

# 3. Conducting a comprehensive geriatric assessment

## Best care for older people in hospital

### What is it?

Comprehensive geriatric assessment is 'a multidimensional, interdisciplinary diagnostic process to determine the medical, psychological, and functional capabilities of a frail elderly person in order to develop a coordinated and integrated plan for treatment and long-term follow-up'.<sup>1</sup>

It requires us to use a person centred approach to find out what matters to our older patients to maximise their strengths, functional independence and outcomes.

This factsheet will highlight the elements involved in conducting a comprehensive geriatric assessment.

### Why is it important?

- Older people are the major users of hospitals, and often have longer stays, which increases their risk of functional decline.
- Older people with frailty and multimorbidity as well as impaired cognition, poor mobility and incontinence will benefit from a comprehensive assessment.<sup>2</sup>
- Information gained from a comprehensive geriatric assessment allows clinicians to implement a person-centred care plan which can reduce functional decline, support independence and improve quality of life.
- An assessment can also facilitate discharge planning and reduce length of stay, medication use, and the need for admission to residential care.<sup>2,3</sup>
- A comprehensive geriatric assessment is a good time to encourage the older person and their family to consider advance care planning, identify their substitute decision maker and document their decisions.

### How can you carry out a comprehensive geriatric assessment?

An initial risk screen of all older people in hospital aged over 70 years should identify those who would benefit from a comprehensive assessment. This need may change during the patient's hospital stay, as indicated by ongoing monitoring of their health status.

### What does a comprehensive geriatric assessment involve?

- A specialist interdisciplinary team approach involving a geriatrician to undertake a comprehensive assessment.
- Use of validated tools to gather a complete picture of the older person's:
  - medical health
  - physical functioning
  - psychological functioning
  - social functioning.<sup>2</sup>
- Collecting information through observation, open questioning of the older person and their family or carers, and reviewing their medical records to complement your assessment using the validated tools.

### Involve the older person, their family and carers

- Assume the patient is well placed to provide accurate information unless you suspect a medical condition is significantly affecting their ability to do so.
- Consider the patient's health literacy and their cultural and linguistic background. Check they have all their necessary aids such as hearing aids and glasses.

- Communicate clearly with the patient, their family or carer and explain why you are collecting the information and how it will inform their care plan.
- Screen the patient's family or carer for carer stress and refer to appropriate inpatient and outpatient support services such as the Social Work team and Alzheimer's Victoria and Carers Victoria.
- Ask the person what matters to them and what they would like to see happen next.

### What to do with the information

- Communicate the outcomes of the comprehensive assessment to the person, their family, carers and all necessary staff.
- Use the assessment information to inform both the person's care plan and their discharge plan.
- Monitor the older person's health status and evaluate their care plan on an ongoing basis throughout their hospital stay.
- Refer to your health service's recommended template or validated tools to collect information during the assessment.

### Want to know more?

Older people in hospital

[www.health.vic.gov.au/older-people-in-hospital](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/older-people-in-hospital)

[National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards](#), 2011, Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

<http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/>

[A guide for assessing older people in hospital](#), 2004, Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council  
[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/611584DDA451964DCA25785200107D95/\\$FILE/assessing-older-people.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/611584DDA451964DCA25785200107D95/$FILE/assessing-older-people.pdf)

[Alzheimer's Victoria:](#)

<https://vic.fightdementia.org.au/vic/education-and-consulting-for-families-and-carers>

[Carers Victoria:](#)

<http://www.carersvictoria.org.au/>

See Factsheet 11. *References* for references cited in this factsheet.

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Available at [www.health.vic.gov.au/older-people-in-hospital](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/older-people-in-hospital)

## Conducting a comprehensive geriatric assessment in the hospital setting

