

HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH

# Problems with care for older people with dementia in Australia



“Fading Away”:  
How Aged Care Facilities in Australia  
Chemically Restrain Older People with Dementia



# About us

HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
WATCH

We are called Human Rights Watch.



We work to make sure that everyone in the world is treated fairly and gets their rights.

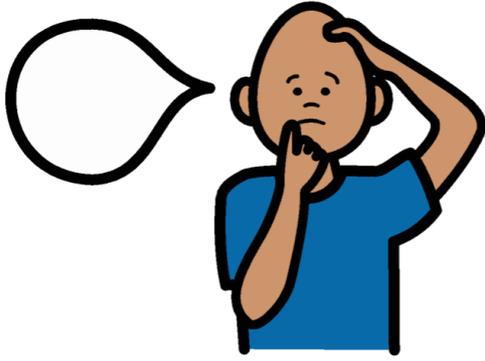
# About this report



This report is about older people in Australia.



It is about older people with a health condition called Dementia and how they are treated.

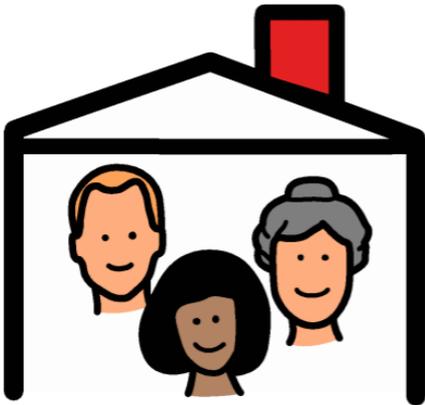


Dementia is a problem that happens in the brain.

It can make it hard for people to remember things, think and communicate.



Dementia happens more to older people.



Many people with dementia in Australia are sent to big homes for older people.



But there can be big problems with the way they are treated.



From 2018 to 2019 we looked into what was happening.

We went to visit some big homes for older people in different parts of Australia.

We talked to:



- Older people in the homes, and their families

- Doctors and nurses

- Staff at the homes

- People who know a lot about care for older people and their rights

- People from the government



## What we found out



People with dementia may sometimes get very upset because of their dementia.



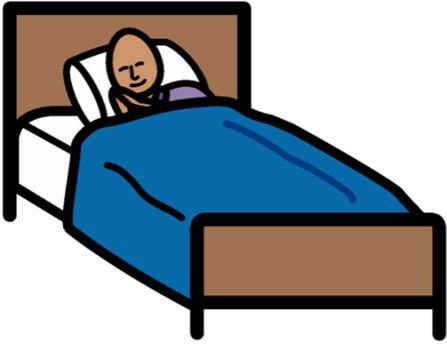
Staff may give people with dementia medicine to control the way they behave and make them quiet.

Staff may give people this medicine even when they do not need it for their dementia.



### **Problems that the medicine may cause**

The medicine can cause big problems for older people and make their lives much worse.

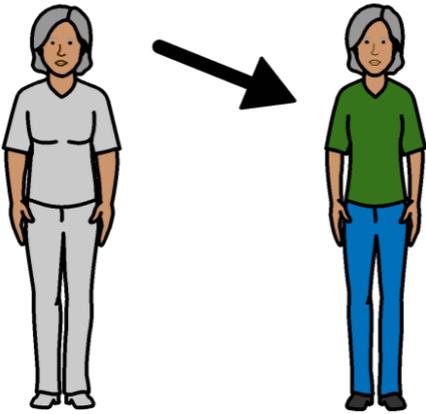


For example:

The medicine can make people very tired so they want to sleep for a long time.

It can be hard to wake them up.

Sometimes people are too tired to talk.



The medicine can make it harder for some people to swallow.

The medicine can make some people lose weight.

For example, because they cannot stay awake long enough to eat the right food.



Some older people used to have a lot of energy and talk a lot before they took the medicine.



When some people stopped taking the medicine they felt good again.

For example, they could talk and stay awake in the day.



But some people still had problems.

For example, they found it hard to swallow or move their bodies.



Some of the medicine may be unsafe for older people with dementia.

For example, some medicine could make older people with dementia more likely to:

- Fall over
- Get ill
- Die



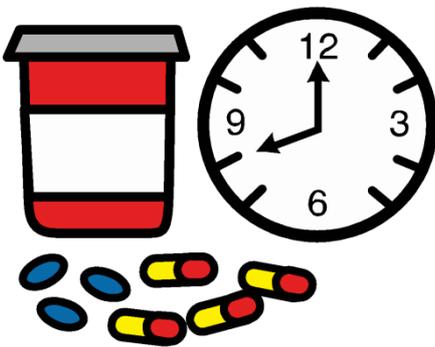
The government in Australia said that some of these medicines should not be given to older people because of this.

## Why staff give older people the medicine

Staff in the homes may give older people with dementia this medicine because:



- There are not enough staff in the homes to support people
- Staff may not have the right training to support people with dementia



This means it can be easier for staff to give people medicine to control the way they behave and make them quiet.



Some older people and families only found out about the medicine afterwards.

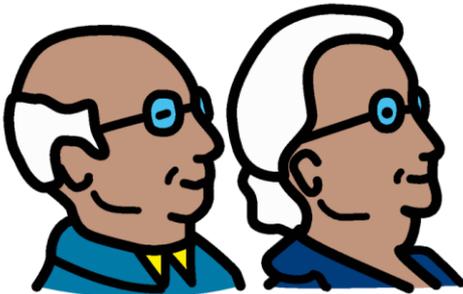


Older people do not need these medicines.

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There are better ways to support older people with how they feel and behave.



For example, other things can help, like:

- Making sure staff get to know the person really well and what they need
- Exercise
- Music
- Finding something else for the person to do if they are upset



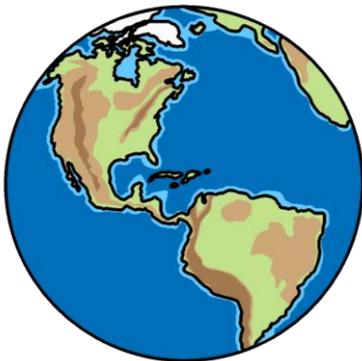
People with dementia in the homes should only get medicine if the medicine helps them.

# What the government in Australia is doing



A new rule about giving older people medicine to control the way they behave and make them quiet. was made in July 2019.

But it does not do enough to stop the problem.



There are important laws in the world about people's human rights.

For example, everyone has the right to:

- Get the health care they need
- Be safe and treated fairly
- Make their own choices about their health and other things
- Take part in the community



The government of Australia should follow these laws.

# What we want to happen next



Staff in the homes should not give older people medicine just to control the way they behave and make them quiet.



There should be a rule to stop this from happening.

The law should say that:

No one is allowed to give older people medicine just to control the way they behave and make them quiet.

- All staff who work in homes for older people should get training about dementia.

And training about how to support people with dementia in a better way.

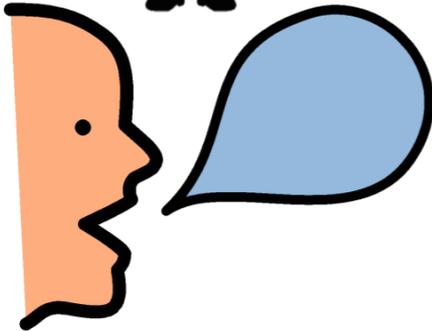




- There should be enough staff at all times to support older people



- The support should be right for each older person with dementia



- There should be easy ways to complain if people are unhappy with the medicine and care they get



- There should be checks to make sure that older people in homes get their rights.

For example, their right to health and to make their own choices