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5

and care with loved ones

When Barry Ridge, 87, was diagnosed seven years ago with Lewy body dementia his wife Edith, 87, and family knew that his care needs would steadily increase.

For several years they managed in their home of 25 years with four hours a week of professional help through a government-subsidised Home Care Package.

But as the symptoms of memory impairment, Parkinson's, hallucinations, slurred speech and shuffling took their grip on the former Uniting Church minister it became increasingly difficult to provide the constant care he needed.

Daughter Alison Ridge, 54, describes the past 12 months as a roller coaster ride where every day they were presented with new challenges. Her mother was physically and emotionally exhausted.

"He'd need to go to the toilet but would have trouble remembering there was a toilet let alone where it was," Alison says.

"It got to the stage where the only way we could manage Dad at home was for me to give up my nursing job and move in with Mum and Dad. I wasn't prepared to do that and my family wasn't keen either," she says.

The dementia type means that Barry is mostly aware of what is going on, even if it isn't 100 per cent clear.

They discussed as a family the point at which they would look at residential care before finally making the move a week before

Christmas. A lot of tears are still being shed.

"It has not been an easy decision and it is not something we are 100 per cent OK with, but it is the right decision for Mum and Dad. At the end of the day, it was not being fair to Dad to not give him the care he needs," she says. They chose a facility in north-west Sydney based on word of mouth, affordability and the help that was available through Affinity Aged Care advisors.

"As soon as I heard there was a 32-page Centrelink form I went for the professional help. It is such a minefield," Alison says.

Aged care season Council on the Ageing chairman Ian Yates expects there will be the usual spike in inquiries to aged care service providers, assessors and the government's myagedcare.com.au website this month.

Families have come together for the first time in a while and recognise changes in their parent's health and/or ability to look after themselves.

"It worries us because sometimes it is a genuine recognition and something happens to genuinely help them and sometimes it is fly-in kids who start organising their parents' lives," Yates says.

He urges children looking to help ageing parents to "work hard to talk to them and be really clear about the range of options. Most people would prefer to get help at home and so they need to know there is an increased range of opportunity for help at home and that it doesn't have to mean losing control."

Any conversation about getting some

extra support should be started on a positive note and with focus around increasing independence, says Denise Tomaras, Equity Trustees national manager, Aged Care Solutions. "Chat about what they can do and how it can be supplemented, rather than focusing attention on ways they are not managing. Keep the lines of communication open, flexible – and varied," she says.

Tomaras says older people want to feel capable and maintain their dignity, so treat them like the adults they are.

"Put yourself in their shoes and enable and empower them as much as possible to make their own choices. They want to appear to be coping and will not want to admit to failing health or cognitive decline – or helplessness," she says.

To be eligible for government subsidised home care packages or residential aged care, an individual needs to first be assessed by an aged care assessment team (ACAS in Victoria) via the [myagedcare](http://myagedcare.com.au) website.

Once approved, the government pays a large part of the care costs and individuals make a contribution depending on their income in the case of home care and income and assets for residential care.

Home Care Community-based care is delivered through two main programs, the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (Home and Community Care in Victoria) and the Home Care Packages Programme.

The CHSP doesn't require an assessment and provides entry-level support services for

older people who need some assistance in order to live independently at home.

The HCPP provides more complex, co-ordinated and personalised care at home and offers four levels of care packages to progressively support people with basic (cleaning), low, intermediate and high care (personal care and nursing) needs.

Home Care Packages can help delay a move into residential care provided there is other support from family members and friends or privately funded care workers.

Residential Care Two types of care is offered in residential aged care facilities: permanent care, where care needs are tailored to an individual no longer able to live at home; respite care for temporary, short-term care in a residential aged care facility to support older people and their carers to live at home for as long as possible.

Permanent residential care is provided on a user-pays basis, with the accommodation costs and care fees dependent upon which residential facility you move into, how much income you have, the value of your assets and the services you take up. Respite is available to ACAT approved individuals for up to 63 days a year.

Bina Brown is a director of aged care placement company Third Age Matters.

► **Next week: Residential aged care: How can I afford it?**