

# In-house pharmacists essential for aged care

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Medicines are the most common treatments used in healthcare, especially for older people. But when they're not used correctly, they can cause serious and sometimes fatal outcomes.

Now, new research from the University of South Australia shows that regular visits from pharmacists to aged-care residents can reduce problems due to medicines and improve [health outcomes](#).

Working with 248 aged-care residents across 39 aged-care facilities in South Australia and Tasmania, researchers assessed the effectiveness of a [pharmacist](#)-led intervention.

Over 12-months, pharmacists met with residents every eight weeks to record any new illnesses or conditions and to monitor any adverse effects or symptoms. They also reviewed participants' medicines and monitored cognitive and [physical health](#).

The study found that regular pharmacist visits were important.

At each visit, pharmacists found 60 percent of residents had problems with their medicines. They made 309 recommendations to change residents' medications or monitor their medications with a view to change; and, for almost two thirds of the population, recommended reduced medicine use.

Importantly, the study showed a significant change in participants' cognition scores, with those monitored by pharmacists, less likely to experience negative effects.

Lead researcher, UniSA's [Professor Libby Roughead](#) says the research highlights an acute need for additional pharmaceutical support within the aged-care sector.

"Medicines are the most prescribed health intervention for [older people](#), yet they're also the catalyst for concern for many aged-care residents," Prof Roughead says.

"People living in aged-care homes rely on the support and care they receive yet previously, residents have only received a [medication review every two years](#) or earlier if required.

"Our research highlights the need for personalized and continuing support by pharmacists more frequently."

Globally, the [cost of medication-related harm exceeds \\$40 billion every year](#) with evidence reporting that between [5-20 percent](#) of aged-care residents experience an adverse medicine event every month. More than half of this harm is considered preventable.

The Australian Government [recently announced](#) funding for on-site pharmacists to improve [medication](#) management in government-funded [aged-care facilities](#), commencing in January 2023.

Professor Libby Roughead says this essential step forward is welcomed and says the move should encompass holistic pharmaceutical support, with pharmacists focused on efforts to reduce harms from medicines.

"It's important to realize that the new on-site pharmacists will not only need to monitor and review medications, but also be able to recognize the early onset of medicine-induced deterioration, such as changes in a person's cognition or activity, so as to prevent harms such as injurious falls or delirium.

"More comprehensive support will not only avoid the many medicine-induced health issues currently experienced by aged-care residents but may also help in preventing frailty and declining cognition."

**More information:** Elizabeth E Roughead et al, Effect of an ongoing pharmacist service to reduce medicine-induced deterioration and adverse reactions in aged-care facilities (nursing homes): a multicentre, randomised controlled trial (the ReMInDAR trial), *Age and Ageing* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/ageing/afac092](https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afac092)

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