

Baby boomers impact AC development

Baby boomers, land prices, and new building standards are combining to change the face of aged care housing, according to Melbourne architectural firm, ClarkeHopkinsClarke.

THE BABY BOOMER generation looks set to transform the AC sector with a population spike that will bring with it wealthier individuals and couples, greater demand for quality services, and an energy and vibrancy for the best quality of life possible that has not been seen before among elderly residents. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that the need for residential AC facilities will continue to grow over the long term.

In 2002, people aged 65 years and over comprised 13 per cent of Australia's population. By 2101, they are expected to comprise between 29-32 per cent of the population.

While this predicted strong demand for residential AC facilities will be a blessing for those in the industry, just how they manage the needs and expectations of baby boomers with the regulations and practicalities of running

a facility will prove a challenge.

In Victoria, the Department of Human Services' (DHS) view is that all levels of care should be provided for by each ACF. Residents who come into the facility as low care can remain in the same place when their needs shift to higher care. However, the addition of high care can be an issue for low care residents who might feel that their living patterns could be potentially disrupted by those with high needs, for example, residents who develop dementia.

"This is certainly one of the challenges for operators, and they are dealing with this in part through good design," says Barry Aitken, partner at ClarkeHopkinsClarke. "As part of the retirement village model, we can create different environments within the development that are more secure and minimise the likelihood of higher care residents becoming disruptive."

Aitken's first AC project was 20 years ago when he designed Rose Lodge in Wonthaggi, Victoria. He has worked with operators throughout the AC industry including hospitals, high care residential units, independent living, and low care residential units. Aitken says the immediate challenge for the industry is the introduction of new building standards for ACFs.

"Many of the urban developments designed in the 60s and 70s don't meet standards, and when the new 2008 building guidelines come into effect, these older facilities will fail to meet the guidelines. DHS regulations require smoke and fire compartmentalising, sprinkler systems,

minimum room sizes and minimum amenities," says Aitken. "Converting existing facilities will be expensive and we're already seeing owners selling their properties and building from scratch in less urban areas."

Compounding this are accreditation and certification issues as well as the need for planning approvals. For example, proposals for double story facilities are difficult to get through and are often compounded by resistance from local residents.

Aitken cites the \$5.5 million Dalkeith Development in Traralgon which ClarkeHopkinsClarke is currently working on. Faced with an outmoded building and not enough additional land to meet the impending new standards, Dalkeith have put the urban site up for tender, and have already broken ground on a new development that offers an impressive array of facilities and services for low care residents. These include a cinema, coffee shop, sports bar, private dining room, sitting room, card room, lounges and a secure courtyard.

In the words of one developer, Greg Gunn, CEO of Carrington Aged Care, "the reason for the increase in AC developments in regional areas is because the

figures for this type of development in city areas just don't stack up. At a minimum of \$100,000 per bed, not including the land, plus the additional costs of meeting the 2008 regulatory building guidelines, the return on investment is simply not there for development in city areas."

This move towards increased AC development in regional areas brings with it a range of social issues. Having lived in suburban homes and developed strong ties to the community, residents may be faced with relocation and displacement issues.

"One of the key issues is distance from other family members," says Greg Mundy, CEO of Aged and Community Services Australia. "People in AC facilities can be lonely, so visits from family and friends are important."

Addressing this aspect of the move to regional areas, Aitken says a holistic view of the individual's experience is important.

"Design can, in part, address the social issues by creating independent living

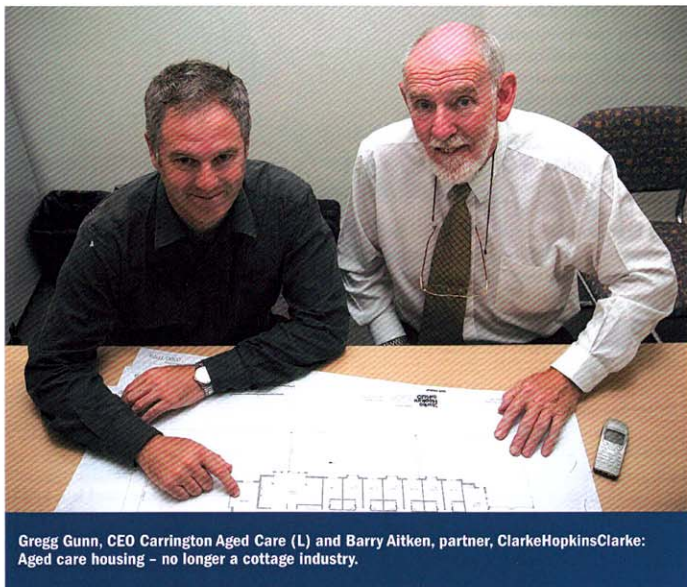


The Mews: A high care facility "where design can, in part, address the social issues by creating independent living spaces together with spaces that encourage socialisation".

spaces together with spaces that encourage socialisation," he explains. "When this is combined with a good management team that organises regular social events and provides good levels of support services, the transition to the new living arrangement becomes smoother."

For those who can afford to stay in the city, high-end facilities will continue to be developed but not without considerable effort on a number of fronts. As Gunn says, "the AC industry is not the cottage industry it once was".

"The only option for AC providers in the city is to get a mix of high and low care, or to provide an 'extra service' option which enables the developer to take a bond."



Gregg Gunn, CEO Carrington Aged Care (L) and Barry Aitken, partner, ClarkeHopkinsClarke: Aged care housing - no longer a cottage industry.

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