



'Achieving closure'

A short guide for older people and families

Improving outcomes when care homes close

Authors: Jon Glasby, Kerry Allen, Matthew Bennett, Tom Douglass, Ayesha Iqbal, Philip Kinghorn, Catherine Needham, Humera Plappert, Tracy Roberts, Magdalena Skrybant, Debs Smith, Denise Tanner, Beck Taylor, Annie Topping, Lucy Ward, Shazia Zafar





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Why care home closures matter

We all want to feel safe, settled and cared about when we are older, and we want the same for our families. Living in a care home is expensive, and we have high expectations of the care that is given. But sometimes care homes close (perhaps because of financial problems, the state of the building, poor care or lots of other reasons). This can affect the well-being of people in care homes, their families and the people who work there.

Despite this, there is very little research to guide this important process. Very few research studies have talked directly to older people and families to find out about their experiences and the things that matter to them.

If care homes have to close, we want this to be managed well, so that older people are supported, families are reassured, and care staff are helped to find new work and stay in care roles.

Our research

While we've done some previous work in Birmingham, we wanted to understand more about what happens when care home close and what works best. Our national research:

- Asked Directors of Adult Social Services to complete a survey, providing information about what is happening across England and how they support older people at such potentially stressful times. We also have information about the number of closures over time in different parts of the country.
- Worked in four different areas of England to explore local closure processes, talking to older people, families, care staff and social workers about their experiences and what would improve these.
- Collected data on what happens to older people whose homes close to see how their health and well-being are affected over time.
- Explored what happens to people who work in care homes after closures and the impact this has on the care they give, their financial security and their future work.
- Explored the cost implications for residents, family members, staff and wider society.

A short section at the end of this guide provides more information about the research and how to find out more, including possible sources of support.

Different types of closure

Some of the closures in our research happened in an emergency, with very little time before people had to move out.

Sometimes closures were planned over a number of months or even years. These could often feel very different.

However, even 'planned' closures can catch people by surprise. This can be because plans change over time, or because it's not possible to tell everyone until later on in the process:

- Sometimes there can be problems emerging over time and lots of things going on behind the scenes to try to help a home stay open – and there can be lots of legal issues. Often these have to stay confidential. Senior leaders also worry that telling people that a closure is one possibility may worry people unnecessarily if the closure isn't then needed – or might even make it more likely to happen (for example, if the people who invest in the care home hear rumours and get nervous). This can be really frustrating for older people and families, but is also really difficult for everyone else involved (for example, the local Council, the home owner and care staff).
- Planned timescales can sometimes change, often through no one's fault. For example, there might be delays in the construction of a new building, or a sudden change in interest rates, which can change the finances of the home owner very quickly. Some people would like to know if there are plans which then change; other people would prefer to wait till there are very definite timescales that are unlikely to change.

What we found

We learned lots of things to help when homes have to close in future.

This guide sets out what we think are five important things for older people and families to know and think about.

This might be a journey for you and your family, where you:

- Find out about a closure.
- Make choices about where you will live next.
- Prepare to move.
- Settle in to somewhere new.

We hope the five short sections below help you through this process.

Stage of the journey	Our themes
Finding out about a closure	Closures are really stressful and upsetting – it's understandable that such a big change leads to people feeling upset, worried and angry
Making choices about where next	Things that people who've been through a closure say might help
Preparing to move	Focus on the things you can control Time is really important
Settling in	Things can sometimes get better

1. Living in a care home that is closing can be really stressful and upsetting

- it's understandable that such a big change leads to people feeling upset, worried and angry

In all the different closures we studied, older people and their families were often very, very distressed.

We found that going through a closure could sometimes feel a bit like a process of bereavement, with the loss of a familiar place and friendships.

Overall, we concluded that:

- Older people who are moving permanently into a care home usually assume that it will be their home for the rest of their lives. It is to be expected that people are angry and upset if the care home closes unexpectedly.
- These feelings can last for some time – even if there are lots of people trying to help, such as family, care staff, social workers and other people from the Council.
- It's also very stressful for family members, who might also feel let down, angry and anxious.



All these feelings are very understandable.

It's worth checking that the Council has up-to-date contact details for everyone involved and knows about how and how much you want to be involved in plans for what happens next.

"I woke up this morning and I'm there saying to myself 'What do I do? I've got to start all over again'."

Older Person

"She just wants to die now – to put it bluntly – when back in shall we say the weeks before the closure notice she was a happy person, content with her lot."

Family

"Yes, it has affected me emotionally. I had two days of crying for no reason, I couldn't have told you why, and it's just one of those things."

Older Person

"I just think at the time she was upset, quite upset, she couldn't understand why she couldn't go back there."

Family

"It didn't feel very dignified... in the first place, the upset, that distress that my Mum – and I'm sure other residents went through – that they're going to have to move at their age, I mean, my Mum's 81, some of the other residents were over 100, so having to move at that time of your life is not nice, particularly when they've been told 'oh the care home's closing, you're going to have to move in the next six weeks', that's very real isn't it?"

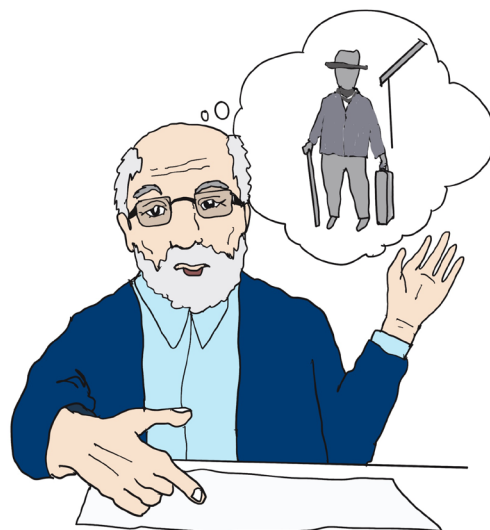
Family

2. Other people who have gone through closures have identified things that might help

Even though being involved in a care home closure is often very unsettling and distressing, there are things that people who've gone through closures have said helped them.

Here are some of their tips and suggestions:

- Talk to family, care staff and social workers about what's happening, including how it's making you feel.
- Ask for further information or for someone to explain it again if you didn't understand the information they've provided so far.
- Ask for information in the language that works best for you if you don't speak English as a first language.
- Families can ask if there's extra support available if the older person has dementia.
- Ask to visit potential new homes or to look at photos and read about them.
- Find out if friends within the current home can move to the same home together, if this is what everybody wants. Ask if members of care staff who support you well can also move with you. This may not be possible, but it is definitely worth asking.
- Paying for care homes is really complicated – ask the Council for clear guidance about the fees of any new home. Families can get independent advice if they are not sure how all this works.
- It's the 'little things' that make a real difference (someone knowing where you like your handbag, how you like your tea, your favourite foods, what you like to do etc). These aren't really 'little things' at all – they're important – so think about things that will make you feel at home. This could be useful in deciding which home to move to. It is also important to tell staff in the new home so they can help you feel settled and comfortable.



3. Focus on the things you can control

If they're happy in their current home, lots of people feel angry about a decision to close the home. Often, residents find that they can't change this decision – and, as we've said, it's OK to feel angry and upset about this.

However, there may be things that you have some control over – and it might help to focus on these.

For example:

- If a provider is building a new care home and moving people across, can friends and staff stay together?
- Can you be involved in the design of the new building in some way, what bedroom you have or have a say over the decoration or the furniture?
- What kind of timescales are there for you to make decisions, and is there any flexibility with these?
- Can you visit new homes to see what they're like before you choose where to go?
- Would it work best for you and your family if a new home was in a particular local area?
- What do you like about where you currently are? Are there things you'd change if you could? What implications does this have for where you live next?



These are all things that you may or may not be able to influence, but it's worth thinking what would work well for you, asking what's possible and asking why not if the first answer you get isn't as positive as you'd hoped.

This can be difficult, so you could ask someone to support you to ask questions, if this would be helpful.

4. Time is really important

Throughout our research, time was really important – but different people often wanted different things:

- Some people wanted as much notice of a closure as possible, so that they could try to come to terms with it emotionally and start working through the practical implications.
- Others didn't want to feel that things were 'dragging out', so would rather only know fairly close to the closure, so that there is less time for them to worry and feel anxious.
- Some people would like the closure to take place over a specific and determined period of time. Others would like the process to move at the pace of individual residents (and so to 'take as long as it takes').



All this means that the people planning the closure have a hard job trying to design a process which works for as many different people as possible – recognising that everyone is different, and that some things probably won't work well for everyone.

All this makes it important that residents:

- Listen to or read any information they're given.
- Ask questions about anything they don't understand or agree with.
- Talk it over with someone they feel comfortable talking to – whether this is their family and friends, care staff or a social worker.
- Ask if they feel they need extra time or extra support to get ready for a closure.
- Seek external advice if necessary (details of Age UK's advice and support line are included at the end of this guide, for example).

While a possible closure might feel really scary or not feel real – putting things off or hoping it won't happen probably just delays things, and is unlikely to help in the long run.

5. Things can sometimes get better

Sometimes a care home is in an old building that can't be brought up to current standards, and it gets replaced by a new building. Sometimes this can be much nicer than the previous building.

Sometimes staff in a new home are even better than in the current home.

In some situations, a home may have to close if the care it provides isn't of the right quality – and the care in a new home might be better.

Some people are really worried about what a new home will be like, but then find that they settle well, and end up really liking it.



All of these things depend on the circumstances, and it can be impossible to know in advance. However, some older people who've moved to a new home – when the process has been well managed and if care was less than optimal at their previous home – have found that their health and well-being improved.

This isn't by any means guaranteed, but it might mean waiting to see what happens and keeping an open mind until you know more about the new home (difficult though this is).

In our previous research, we've described this as a 'game of two halves' (to use a football phrase). Going through a closure is usually really upsetting, yet sometimes the outcomes in the long-term can still be positive (at least for some people and as far as we know). This doesn't take away from how distressing the closure can be when you first hear about it – and these feelings can last a long time.

If you don't settle and remain unhappy after a period of time, it's important to speak to someone (your family or a social worker) about looking for other options.

About the research and how to get more information

Our research

If you want to know more about our research, please go to: www.birmingham.ac.uk/achievingclosure.

This website will have all our research, reports, guidance and training videos, including:

- A research report
- Links to academic articles we have written
- A national policy guide, based on 'ten top tips' from older people, families and social care staff
- A training video for anyone who is interested (and for care staff who may not always have access to free training materials)
- A copy of this guide
- A guide for care staff

Some of the academic articles may be in journals which charge for access. However, everything else is free to anyone who is interested.

Our research was funded by a national research funder called the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR). Although they gave us the money to do our research, the things we say in our guides and other reports are based on our findings and on our own views – not those of NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.

Advice and support from Age UK

For advice and support about services for older people, including issues relating to care homes and social care more generally, please look at the Age UK website (<https://www.ageuk.org.uk>). They have lots of information about care and support via <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/>, as well as a free advice line on 0800 678 1602. Lines are open 8am-7pm, 365 days a year. There are also 120 local Age UKs, and you can find out more about their services at www.ageuk.org.uk/services/in-your-area/.



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Edgbaston, Birmingham,
B15 2TT, United Kingdom
www.birmingham.ac.uk

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