

# Care and Support

## Personal Alarms



Personal alarms are devices which can be used to alert a contact (such as a neighbour, relative, friend or a monitoring service) that there is an emergency situation. They can play an important part in assisting elderly people and people with a disability to remain living independently in their own homes and in supporting family carers in their role.

### Types of alarms

There are two basic types of alarms:

- Non-monitored
- Monitored

#### Non-monitored

There are two sub-groups. They can be whistles, battery-operated alarms which emit a high-pitched shriek when activated, flashing lights, etc. These usually have a limited range and rely upon someone who is willing to help being within hearing range.

Automated telephone systems (sometimes called autodiallers) which dial preset numbers, are not connected electronically to a monitoring centre and thus rely on a person willing to help being contactable on the preset number(s). Automated telephone systems dial preset telephone numbers that are programmed into the system and then deliver a pre-recorded message. It is important to ensure that the message is clear and audible and that any information contained is up to date.

These systems rely upon the user having a network of people who they trust, that they can call for assistance. The system continues to call the programmed numbers until the call is answered. In most systems, there is a feature called 'acknowledging'. This requires the person answering to press a particular button to let the system know that the call has been answered by a person, not an answering machine or voicemail.

Some systems may also send written messages by SMS to pre-configured contacts.

#### Programming 000 into your autodialler:

Although it is possible to program 000 (triple zero) into an autodialler (along with other numbers), it is important to be aware that 000 calls from automated devices, such as autodiallers, cannot be guaranteed a response from the emergency services.

This is due to the fact that the 000 system requires a person, not an automatic message, to make the 000 call, because the emergency services operator must be able to discuss and confirm the details of the emergency with the caller. Calls to 000 are answered in a two-step process. It is particularly important during the second stage of the call that the caller's details, including their address, can be clearly and

accurately provided to the emergency service operator.

To ensure a call for emergency assistance is correctly and promptly attended, the emergency services must be able to verify that there is an actual emergency, the nature of the emergency, and the address of the emergency. Without a validated condition and verified address, a response cannot be guaranteed.

Because of the length of time that it takes for a call from an autodialler to reach the relevant emergency service organisation, part of any pre-recorded message may have already been played by the time it reaches the emergency services operator. This then makes it very difficult to determine the nature of the call, to identify the caller, and most importantly, to ascertain the caller's address, which is essential for an emergency response.

If you are looking for an autodialler system for a person in your care consider the following:

- If the person has limited mobility, consider features such as fall detection that will activate the alarm to warn you even if the person cannot make contact.
- If the person has dementia, consider features such as automatic tracking, which can help locate a person unable to communicate their position or condition.

#### Monitored

These generally consist of a base which receives signals from a pendant or other device worn by the user. The base may be connected to a landline, or it may include a SIM card and use the mobile phone network.

The signals are received at a monitoring centre and a pre-agreed response is put into action after confirmation that the alert has not been accidentally activated. Centre staff will usually have some medical history of the client and access details if the residence is secured. This information can be passed onto the ambulance staff as required.

In addition to the cost of the unit and possibly an installation fee, a monthly monitoring fee is normally charged.

#### Assistance with selection

The **Independent Living Centre (ILC)** has a range of working models of personal alarms that the public can see in operation. Allied health professionals are available to provide assistance, and can discuss the most appropriate system to suit your needs, as well as provide detailed product information and supplier details. To discuss the systems or make an appointment time with the

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Independent Living Centre (11 Blacks Rd, Gilles Plains) **tel. (08) 8266 5260 or 1300 885 886**, **email [ilcsa@sa.gov.au](mailto:ilcsa@sa.gov.au)**, **website [www.ilcaustralia.org.au](http://www.ilcaustralia.org.au)**

#### Personal AlertSA

This South Australian government initiative (formerly Personal Alert Systems Rebate Scheme - PARS) helps frail older South Australians at risk of falls or medical emergencies to obtain a personal alert system, allowing them to live independently in their own homes for longer.

There are specific age-related, clinical, social and functional criteria that applicants have to meet to be eligible for the rebate. The rebate is currently only available to people who meet all the criteria and are 75 or older (65 years for Aboriginal people).

The rebate is only available for certain alarm systems and will only be paid to applicants who obtain approval **before** purchasing an approved system from a recognised supplier. A list of approved models and suppliers is available from the government's website; it can also be provided upon request by the scheme's staff and by Catalyst Foundation. Contact the Independent Living Centre for assistance with determining which of those systems will best meet an individual's specific situation.

People who are eligible for a Commonwealth-funded Home Care Package level 2, 3 or 4 and have been assigned a package (of the required level or an interim package) are not eligible for the rebate. They may wish to consider including the provision of a personal alert system in their package. People in receipt of the lowest levels of funding for aged care and support services (Commonwealth Home Support Program or Home Care Package level 1) will continue to be eligible for PASRS.

Some retirement villages may have arrangements in place for the provision of alarm services as part of their contract (residents should check with the village). In such cases the resident is not eligible for the rebate.

To speak to someone regarding your eligibility for the Personal AlertSA rebate and to obtain the necessary application forms contact the scheme, **tel. 1300 700 169**, **email [pasa@sa.gov.au](mailto:pasa@sa.gov.au)**. **Website: [www.sa.gov.au](http://www.sa.gov.au)**.

Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service) can assist with information and with completing application forms.

**Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)** - DVA Gold Card and White Card holders may be eligible to receive a free personal alarm under the Rehabilitation Appliances Program. Your needs will be assessed by your doctor or a health professional, such as an occupational therapist. Their referral and prescription will be sent to an appropriate supplier or

DVA to arrange issue of the item to you. For further eligibility information contact the Program on **1800 550 457**, email **[RAPGeneralEnquiries@dva.gov.au](mailto:RAPGeneralEnquiries@dva.gov.au)**, or visit **[www.dva.gov.au](http://www.dva.gov.au)**.

#### Personal alarm suppliers

For more specific product and supplier information on personal alarm functionality contact the **ILC**, **tel. 8266 5260 or 1300 885 886** or visit **[www.ilcaustralia.org.au](http://www.ilcaustralia.org.au)**.

#### The National Broadband Network and personal alert systems

The introduction of the National Broadband Network (NBN) telephone services may have implications for people who use personal alert systems connected to a landline. These systems can work under the NBN but you will need to ensure that, when the NBN begins rolling out in your area, your telephone provider (new or existing) is aware you have an alert system and can support its continued operation. In some cases, new equipment or extra wiring may be required.

To assist you in this process it is recommended that you register your address immediately, either online, on the NBN Co Medical Alarm Register page (**[www.nbnco.com.au/learn/device-compatibility/medical-alarms](http://www.nbnco.com.au/learn/device-compatibility/medical-alarms)**) or by calling **1800 227 300**. To register, you do not need to wait until the NBN is being rolled out in your area.

Call your alarm provider for advice on keeping your services working.

Equipment connected over the NBN will not work during a power blackout. Consider having an alternate form of communication handy (such as a charged mobile phone).

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