

FACT SHEET



RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO AGEING-RELATED DISTRESS

A practical guide for Community Engagement Points

OVERVIEW

- Growing older can bring changes in health, mobility, relationships and independence.
- These changes may affect confidence, identity, daily routines, or a person's sense of purpose.
- Ageing-related distress can impact mood, motivation, sleep, physical health and day-to-day functioning.
- Distress may stem from chronic pain, memory concerns, bereavement, isolation, reduced mobility or changes in living arrangements.
- Older people may feel like a burden, or become unsure about where to seek support.
- Because many older Australians minimise their struggles as "just part of getting older," early signs of distress are often overlooked.
- Ageing-related distress can build gradually and may not be spoken about directly.
- Not all distress requires a formal service response.
- Sometimes the most powerful support is simply being noticed, respected and listened to with compassion.

WHO THIS IS FOR

This fact sheet is for any Community Engagement Point that may come into contact with older people experiencing distress related to ageing.

This includes, but isn't limited to:

- Men's Sheds and women's social groups
- Libraries and community hubs
- Seniors groups and retirement villages
- Community centres and neighbourhood houses
- GP clinics, pharmacies and allied health waiting rooms
- Faith communities and volunteer groups
- Op shops, men's sheds, men's spaces and craft clubs
- Aged care social programs and day respite centres
- Local cafés, social enterprises and community gardens

As a Community Engagement Point (CEP), you may be in a unique position to notice early signs of ageing-related distress.

We are building a Network of Community Engagement Points (local people and places) who can offer a compassionate first response and, when needed, connect people with further support.

Anywhere older people naturally spend their time — and feel safe and welcomed — may become a moment of support.



Network of Community Engagement Points (NetCEP) is a program that enables trusted people and places, like community centres, sports clubs, and local businesses — to offer a compassionate first response when someone is having a tough time. Read more at www.netcep.com.au.



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Ageing-related distress is not always easy to spot. Many older people downplay their struggles or avoid being a “bother.”

As a Community Engagement Point, you might notice:

- Low mood, irritability, withdrawal or increased anxiety
- Comments like “I’m just a burden” or “I don’t know why I’m still here”
- Loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed
- Difficulty keeping track of conversations or seeming easily overwhelmed
- Visible signs of neglect or mistreatment (e.g., unexplained bruises, appearing fearful or hesitant to speak openly)
- Increasing forgetfulness, confusion or distress about daily tasks
- Signs of social isolation — attending alone, staying on the edges, or visiting places without engaging

Any of these may signal that an older person is experiencing distress beneath the surface.

HOW CAN YOU HELP

You don’t need to solve the challenges of ageing — but you can play a vital role by being a calm, respectful and compassionate presence. You can:

- Show warmth and empathy in your conversations
- Listen without judgement if they want to talk
- Acknowledge that what they’re experiencing is real and important
- Encourage gentle connection (e.g., groups, activities, community spaces)
- Keep it simple — you don’t need personal or medical details
- Offer options, not pressure
- If they’re open to it, connect them with the local Short-Term Support Team (STST) for free, confidential, short-term support
- Reassure them that reaching out is a sign of strength, not burden

Early recognition and a warm response can help an older person feel valued, supported and more able to take steady steps forward.

IN PRACTICE

AT A MEN’S SHED

1

Bill, a volunteer at the local Men’s Shed, notices that Frank — a long-time member — has become quieter than usual.

He often sits apart from the group and makes comments like “I’m just a burden now” or “I don’t want to get in anyone’s way.” Bill also realises Frank has been missing some of the usual social catch-ups he once enjoyed.

2

One morning, Bill takes a moment to sit with Frank over a cuppa. He listens as Frank opens up about feeling less capable since a recent health setback.

Bill validates how tough ageing changes can feel and reassures Frank that he’s an important part of the Shed community. He gently asks if Frank would be open to some extra support — something that could help him feel more connected and confident again.

3

Frank agrees. With his consent, Bill connects him with the Short-Term Support Team (STST).

The STST arranges to meet Frank at a familiar, comfortable local spot. Over the next few weeks, they support him to reflect on what’s been weighing on him, explore practical ways to stay connected, and identify longer-term supports — helping Frank regain a sense of purpose, dignity and control.

