

# READY TO LISTEN

## In Sickness and Health

Information for the care partners of people living with dementia who are experiencing unwanted sexual demands

This resource has been written by people living with dementia and their care partners.

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*I made a commitment to care for my partner in sickness and health; and that commitment means a lot to me. He needs me more since he got dementia. But he has become sexually demanding, and that's not like him. He would be mortified if he knew what he was doing. I know it's the dementia doing that; but what can I do to stop it? I want to keep caring for him at home – but I need that part to stop.*

*Thanks, Betty*

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*\*Betty is a pseudonym representing a compilation of experiences of people with lived experience.*

Betty's situation is not uncommon. Dementia can bring changes to intimate relationships that the person living with dementia may or may not be aware of. For example, people living with dementia may say or do things that are out of character, for example, they may become:

- **less interested in sex**
- **overly interested in sex (hypersexuality)**
- **sexually disinhibited (more open) or inappropriate.**

Dementia can also change sexual consent. A person living with dementia may no longer understand the importance of checking sexual consent. Additionally, some care partners may need to work harder to check the person with dementia understands and provides them with consent for each and every sexual activity, including affection and intimacy.

Changes in sexual interest and sexual consent for people living with dementia and their care partners isn't something we have talked about much in the past. That's part of the problem. There is no shame in having a disease that changes the way sexuality, affection and intimacy is or isn't expressed.

Talking to someone about these challenges can lead to practical support that helps care partners to keep on caring for the person living with dementia. Talking about these challenges is not being disloyal to your partner or your family. Instead, talking about these challenges is an important step towards getting the assistance you need to keep supporting your partner and yourself.

This brochure has been developed by people living with dementia and their care partners, to help support the care partners of people living with dementia who are experiencing unwanted sexual demands. Other resources have been developed for people living with dementia and service providers.

The brochure is an invitation for you reach out and talk to someone who can give you practical help.

## Useful information

The services listed below can provide you with practical advice and support. They can help you understand that you have choices, and what they are. They can help you to continue caring for the person living with dementia at home – if that's what you both want.

### Dementia and carer support services

- **GP Advice Line:** Dementia Support Australia has a GP Advice service. GPs can contact the DSA Medical Specialists for clinical advice and support for people living with dementia who are experiencing behaviour change. The GP Advice Service can be accessed through the website: <https://www.dementia.com.au/who-we-help/health-care-professionals/services/gpas>
- **Dementia Support Australia:** support people living with dementia and their care network. When a person living with dementia is experiencing changes to their behaviour, DSA can work with you to understand the causes and develop personalised strategies. Dementia Support Australia's helpline is available 24 hrs a day every day of the year 1800 699 799. Or you can reach out at <https://www.dementia.com.au/>
- **The National Dementia Helpline:** this free telephone support service provides free information and advice 24 hours a day to people living with dementia, care partners and others. Phone: [1800 100 500](tel:1800100500) or visit: <https://www.dementia.org.au/helpline>
- **Carer Gateway:** provides access to free carer counselling and other emotional and practical services and support for carers. Call: 1800 422 737 or visit: <https://www.carergateway.gov.au/>

## Other services

- **1800RESPECT:** is the national domestic, family and sexual violence counselling, information and support service. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) ) or visit: <https://www.1800respect.org.au/>
- **1800FULLSTOP:** confidential counselling for people who have experienced sexual assault and for family members. Call 1800 385 578 any time or check the website: <https://fullstop.org.au/>
- **The Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN):** helps older people understand and exercise their rights, access aged care services and solve aged care problems. Call 1800 700 600 or visit the website: <https://opan.org.au>
- **Beyond Blue:** provides a free phone service 24 hours a day on 1300 22 4636 or visit: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>
- **Lifeline:** is a free phone service available 24 hours a day on 13 11 14 or visit: <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

## The team

This resource was developed for the #ReadyToListen project by a group of people living with dementia and their care partners who are committed to preventing sexual assault of people living with dementia and supporting care partners experiencing unwanted sexual contact.

The team was supported by the [Older Persons Advocacy Network \(OPAN\)](#), [Dementia Alliance International \(DAI\)](#), [Celebrate Ageing Ltd](#) and [Older Women's Network NSW](#). It was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. For more info go to: <https://opan.org.au/training/ready-to-listen/>