

Everything in its place



as it represents a place of solace and should be familiar and domesticated. The feel of this space is essential to creating a sense of home, where the care they need is available. This nurturing environment can be designed using neutral colour palettes, personalised furniture, decorations and non-clinical fixtures.

The size of nursing units and number of residents can dictate social connectivity and the ability of staff to provide optimal care. An interactive design in which private rooms are clustered around activity zones and common areas facilitates greater interaction amongst residents. Pleasant environments that are easy to navigate ensure residents can be social when they want or need to be.

Good natural light and views outside can connect residents to changing seasons, the time of day and urban surroundings. These design elements can also contribute to easy passage for residents with varying mobility. In any community, a landmark, a sign or a view assists with navigating and internal movements. These connections have been linked with maintaining mental health and are therefore essential to the creation of appealing and welcoming communities.

Designing places for a resident outside their room, such as cafés, cinemas, libraries, conservatories, family dining places, performance areas or spots for visiting children to play, boosts any community by expanding residents' experiences. For example, Millhaven Lodge in suburban Victoria has an entrance café used by residents, visitors and the surrounding community. The large, multipurpose hall can accommodate the whole residential community and can be used for events such as visiting school performances and dances.

The space is big enough to accommodate a stage and incorporates a kitchen to allow for event catering. This central and vibrant space can be used by the whole community, in line with Millhaven Lodge's not-for-profit, community-owned status.

Millhaven residents have memory boxes outside bedrooms to display things that give an indication of their life before they entered the facility. This serves a double purpose – as an identifier for the residents' rooms and as a conversation point.

The residents are the reason the lodge exists as a community where support is offered to those who need care. It's a philosophy that underpins the design of the resident and community spaces. One of the key objectives in the facility's design was to enable residents to spend time with their visitors outside of their bedrooms. This is more consistent with how they would have lived prior to moving into Millhaven Lodge – and of course it is more comfortable for visitors to sit in a lounge than on the resident's bed.

So to recap, the resident, operators and staff should all benefit from good design. But it is the resident who must remain central in all planning and design decisions.

Future articles will include more details about how community involvement, such as the Pakenham community's input into design and facility operation in Millhaven Lodge, can contribute to achieving a perfect balance in a vibrant community. ■

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Quality design puts residents at the centre, whilst incorporating all stakeholders' needs.
By **Cath Muhlebach**



The ability to create real and supportive communities requires an intimate understanding of the experiences of all users and how this knowledge can shape design. Such skills are becoming even more important in our increasingly regulated and competitive environment.

A well-designed aged-care facility must balance the differing needs of all people, including residents, staff, visitors and those who attend the facility to receive care. So a strategic approach to the planning and design of aged-care and independent living facilities has the potential to deliver many long-term benefits to residents, staff and operators.

The most popular and vibrant facilities incorporate not only high-quality architectural design but also the high occupancy levels essential for financial stability. The reality is that the bottom line counts. The balancing of the books, operating costs such as basic utilities, the time and energy of staff, and suppliers must be successfully managed and accommodated in the design.

Often quality design and architecture is the seed for both economic and reputational growth. Staff retention is an important design consideration in these intensely people-oriented environments. It ensures the quality of care is maintained and that a sense of home is created. Design is also an essential element in workforce planning. Architecture is a recruitment tool. New designs, refits and refurbishments present a priceless opportunity to attract and retain staff.

Operators and architects should collaborate to create vibrant communities that establish a sense of place and belonging. Considered design can reduce the unease residents feel as they transition into a less familiar environment. Quality design can present them with a variety of lifestyle options in which they can establish new social connections.

Each individual room is important to a resident and their family,