



Nelson Marlborough  
District Health Board

*TOWARDS INTEGRATED*



MANAGEMENT FOR OLDER PEOPLE



# Elder-Friendly Guidelines

**A guide for services and businesses in providing an approach and environment that is helpful to older people.**

October 2004

## Elder-Friendly Guidelines

The Nelson Marlborough region, like the rest of New Zealand and many other countries, has an increasingly ageing population. A minority are frail and vulnerable and require high levels of health care and disability support. Most people aged 65 years or over are fit and healthy and live in their own home in the community. This means that it is likely that many services including health and a full range of social, recreational and commercial services are likely to be offered to older people.

These guidelines have been developed with this in mind. Some aspects are specifically for health service providers but most are relevant to anyone who provides a service - from medical to plumbers to retailers etc. They have been developed as a guide to ensuring that the approach and environment is conducive to appropriate service delivery.

### **Ethnicity & Cultural**

It is important to remember that there is cultural diversity among older people. Do not make assumptions. Give consideration and respect and act with humility. Ask the older person or their family/whanau if there are cultural needs and 'how we can assist'.

## Who should use these guidelines:

- **Health Service providers**
  - Hospitals
  - Residential Care facilities
  - Outpatient services
  - Community services
  - Primary care services
  
- **Businesses that offer services to older people**
  - In your facility
  - In a persons home

## Apply what is relevant to your service/business

Please note: Health service specific comments will be shaded

## How should these guidelines be used:

**These considerations are important in showing respect to people of any age and are especially important for older people.**

- **Challenge yourself by asking**

- What can this service/ business learn from these suggestions?
- What can staff learn?
- What changes can be made to improve?

- **Practical Suggestions**

- Consider your manner and language
- Consider business cards, signs, pamphlets, mail (font & language)
- Consider your processes – your initial contact, waiting time and environment etc.
- Use them when developing your staff orientation programme
- Use them to develop a customer service focus and continued staff development

# Language/Communication

## Important Considerations

## Actions and Behaviours to Address

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### Introductions

Introduce yourself and explain your role.

### ID badge

Should be worn where it can be easily seen. The print needs to be as large as possible.

### Vulnerability & security – re home visiting

Phone/send letter before your visit.  
Suggest a family member/ whanau/ friend/neighbour is present at the time of your visit.

After your visit leave a contact card

### Use a persons correct name

Ask the person how they want to be addressed. Do not presume to use their christian/given name.

Use Mr or Mrs and surname unless advised otherwise by the person.

Correct pronunciation is important.

Do not use 'love', 'dear', 'petal' etc

### Dignity

Do not hurry. Take time to communicate.  
Do not 'humour' or 'talk down' to the person. Do not show impatience.

### Speak to the older person

Look at the person you are speaking to.

### Include family members appropriately

Gain permission from the older person

### Beware of information overload

Be concise but no acronyms

No jargon

(e.g. say broken hip not fractured NOF)

Use plain language e.g. say 'will phone' (or write) not 'will contact'

Reinforce main points with brief, written information

# Language/Communication

## Important Considerations

## Actions and Behaviours to Address

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### Encourage clarification Understanding

Ask if there are any questions. Check they have understood (open question)

### May have sensory impairment

#### Vision

Use large print for written material.

Good contrast – dark print on light background.

Ensure appropriate glasses are worn.

#### Hearing

Minimise background noise e.g. turn off radio, use a quiet room.

Face the person as you speak to them, standing about one metre apart.

Clear, normal speech at medium pace.  
(No need to shout or talk too slowly).

#### Telephones

Consider the provision of enhanced amplification telephone for use by those with hearing impairment.

For hearing aid wearers try the 'T' position.

#### Answer phone message

#### Ensure the equipment allows a clear recording

Check the equipment is of good quality.

#### Ensure the message is clear

Speak clearly and a little slower when leaving a message and repeat the telephone number (give the number twice).

Check your own pre-recorded message (preferably while wearing ear-plugs) to see if it is clear enough.

# Process

## Important Considerations

## Actions and Behaviours to Address

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### Getting the pace right

Avoid rushing.

Treat the person's body gently - may have, e.g. arthritis, fragile skin.

### Information

Give frequent explanations of what is being done.

Be concise.

No jargon

(e.g. say broken hip not fractured NOF).

Reinforce main points with brief, written information.

Encourage questions.

### Privacy

Ensure privacy for the person when giving information.

(e.g. – when carrying out treatment).

Have frequently asked questions typed out to hand to the older person.

### Glasses, hearing aid, dentures, walking aid

It is important that:

**dentures** are in,

**glasses** are clean and are worn,

**hearing aid** is worn, turned on and functioning

**walking aid** - named

all of these items travel with the person wherever they go.

# Environment

## Important Considerations

## Actions and Behaviours to Address

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### Parking

Good directions/signage to get to parks.

Width of park – wide enough to open doors fully and access walking frame/wheelchair.

Sufficient number of designated ‘disabled’ parking spaces.

No sloped surfaces or curb near to “disabled” parking.

Non cobbled pathways.

### Entries

Seats for rest stops.

Adequate lighting at night

No heavy doors. Automatic doors not too swift/forceful.

### Lighting

Sufficient

Well lit access areas

Even lighting (minimise changes from shade/dark to light).

## Environment continued

### Important Considerations

### Actions and Behaviours to Address

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#### Distances within buildings

'Rest stops' available – stable chairs strategically placed

#### Toilet access

Good signage

Easy access (no heavy door/steps, have wide access etc)

Sufficient space to turn around with a walking aid.

Height of toilet (too low is hard to get up from)

Rails to be sited in appropriate position

Easy use locks and door handles

Make it clear how to get help if needed.

#### Comfort

Ensure the person is warm and comfortable

(e.g. is able to change position frequently)

#### Food and Drinks (if no fluid restriction)

Ensure the person has drinks offered as an older person may not feel thirsty (even when de-hydrated)

Must be able to reach/see/chew their meal/ drink.

## Environment continued

### Important Considerations

### Actions and Behaviours to Address

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#### Floor Surfaces

Ramps – if available- should have rails

Should be even – few changes of surface.

Non slippery

#### Wheelchairs for general use

Well maintained, no punctures, oiled, brakes work and no parts missing.

Easily accessed.

(desirable - a variety of widths with adjustable arms and leg rests).

#### Height of Furniture and fittings

Low beds/trolleys for access on/off independently.

Stable chairs, a variety of heights - must not be too low.

Chairs with padded arms, level seat, upright padded backs.

Chairs with somewhere to rest walking stick/crutches.

#### Tidy Environment

No clutter/obstacles/loose mats





A copy of this guideline is available on our website:  
[www.nmdhb.govt.nz](http://www.nmdhb.govt.nz) or contact the Project Manager

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