

Home Care Services in Seniors Housing Communities

Purpose built, well designed, seniors housing communities are in demand. By June 2021, it is estimated that around 1.9 million of the population of NSW will be aged 60 years and over. This number is expected to grow to around 2.4 million, or nearly 1 in 4 of the population of NSW by 2031.

As made abundantly clear via the Royal Commission into Aged Care our ageing population is increasingly reluctant to enter aged care facilities with many seniors choosing to live in purpose-built communities, such as retirement or vertical villages. This has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic with many seniors in aged care living in isolation.

“Thousands of residents in aged care homes that have not suffered outbreaks have endured months of isolation which has had, and continues to have, a terrible effect on their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing” Commissioner Lynelle Briggs AO

All stakeholders, including seniors and their relatives, health departments and the NDIS, benefit from these communities.

There is one catch – availability and in the right location. A major impediment to the development of seniors housing communities is the availability and cost of suitable land in areas with ageing communities. Planning departments and councils can help by facilitating and increasing the supply of land in suitable locations to allow the construction of affordable accommodation.

One of the advantages offered by many seniors housing communities is on-site home care services especially when compared with what is offered in a suburban home. Zinnia, collectively have over 40 years-experience in home care services and have seen the benefits firsthand.

Benefits of home care services for residents

On-site home care services at a seniors housing Community such as Jardin is likely to enable seniors to stay independent commonly for longer than seniors who remain in the family home and they receive more comprehensive care.

Health, wellbeing and independence

Having on-site services supporting residents to maintain their independence improves their quality of life. Rather than residents experiencing a rapid decline in mobility and requiring assistance with daily living tasks, they are encouraged to remain active and take a proactive approach to health and wellbeing.

The benefits of remaining healthy and active may include:

- **Not needing to go into residential care – or delaying entry**

The Royal Commission on Aged Care’s final report, *Care, Dignity and Respect* (2021) ‘confirmed over and over again that people do not want to live or die in institutions’.

Grant Thornton partook in a report with the Property Council of Australia which stated that entry into aged care is on average five years later than from a family home. Adding four or five years of independence to a person's life has the dual benefit of prolonging a person's quality of life and reducing costs to the community. The full report can be [Downloaded Here](#).

- **Reduced social isolation**

During the COVID-19 lockdown experience in 2020, the Royal Commission found that aged care residents, their families and staff all suffered. Thousands of residents, even in homes that did not experience outbreaks, endured months of isolation that had an ongoing impact on their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Even in normal times, external home care staff come into the family home, support the resident and leave. With a centralised on-site service, staff can spend more time with residents and understand their interests and capabilities. They can also connect them with other like-minded residents.

Staff also ensure residents are aware of, and engage in, community-based activities that support their lifestyle. The majority of seniors housing communities have on-site social activities that the resident doesn't need to leave their community to enjoy. For example, a resident could attend a fitness class or a book club.

- **Fewer falls and less depression**

Over 55's communities are designed to reduce the risks of falls and depression. A 2014 report by Grant Thornton, *National overview of the retirement village sector*, commissioned by the Property Council found through various studies presented that people in over 55's communities have fewer falls and are less likely to suffer from depression than seniors in the family home.

This report states that 93% of the 184,000 people who live in retirement villages are happier than they were before they moved there.

Comprehensive care

The benefits of comprehensive care include:

- **Consistent, flexible and preventative services**

Care staff in seniors housing communities are able to offer a more comprehensive and flexible service than is available in the family home. Delivering home care services in a centralised location achieves a greater level of consistency in care-service staffing, ensuring residents have a regular, dedicated team of care workers familiar with them and their needs.

Residents have access to shorter care visits throughout the day or evenings for check-ins, medication support and assistance with daily living tasks. These short visits help

develop relationships and provide reassurance to residents. Carers are able to identify any changes in residents' capability early and connect them with appropriate services.

- **Support to navigate the aged and health care system**

For over 60's and their family and friends, navigating the aged and healthcare systems can be overwhelming, confusing and frustrating.

Senior's housing communities are able to provide residents with access to independent advice, advocacy and guidance which helps them understand and access services and funding when needed. They can help vet, select, oversee and manage high-quality, reliable service delivery, saving residents time and money and reducing the risk of inadequate service provision.

- **Responsive services**

Having on-site home care support services enables high-level responsiveness and staffing consistency for care recipients. This ensures that clients requiring urgent services can be prioritised and responded to quickly.

- **Continuum of care**

Senior's housing communities can facilitate the flexibility and coordination of care. Nursing, care and allied health staff are available on-site, and the on-site management team can arrange for providers to attend for multiple appointments at a time.

More customised care costs and more services

Residents generally receive better value for their money from customised, on-site services than in the family home:

- **Efficiencies of scale**

When home care agencies provide services in the family home, they often have a minimum engagement time (e.g., 1–2 hours). When services are provided on-site, they can provide customised packages (e.g., 30 mins) to ensure residents' package funds are efficiently utilised.

With on-site home care services, residents can pool their resources to receive more services. For example, instead of two residents receiving escorted shopping separately they can go together and save 50%.

Example: Jane has a Level 4 home care package (valued \$52,250/year) she requires support with medication prompting every morning, shopping once a week, washing/laundry once a week.

- **Scenario 1 Home care Delivered into a Zinnia / Jardin Community:**

Medication prompting: Zinnia coordinate Jane's medication prompting with 3 other residents with home care funding needing short visits for daily medication prompting, so Jane and the other residents are only charged for 15mins of service (\$12.50 each day/87.50 each week) from package).

Shopping weekly – Zinnia coordinate for Jane to go shopping with another resident, so they share the cost of accompanied shopping at \$25 each/week plus mileage expense halved \$8.25

Washing/laundry once a week – Zinnia arrange laundry service to collect and return to Jardin \$30/week

Weekly total: \$150.75

- **Scenario 2: Homecare Delivered into the Suburban home:**

Medication prompting – The minimum service duration is 1 hour so Jane pays for 1 hour of service each day for her medication prompting (\$50.00 each day/\$350 each week).

Shopping weekly – Jane pays \$50/week plus full mileage expense \$16.50

Washing/laundry once a week – Jane pays for two hours care service to get washing done, hung out and brought in. \$100/week

Weekly total: \$516.50

- **Some services are no longer needed**

Some services required in the family home are not needed in a seniors housing community. For example, garden and house maintenance, home modifications and specialist equipment.

- **Allied care services are more readily available**

With gyms, pools and other community facilities available to residents, delivering services such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy is easier and more efficient.

Benefits for the community and government

As outlined in the Grant Thornton Report people often stay in over 60's communities longer than they would in their own home, reducing the pressure and costs on residential aged-care beds. There are also staffing benefits and peace of mind for family and friends.

Cost savings from delayed entry into residential aged care

Reduced costs benefit the entire aged-care sector and reduce pressure on residential care. The Grant Thornton report says:

'While there has been some research on retirement villages delaying the entry of their residents into aged care, quantitative research on broader impacts and savings to the healthcare system is sparse. There are however some logical correlations that can be drawn between the services and supports offered by a retirement village, and cost savings to government. The analysis completed estimates that **in addition to the \$1.98 billion saved through delayed entry to aged care, there is a potential \$177 million saved through residents requiring fewer hospital and GP visits, earlier discharge from hospital, and better mental health.**'

The reports states that the annual cost to the federal government of an aged care bed is \$52,000 (2013), so a five-year delay saves \$260,000 per person. Applying these figures to an over 55's community of approximately 200 units (300 residents) equates to a saving of \$78,000,000 over a five-year period.

Reduced pressure of the home care waiting lists

Having services on-site helps relieve pressure on home care wait lists as residents can be advised and supported to connect to other options either while they wait, or instead of waiting.

Options may include:

- applying for Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) support
- paying privately for services based on village management recommendations
- accessing additional government-funded, short-term support including post-hospital discharge packages (Compacts, Transpac) and emergency support and respite, e.g., Carer Gateway.

Staffing efficiencies and reduced travel

Regular work on-site has advantages for attracting and retaining staff.

When delivering a higher volume of care services to one site, services can be delivered more cost efficiently as care staff are not travelling to multiple sites (travel costs) and volume discounts can be negotiated for residents (a cleaner can service multiple homes at one address instead of travelling).

Increased safety and security

There is also an increased level of safety and security for residents in over 55's communities, providing reassurance for family and friends that their loved ones are safe.

Benefits are supported by research

As well as the Grant Thornton study, the benefits of providing home care to over 55's communities is supported by other research, including the following two studies.

- **Retirement Villages Care Pilot**

An Australian Government initiative, the Retirement Villages Care Pilot (RVCP) trialled the provision of flexible care packages into 45 retirement villages in metropolitan, regional and rural locations across Australia.

The pilot demonstrated the economies of scale and the flexibility of care that comes with integrating a dedicated team of nursing and attendant staff into a housing community. The evaluation found that RVCP packages deliver a more comprehensive range of services than Community Aged Care Packages. RVCP packages are also able to deliver service levels ranging from a low-level Home and Community Care (HACC) up to a typical Extended Aged Care at Home package, or higher.

[Download](#) the report.

- **IRT pilot study**

IRT is a community-owned organisation that provides housing and care for older people in NSW, ACT and Qld. In 2014, IRT conducted an investigation of the IRT retirement community landscape.

The pilot aimed to:

- enhance understanding of the benefits of retirement communities
- provide guidance to the retirement living industry
- establish a basis for further research.

The pilot found that residents in retirement living communities required access to services later than residents in the wider community because they maintained their independence for longer. This also delayed entry to residential aged care.

[Download](#) the report.

About the authors

[Stacey Baker](#) and [Jen Berryman](#), founders of Zinnia, have more than 40 years' professional experience in the aged-care services sector. Before founding Zinnia, Stacey and Jen jointly ran a homecare business supporting thousands of clients. They learnt that older Australians want a home that enables them to continue living within vibrant communities, with services and care at their fingertips when they need a hand.