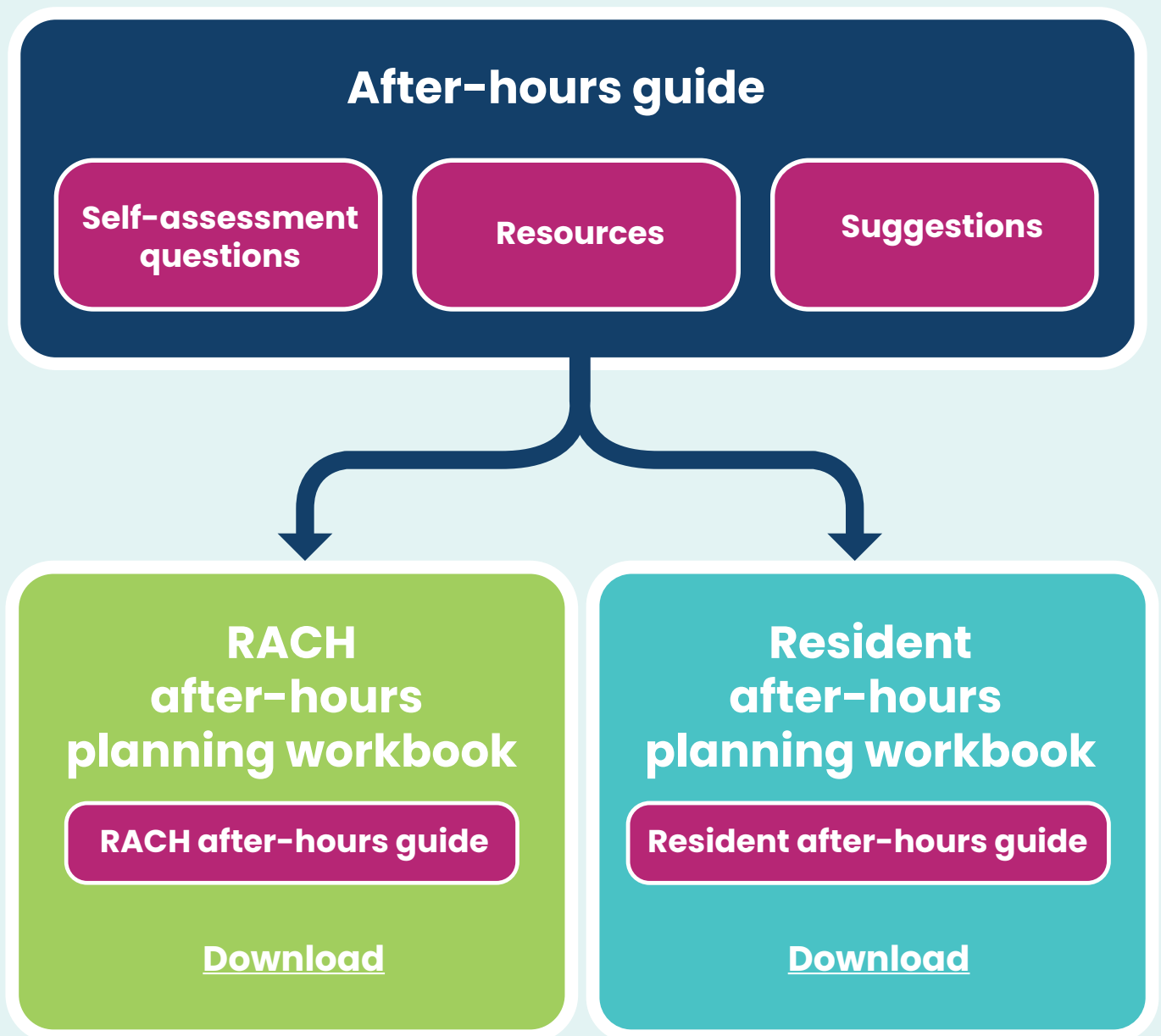












Figure 1: Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards

## After-hours planning toolkit flowchart

This toolkit includes two planning workbooks to guide your decision making. The workbooks are divided into themes which match minimum requirements for inclusion in RACH after-hours plans as recommended by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. These requirements are defined on the following pages. Alignment with the standards is as a guide only.



Requirement	Definition	Standard
<p><b>Clinical governance</b></p>	<p>Clinical governance serves as the backbone for ensuring high-quality and accountable care within health services, including residential aged care homes (RACHs). Clinical governance is the framework which defines the relationships, responsibilities and processes within a health service organisation to ensure safe, high-quality care. It involves collaboration between the organisation, its governing bodies, workforce, patients, consumers, and relevant health authorities. Within RACHs, clinical governance extends beyond documentation of residents' care preferences, it also encompasses policies, protocols and guidelines which regulate both individual staff actions and broader organisational practices to uphold excellent clinical outcomes.</p>	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; width: 100%;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Standard 5</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Standard 1</p> </div> </div> <div style="margin-top: 20px; text-align: center;">  <p>Standard 2</p> </div> </div>
<p><b>Health workforce</b></p>	<p>The health workforce encompasses everyone involved in healthcare delivery, ranging from vocationally trained professionals to specialised medical practitioners. For effective after-hours planning, it is essential to evaluate the capabilities of the workforce within your RACH, including their ability to manage the health needs of residents during after-hours periods.</p> <p>Additionally, broader workforce resources should be considered to address situations involving the deterioration of a resident's health. These external resources may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>After-hours pharmacies:</b> Providing access to medications and pharmaceutical advice outside regular operating hours.</li> <li>» <b>National telehealth hotlines:</b> Offering remote medical consultation and guidance during after-hours periods.</li> <li>» <b>Local general practices with after-hours clinics:</b> Delivering immediate care and support for residents when necessary.</li> </ul>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Standard 2</p> </div>

<p><b>Systems and processes</b></p>	<p>Systems and processes enable a structured framework of principles and procedures designed to guide the delivery of health and social care for residents. These systems and processes encompass essential tools such as handover mechanisms, checklists, instructional guidelines, clinical monitoring tools for tracking condition change as well as well-defined workflows which outline necessary steps when residents require additional care and support.</p>		
		<p>Standard 2</p>	<p>Standard 5</p>
			
			<p>Standard 1</p>
<p><b>Meeting needs and accessing services</b></p>	<p>The location of a RACH and the availability of local services influence how support can be accessed and delivered. When developing an after-hours plan it is beneficial to identify available resources at local, state, and national levels which can aid access to appropriate services such as telehealth, mental health hotlines and pharmacies.</p>		
			<p>Standard 2</p>
<p><b>Infrastructure</b></p>	<p>Health infrastructure encompasses the physical and organisational facilities, spaces, services, and networks supporting the delivery of healthcare to the population. In RACHs, this includes essential services such as electricity and telecommunications, which facilitate the operation of internal systems, including electronic medication management.</p>		
		<p>Standard 4</p>	<p>Standard 2</p>

## Toolkit for after-hours support

This toolkit provides access to a suite of complementary resources designed to support RACHs during after-hours periods.

The after-hours plans and templates are intended to be dynamic documents. The service's and resident's after-hours plans should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they align with current policies and procedures, available services and evolving care needs.

### Disclaimer

This document does not prescribe specific content for after-hours medical support plans in individual RACHs. Instead, it aims to explore the range of available resources across NSW and within South Western Sydney, helping RACHs maximise the use of existing support services.

# How to use the toolkit

RACHs are encouraged to utilise the toolkit in a way which best meets their needs. SWSPHN recommends management allocates time and takes a collaborative approach to identifying strengths and gaps in both the services and individual resident's after-hours plans.

## Step 1

- Read this toolkit and review the requirement definitions and self-assessment questions to ensure a clear understanding of the available resources and planning considerations.

## Step 2

- Complete an after-hours plan (one per RACH). Define your RACH's after-hours period – specifying the timeframe which falls outside usual business hours. Where answers to the following self-assessment questions are clear or existing plans and processes are in place, record them within the after-hours plan.

## Step 3

- Enhance your RACH's plan by incorporating suggested resources, tools and services from this toolkit. Review the **After-Hours Quick Guide** to identify and address any gaps in the plan.

## Step 4

- Complete an individual after-hours plan for each resident using the **Individual Resident's After-Hours Planning Workbook**. Consider whether an Advance Care Directive or other medical documentation would be appropriate. If responses to key questions are clear, integrate them into the after-hours resident plan.

## Step 5

- Enhance individual resident plans by incorporating suggested resources, tools, and services from this toolkit. Regularly review and update these plans to reflect evolving needs.

## Step 6

- Provide feedback on the toolkit to SWSPHN to support ongoing improvements.

Note: Your RACH's designated after-hours period may differ from those of local pharmacies or general practices, so plan accordingly.

Review the self-assessment questions and practical examples on the following pages to evaluate your RACH's existing after-hours plan and individual resident plans. These resources will help identify your RACH's strengths, gaps and opportunities for improvement to ensure comprehensive and effective after-hours healthcare.

# Clinical governance



## Self-assessment questions

Use the following questions to evaluate your RACH's approach to after-hours care and identify opportunities for improvement:

- ✓ What documents underpin the way we work in our organisation. Where can they be found?  
.....
- ✓ What is our process for escalating a resident's care in the after-hours period. Who is responsible for this escalation?  
.....
- ✓ How is the process for escalating after-hours care communicated to all staff?  
.....
- ✓ What plans, processes and structures do you have in place to determine how care is administered?  
.....
- ✓ What role does the resident play in determining how their care is provided if they become unwell after hours?  
.....
- ✓ How can patient and family-centred care be introduced into the after-hours support process?  
.....
- ✓ Where and how are the RACH's and individual care plans recorded?  
.....
- ✓ What and who needs to be consulted when a resident becomes unwell after hours (eg family, advance care plan, management)?  
.....
- ✓ Who decides how and when others are consulted when a resident becomes unwell after hours?  
.....
- ✓ When and how are incidents reported and monitored to manage risk?  
.....
- ✓ What processes are in place to ensure individual and RACH plans are regularly reviewed and updated?  
.....

## What could this look like in practice?

To effectively implement after-hours care planning, organisations should establish clear processes which align with best practice and regulatory standards. Key considerations include:

- ➔ **Following internal processes:** Ensuring that established protocols are followed when a resident becomes unwell after hours.
- ➔ **Charters of responsibility:** Upholding organisational commitments such as the mission, vision, code of conduct, and employee agreements.
- ➔ **Compliance with the Aged Care Strengthened Standards:** Adhering to sector-specific guidelines to maintain high-quality care.
- ➔ **Professional codes of conduct and ethics:** Observing disciplinary standards, including those set by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).
- ➔ **Family communication plan:** Establishing clear procedures for notifying a resident's family when they become unwell after hours, including ensuring emergency contacts are readily available.
- ➔ **Resident and family conversations:** Engaging with the resident and their family to discuss their after-hours care preferences and expectations.
- ➔ **Flexible care approach:** Recognising and adapting to changes in residents' after-hours care preferences.
- ➔ **Cultural and religious considerations:** Incorporating residents' backgrounds and beliefs into their personalised care plans to ensure respectful and appropriate support.

### Suggested resources

Advance care planning is a proactive approach to future healthcare decisions. It enables individuals to outline the medical treatment they would or would not want if they were to become seriously ill or injured and unable to communicate their preferences. This process is particularly relevant to end-of-life care. In NSW, advance care planning consists of two key components:

- » **Appointing an Enduring Guardian**
- » **Completing an Advance Care Directive**

#### Advance Care Directive

An Advance Care Directive allows individuals to specify the healthcare and treatment they wish to receive should they lose the ability to communicate or make decisions. Additionally, they may nominate someone to act on their behalf – this person becomes their Enduring Guardian. To formalise this role, the individual must complete the **Instrument Appointing Enduring Guardian** form. While these processes are not mandatory, they help support person-centred care and are encouraged for consideration by residents and their families.

### Medical goals of care plans

Medical goals of care plans ensure patients who are unlikely to benefit from curative treatments receive care appropriate to their condition. These plans help prevent unnecessary interventions, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and Medical Emergency Team (MET) calls. A flowchart outlining the implementation of a **Medical Goals Of Care Plan** can be referenced for further guidance.

### Professional standards, codes and guidelines

- » Nurses and midwives must be registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia and comply with professional standards to practise in Australia.
- » Residential aged care homes must adhere to the Aged Care Strengthened Standards, as mandated by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, ensuring safe and high-quality care for residents.

### Links

#### Advance Care Planning

[www.advancecareplanning.org.au](http://www.advancecareplanning.org.au)

#### Advance Care Directive

[www.health.nsw.gov.au/patients/acp/Publications/acd-info-form-book.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/patients/acp/Publications/acd-info-form-book.pdf)

#### Enduring Guardianship

[www.service.nsw.gov.au/referral/appoint-an-enduring-guardian](http://www.service.nsw.gov.au/referral/appoint-an-enduring-guardian)

#### Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia – Professional standards

[www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/codes-guidelines-statements.aspx](http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/codes-guidelines-statements.aspx)

#### The Strengthened Quality Standards

[www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-standards/strengthened-aged-care-quality-standards](http://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/providers/quality-standards/strengthened-aged-care-quality-standards)

# Workforce



## Self-assessment questions

- ✓ Who within our organisation knows what to do to care for a resident who has become unwell in the after-hours period?  
.....
- ✓ Who in our organisation can complete a comprehensive physical assessment of a resident who becomes unwell?  
.....
- ✓ What is the role of a non-clinical staff member in the after-hours support plan?  
.....
- ✓ Who within our organisation requires training in the use of any or following: The Yellow Envelope, Emergency Decision Guidelines, ISOBAR, comprehensive physical assessment?  
.....
- ✓ How often do we have refreshers on our training?  
.....
- ✓ Who else might we consult when a resident becomes unwell after hours?  
.....
- ✓ What plan do we have in place with our local GP for when a resident becomes unwell after hours?  
.....
- ✓ What are the nearby facilities which provide after-hours care?  
.....

## What could this look like in practice?

- Identifying and documenting the appropriate after-hours doctors and their contact details.
- Staff appropriately trained in after-hours processes.
- Agreed plans with GPs and alternatives to emergency departments such as home visits with the resident or virtual consultation.
- An orientation for new staff which includes reference to after-hours support processes.
- Plan regular refresher training at set intervals.
- Knowledge of eHealth technology and systems.
- Building staff competency and confidence to manage deterioration in a resident's health and assess what steps need to be taken.
- Easily accessible information about who to contact when a resident becomes unwell after hours and needs support.

## Suggested resources

### Shared transfer of care videos

This series of videos provides perspectives and case examples to support the implementation of shared transfer of care. These videos – produced by Primary Health Tasmania – provide contextualised examples of how healthcare providers and consumers understand quality shared transfer of care.

[www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/resources/shared-transfer-care-videos](http://www.primaryhealthtas.com.au/resources/shared-transfer-care-videos)

### Bridge learning management system

Bridge is the recommended learning management system from Altura Learning. It offers online training for the aged care workforce and offers continuing professional development (CPD) accredited training.

[www.alturalearning.com/content-delivery/bridge-lms](http://www.alturalearning.com/content-delivery/bridge-lms)

### Advance care planning

Advance care planning supports healthcare practitioners, care workers, students, individuals, and substitute decision makers to learn about advance care planning.

[www.advancecareplanning.org.au](http://www.advancecareplanning.org.au)

### Learning and development courses

The Aged and Community Care Providers Association has a range of learning and development courses by **PerformHR** for those working in aged care services.

[ld.performhr.com.au](http://ld.performhr.com.au)

### Palliative Aged Care Outcomes Program – PACOP

The Palliative Aged Care Outcomes Program offers a range of resources for clinicians, residents of RACHs and their families to systematically improve palliative and end-of-life care.

[palliativecare.org.au/project/palliative-aged-care-outcomes-program](http://palliativecare.org.au/project/palliative-aged-care-outcomes-program)

### End of Life Directions for Aged Care – ELDAC

ELDAC provides information, guidance and resources to health professionals and aged care workers to support palliative care and advance care planning.

[www.eldac.com.au](http://www.eldac.com.au)

## Relief agencies

### Healthdirect

[www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)

### Pulse Staffing

[pulsestaffing.com.au](http://pulsestaffing.com.au)

### Medi-Serve Nursing Agency

[www.mediserve.com.au](http://www.mediserve.com.au)

# Systems and processes



## Self-assessment questions

Self-assessment questions for after-hours care in aged care settings:

- ✓ What is the immediate action to take when a resident shows signs of deterioration or becomes unwell after hours?

---

- ✓ What steps should we follow?

---

- ✓ What assessment tools should be used to evaluate residents who become unwell after hours?

---

- ✓ What established plans, processes and structures guide how care is provided in after-hours situations?

---

- ✓ How do we assess whether our after-hours support plan is effective in meeting residents' needs?

---

### What could this look like in practice?

#### Robust record management

- Maintain clear documentation of after-hours services, including assessments and advice given.
- Implement a system for securely capturing and sharing resident health information with their regular GP and/or hospital.
- Ensure real-time access to clinical notes for seamless continuity of care.

#### Planned hospital transfer approach

- Establish defined protocols for escalating care and transferring residents to hospital.

- Streamline communication channels between aged care staff, emergency responders and hospital teams.

- Ensure efficient information transfer to avoid delays and improve treatment accuracy.

#### Accessible contact details for triage and GPs

- Maintain an easily accessible directory with critical contact information for after-hours support.
- Ensure staff know who to call and when, reducing confusion during urgent situations.
- Integrate digital solutions such as electronic alerts or quick-access portals for emergency numbers.

#### Consistent workflow for administering care

- Develop a simplified step-by-step guide outlining key actions after-hours.
- Establish decision-making trees to help staff assess and respond effectively.
- Ensure routine training to reinforce best practice in after-hours care.

#### Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle for continuous improvement

- **Plan:** Define objectives for enhancing after-hours care.
- **Do:** Implement structured procedures, workflows and response protocols.
- **Check:** Evaluate outcomes through incident reviews and staff feedback.
- **Act:** Adjust processes based on data-driven insights and identified gaps.

## Suggested resources

### Clinical guidelines for aged care

#### Infection surveillance in long-term care

- » **McGreer definitions** provide standardised guidance for monitoring healthcare-associated infections in RACHs and similar organisations. This checklist supports consistent infection surveillance practices and research initiatives, ensuring best practice across aged care settings.

[www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu](http://www.pharmacy.umaryland.edu)  
(search 'McGreer checklist')

#### Pain assessment tools pain

- » A range of validated pain assessment scales can be used to evaluate residents' pain levels. For example, the PainChek app.  
[swsphn.com.au/painchek](http://swsphn.com.au/painchek)
- » Resources and tools are available on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website to support effective pain management strategies.  
[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

#### Emergency decision guidelines

- » A **step-by-step framework** for identifying, assessing and managing acutely unwell or deteriorating residents in aged care.
- » **Training** in the use of these guidelines is available from Medecs Learning.  
[medecslearning.com](http://medecslearning.com)

#### ISoBAR clinical handover checklist

- » ISoBAR (Identify - Situation - Observations - Background - Agreed Plan - Read Back) is a structured tool for improving patient safety and reducing adverse outcomes. This method enhances clinician leadership, ensures critical information is relayed accurately and minimises duplication in handovers.  
[www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/isobar-handover-how](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/isobar-handover-how)
- » Training sessions can be organised via Medecs Learning.  
[medecslearning.com](http://medecslearning.com)

- » An ISoBAR lanyard design can be downloaded from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care website.  
[www.safetyandquality.gov.au/node?page=422](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/node?page=422)

### Handover tools for continuity of care

#### Implementation toolkit for clinical handover improvement

Read the Implementation Toolkit for Clinical Handover Improvement from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care website.

[www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/implementation-toolkit-clinical-handover-improvement](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/implementation-toolkit-clinical-handover-improvement)

#### Aged Care Transfer Summary

Visit the Australian Government Digital Health Developer Portal to access the [Aged Care Transfer Summary - Conformance Profile v1.2](#)

# Meeting needs and accessing after-hours services



## Self-assessment questions

- ✓ Who is our primary contact for after-hours primary care support (eg local GP, GP Assist)?

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- ✓ What is our back-up option if we cannot reach our preferred after-hours provider?

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- ✓ Do we have an arrangement with local pharmacies for after-hours support?
  - Which pharmacy is the closest?
  - What are their hours of operation?

---

- ✓ What mental health support services can we access for residents after hours?

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## What could this look like in practice?

- Communication and planning with GPs for the after-hours support they will offer.
- Planning which alternative service to call after hours if required for residents.
- List of local pharmacies open later than usual business hours.
- Back-up national and statewide services that can be used if local services are not available.

## Practical implementation

### Coordinated communication with GPs

- » Establish clear expectations for the level of after-hours support offered by local GPs.
- » Maintain up-to-date contact details for primary and secondary after-hours care providers.

### Planned alternative service pathways

- » Identify back-up options in case the preferred after-hours provider is unavailable.
- » Ensure staff know who to contact and when escalation is necessary.

### Accessible pharmacy information

- » Maintain a list of local pharmacies with extended hours.
- » Confirm arrangements for urgent medication needs after-hours.

### Back-up national and statewide services

- » Have a directory of national and statewide support services for primary care, pharmacies and mental health.
- » Ensure staff are trained to navigate these alternative care options when local providers are unavailable.
- » Healthdirect Service Finder may be used to find services to include in your after-hours plans. [www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services)
- » Visit the service directory on the SWSPHN website for after-hours services which may cover your locality, as well as national and state-based options. This list is for information only. SWSPHN does not maintain or endorse the services listed, and details may change without notice.
- » The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia has a pharmacist advice line operating from 6pm to midnight, seven days per week. It is free for all. This advice line is not for emergencies and does not prescribe. Phone **1300 633 424** (1300 MEDICINE) [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au)

# Infrastructure



## Self-assessment questions

- ✓ What software do we currently use to monitor the resident and share information about their condition?

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- ✓ What tools would we like to access, use and train our staff in the use of, to improve our capacity to provide support after hours?

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- ✓ Is our internet service reliable enough to support telehealth?

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- ✓ Who do we contact if the power or internet goes out?

---

- ✓ Who do we contact if we need IT support? Where is their phone number kept?

---

- ✓ What procedures do we follow if we cannot access IT systems that contain resident information?

---

- ✓ Do we need a separate space to assess and treat residents who need after-hours medical care?

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### What could this look like in practice?

- Telecommunication services and networks available to support practice software.
- Using fit-for-purpose practice management software.
- Internal telehealth infrastructure, eg tablets, phones, telehealth cart solutions.
- Dedicated treatment rooms for residents who require treatment/are unwell and require medical review.

## Suggested resources

A variety of **person-centred electronic clinical management systems** are available to support aged care homes in **administration and management tasks**, including reporting, electronic care planning, medication management, communication, clinical analysis, mobile data entry, communications with families, health monitoring and pathology services.

**Disclaimer:** South Western Sydney PHN does not endorse or promote the use of any particular digital solution for residential aged care homes.

### Available digital solutions in NSW

#### Electronic clinical management systems:

- » Autumncare
- » Person Centred Software
- » Alayacare
- » Leecare
- » Management Advantage (Manadplus)
- » eTools

#### Medication management systems:

- » Medmobile
- » Bestmed
- » Medisphere
- » Medimaps

#### Pathology services:

- » Sonic Dx

#### Communication devices:

- » Spectralink

# References

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## Toolkit feedback survey

This toolkit aims to enhance the capacity of South Western Sydney RACHs in planning for after-hours care.

Visit the link below to share your feedback on this document.

[surveys.swsphn.com.au/n/9A8tpM3](https://surveys.swsphn.com.au/n/9A8tpM3)