

Operations

Design to support healthy ageing

Aged care providers are continuing to enhance buildings and amenities to keep up with design trends and space with the demands of residents, writes SANDY CHEU.



ACH Group residents at Milpara embracing the Healthy Ageing Approach



Feros Care Wommin Bay's newly refurbished café

The designs of aged care buildings are constantly changing, says Ryan Loveday, director at Fulton Trotter Architects. “There is no single correct design that these buildings are trying to meet – the goal posts keep moving,” Loveday tells *Australian Ageing Agenda*.

The design of residential aged care has changed over the last 10 years from large-scale facilities to towards smaller-scale and domestic-style models.

“Surveys indicate the majority of building stock in the sector is 20-30 years old and struggling to keep pace with current operational demands,” Loveday says. “The aged care industry has undergone profound change over the last few decades and it is asking a lot of any building to keep pace with those changes.”

New models of care, changing resident expectations and a growing emphasis on creating social connections are among the drivers of the need to renew buildings, Loveday says. The Silent Generation, which refers to individuals born between 1928 and 1945, had modest expectations of housing, whereas the next cohort – the Baby Boomers – expect more, he says.

“The Baby Boomers are a vocal, demanding and discerning group, and they are making the choices both for their elders right now and for themselves in the near future,” Loveday says. “The quality of light, space, finishes and feel of resident rooms and common areas are critical to those decisions. Older facilities with a single ensuite shared between rooms just won’t cut it.”

The need to build social connection is a response to loneliness and social isolation, which is a “secret curse” of this era and more so among older people, Loveday says.

“One of the key drivers of much of our renewal work has been in creating more

opportunities for casual social interaction and an overlap with the activities of the outside world.”

Fulton Trotter Architects worked with residential and home aged care provider Feros Care to refurbish its Wommin Bay facility in Kingscliff on the north coast of New South Wales from 2017 to 2019.

The refurbishments aimed to meet the changing needs of the market including shorter residencies than before and improve social connections between residents, says Robyn Schneider, chief operating officer of residential at Feros Care.

“The existing village was over 20 years old and it was generally in good condition but ... the decision was made to upgrade the interiors of the resident-focused spaces in order to meet the expectations of residents and their families. Schneider tells AAA.

The refurbishments included upgrades to kitchens, dining spaces, building entries, lounge rooms, corridor spaces, lighting and fire safety. A new café, external dining terrace, raised gardens and backup power generator were also added, says Schneider.

The new communal spaces encourage social gatherings, support resident wellbeing and improve their social connections, she says.

“The refurbishments support the wellbeing and social interactions of residents by focusing on the communal spaces and providing opportunities for social gatherings, dining and catch-ups with family and other residents in a multitude of spaces,” Schneider says.

Materials, finishes, colours, furniture and artwork were selected to create a sense of home, rather than an institutional feel, she says.

“The village is a place that the residents call home and the buildings and outdoor spaces and design needed to reflect that,” Schneider



Ryan Loveday



Robyn Schneider



Leah Trotta

says. “The introduction of the new café, which has been an absolute dream in the community hub, also created the space for residents to carry out celebrations as well as catch up with their friends and family.”

The upgrades support Feros Care’s Byron Model of Care, which moves beyond the person-centred approach and focuses on assisting seniors to be independent, active and socially connected to their families.

“The model of care plays an integral part in the refurbishment and is always important for us to ensure that the focus remains on our residents, who are the core of every decision,” she says.

Schneider says the greatest challenge faced during the refurbishment was carrying out the works on a live site without displacing residents.

“This required detailed planning as well as flexibility and adaptability from the entire project team to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of staff, resident and visitors was a top priority at all times,” she says.

“The key to it is to keep residents, families and staff well informed. It is imperative to obtain and welcome feedback during the planning process because it is their home.”

Supporting healthy ageing

South Australian aged care provider ACH Group has also recently refurbished homes to promote

resident wellbeing and socialisation. ACH Group’s Milpara in Rostrevor and Colton Court in McLaren Vale have been upgraded in line with the organisation’s Healthy Ageing Approach.

The refurbishments aim to ensure the physical infrastructure enables residents to remain as physically, mentally and socially active as possible in a home-like environment, says Leah Trotta, general manager of service delivery at ACH Group.

“All of our upgrades efforts at those two sites have been aimed at helping people to come together, to catch up, to build strong connections, to remain physically active, to have safe ways to get into the site and safe ways of getting back out into the community,” Trotta tells AAA.

At Colton Court, the front entry has been refurbished to include an undercover area so people can be comfortably dropped off and picked in any kind of weather while Milpara received a new gym and café.

“Both upgrades are aimed at supporting people to live well as they age whether that is through enjoying the space, the contemporary look and feel of the environment or having those all-weather spaces to be able to get into a car or a taxi as you’re entering or leaving the site. That helps with the connection back to the community and to bring community in,” Trotta says.

The enhancements were requested

by residents to enable them to live well as they age, she says.

“Resident feedback suggested that having an opportunity to enter the facility in a way that enables them do that as independently as possible is important and so that is behind the Colton Court upgrades,” she says.

The gym plays a key part in supporting residents to engage with healthy ageing activities, Trotta says.

“Upgrading that aligns with the resident and community wishes to use that site in the most independent, restorative active way and both sit with our model of care,” she says.

The refurbishment process has enabled ACH to develop an understanding on the importance of resident engagement and co-design, Trotta says.

“We’ve also learnt just how broad reaching the connection of residential aged care facility is in the community and the various roles that it plays in people’s lives.”

Trotta recommends providers engage with community when undertaking refurbishments.

“Understanding the broader influence that the site has on the community and that the community has on the site, and reaching out to stakeholders as broadly as possible in forming a view about what site redevelopment might be able to achieve is important,” she says. ■



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