

17 December 2021

## Carers Australia's response to the New Residential Aged Care Accommodation Framework

### Consultation Questions

1. *What do you see as good design characteristics in residential aged care?*
2. *see included in the design standards to support quality of life for senior Australian?*

Ideally new residential aged care design should incorporate the following features:

- Ensure the physical safety of residents, including adequate ventilation and temperature control.
- Provide a comfortable and, to the extent possible, homelike environment.
- Innovative design of smaller spaces, both indoors and outdoors, where residents can otherwise socially interact with each other and their families and friends rather than visits being confined to residents' rooms or large communal spaces.
- Larger spaces where residents can engage in group activities.
- Visitor friendly, including having adequate parking spaces for visitors.
- Connect the kitchen areas with dining areas to enhance the dining experience (for example, the smell of the food being cooked) and kitchens designed so that residents can engage in the preparation of food if they wish.
- Adequate room size and door spaces and outdoor pathways for residents with power chairs to manoeuvre.
- Adequate room size for residents to bring some personal possessions, including furniture such as a favourite chair, a desk, a small cabinet or a fish tank.
- Overhead lighting adapted for people with failing eyesight and to minimise disorienting shadows for people with dementia.
- Individual rooms with ensuite bathrooms.
- Incorporate the features outlined in the dementia friendly design principles outlined in the Discussion Paper in facilities catering to people with high care needs.
- New facilities located close to places where communities congregate rather than on the outskirts of communities. There is also evidence of the benefits in locating the home near schools or childcare centres to provide residents with the opportunities to spectate or interact with children.

While all these features are important, we would like to emphasise in particular the elements of visitor friendly design. The COVID experience of residential aged care lockdowns starkly demonstrated the negative impact on both residents and their families and significant others of losing contact. Visiting should be a relaxed and accommodating experience which will encourage longer and more frequent visits.

For a more detailed analysis of we would recommend the Victorian Department of Health publication *Designing new residential facilities* <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/dementia-friendly-environments/designing-new-residential-facilities>

### **Promoting Dementia Friendly Design**

- 3. How should the design standards consider dementia friendly design?**
- 4. Should dementia friendly elements of design be highly prescriptive or principles based?**
- 5. Are there tensions between good design for dementia-friendly environments and other characteristics, such as accessibility or infection control? How can these tensions be managed?**

The 10 Principles for Dementia Friendly Design included in the Discussion Paper provide excellent guidance for dementia friendly aged care residences as does the Victorian Department of Health publication referred to above.

It is not as if these design features are particularly expensive or awkward to implement

It is also our view that the dementia friendly design principles would benefit residents without dementia, with the one exception that people without dementia might prefer a degree of visual stimulation which is counter-productive for people with dementia.

We would agree with the Aged Care Royal Commission caution that, if these principles are simply to be regarded as best practice and there is no degree of compulsion to mandate their use, there is a risk that many providers will only partially implement them or not implement them at all as is currently the case

### **Diversity**

- 6. How should the design standards consider the specific needs of diverse groups to ensure residential aged care facilities are inclusive?**

In terms of the design principles for people from diverse backgrounds (except perhaps for dedicated facilities for residents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background) the general design principles identified above would continue to apply, perhaps with some special feature adaptations for aged care homes devoted to particular cultural groups. Catering to the special needs of people from particular cultural backgrounds tends to focus on diet, respect for cultural differences, and the ability for residents to communicate in and be communicated to in their first language.

Spiritual spaces within aged care residences need to be available for the practices of all religions. If the organisation running the residence happens to be faith-based and chooses to have a dedicated

space for the practice of their religion, another suitable space must be made available to residents of other faiths.

### **Small Home Environment**

#### ***7. What would be the key challenges in moving to a small home based model for providers?***

We strongly support this model of residential care but have no particular expertise in the barriers to establishing them.

We realise that smaller home-based models may not be able to incorporate some of the features of the preferred model for larger residential care facilities – for example, multiple, separate spaces for social interaction or sufficient parking spaces for visitors. But they should be able to be adapted to most of them.

At a general level, we would think economies of scale, the need for capital funding to build or modify existing properties and the need to change some local government zoning restrictions present some of the more obvious challenges.

If the Government favours this model, we would expect that it would make capital funding available to encourage expansion in the number of these homes, and perhaps consider providing zero interest loans to support the purchase of land and construction or capital upgrades and renovations for rental properties.

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