

A rush to accommodate

Residents in aged care are demanding more for their money; here's how providers and builders are working to change with the times and capitalise. By **Dallas Bastian**

The individuals entering aged care change from year to year, as do their needs and expectations, and new buildings that house them are following suit.

Mark Grigsby, director of smith+tracey architects, says, "We have certainly experienced an increase in project activity at both ends of the development spectrum – both [in] major project feasibilities and in building refurbishment project activity since the change of government last year."

He says aged-care providers are ensuring that compliance upgrades are conducted, and reviewing their portfolios with a focus on accessing the government's *Living Longer Living Better* reforms, which include incentives to improve existing buildings through refurbishment.

Thanks to significant changes to compliance requirements, building codes and operational practices, "residences constructed in the 1990s are now effectively obsolete", Grigsby explains. "Major refurbishment allows a re-setting of these buildings to greatly improve the living experience and workplace environment."

With this in mind, the interior appeal of a building and the associated lifestyle experience are being recognised more than ever before, he says. Clients want more innovations in construction methods, more choices for accommodation offerings, efficient delivery of care and a focus on the family's needs.

Grigsby adds that ageing in place remains a strong focus, and that a mix of accommodation types is, in fact, being offered. "This includes the incorporation of community facilities and retail opportunities to greater improve the interaction and engagement with family and community," he says.

As developers scramble to meet the demand, *Aged Care Insite* takes a closer look at some of the construction and design trends for 2014.

AMENITIES

Sam Verco, project manager of HY Building Solutions, the national division of Hansen Yuncken, which specialises in fit-out and refurbishment, says there is a greater expectation that facilities provide creature comforts.

"Residential amenity is seen as a critical factor to attracting new residents and securing accommodation bonds," Verco says. "For example, upgrading of residents' bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms is now considered essential in most facilities."

Whilst previously many aged-care facilities had shared bathrooms and bedrooms, the new model of care focuses on safety, privacy and comfort, with accommodation that reflects a home. For larger sites housing more residents – which Verco says are becoming increasingly common – catering, laundry and maintenance services are often centralised, as opposed to being outsourced or shared across multiple sites.

"Larger and better-equipped facilities to provide these services are often required; with kitchens, laundries and sluice rooms being built.

"Often there is a large, central kitchen or laundry facility, sometimes now with smaller [mobile] food serveries, laundry collection rooms, cleaning cupboards, linen storage and smaller sluice or pan rooms provided, with local macerators or pan sanitisers installed to serve adjacent residential rooms."

APARTMENT-STYLE LIVING

The principal of ROTHELOWMAN Architects, Chris Hayton, says there has been a move towards high-amenity apartments and away from traditional retirement and aged-care facilities.

He says there is a growing market for an older demographic seeking lower-maintenance housing with greater security and a community environment



close to local amenities, such as shops and places of leisure.

"Apartments that appeal to this market are bigger, and consequently more expensive, than apartments being bought by the investor market or younger owner-occupiers," Hayton says.

These apartments are designed with wider doors and corridors, clear pathways to entrance doors and showers, strengthened walls to allow for grab rails and larger parking spaces. Hayton says these aspects need to be thought about from the outset and cannot be retrofitted.

COMMUNITY SPACE

"Development of a sense of community in these buildings is critical; the design of high-quality communal spaces is very important," Hayton says. "Use of these communal spaces needs to match residents' preferred choices."

Rod Burger, director of Grindley Construction, also says there is a common client emphasis on quality of finish in community spaces, adding providers are articulating their brand differentiation clearly by using unique finishes and interior design.

"We are seeing a clear move towards the use of private outdoor spaces, private dining areas, fireplaces and library areas with the incorporation of luxury finishes such as stone," he says.

SOUND

The acoustic separation between residential units is another area many facilities are improving.

"Historically, the traditional separation between two residential units paid scant regard to the transmission of sound between shared walls," HY Building Solutions' Verco says. "This now presents a challenge to the builder, requiring great attention to detail and precise programming of trades, deliveries and staging across occupied residential aged-care sites."

CSR Gyprock's national designLINK manager, Angus Kell, says "Adequate acoustic control is a major part of providing a quality environment, and is a prerequisite of the Building Code of Australia."

In addition to these provisions, he says consideration should be given to noise that potentially enters rooms through windows and external walls, the sound of rain transferred through the ceiling and ratchet from plant rooms and mechanical equipment.

"In most rooms, comfortable acoustics depend directly on a short reverberation time," Kell explains. "A sound in a room is still audible a short time after the source has ceased, due to reflection from the room's surfaces."

The shape and volume of a room and the amount of sound-absorbing material can all have an effect on reverberation time.

"The total amount of sound absorption in a room and its reverberation time are critically important for speech intelligibility, privacy and sound levels, amongst other things," he continues. "Rooms intended for conversation, or where a high degree of privacy is required, are most dependent on short reverberation times."

These rooms include areas for dining, TV, gaming and reading.

Kell says including acoustic ceilings that provide a high level of sound absorption is effective.

FIRE SAFETY

The need to constantly upgrade safety within existing facilities to achieve government certification and funding requirements is an area of focus for HY Building Solutions. Activity under way in this area includes improving the integrity of fire and smoke doors and walls and work on emergency lights and exit signage. Verco says meeting new certification standards for fire sprinkler, smoke and firewall upgrades and installations is particularly difficult.

"Site inductions of building personnel dictate that the care and safety of both residents and staff is the paramount concern for the building management team at all times. Working amidst an [facility that's operating] is often the situation imposed on the aged-care builder, as providers do not want to lose residents or income, or to cause any imposition on either residents or staff," Verco says.



HOLISTIC HEALTHCARE SERVICE IN AN INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Rebecca Moore, director of Conrad Gargett Riddell Ancher Mortlock Woolley, says integrated development models are gaining significant traction in Australia and will be delivered increasingly in the future.

More emphasis is being placed on commercial viability of facilities, as well as the need to cater for a demographic that is "cashed up, knowledgeable, and has children who have a vested interest in their parents' investment".

She adds there is a broad range of models that can meet this market, some of which add medical centres and complementary therapies, others include retail activity.

"Integrated development models can seed from residential aged-care developments, but include complimentary services at the fingertips of the customer," she says.

Moore says aged-care services using these models place greater emphasis on the quality of the built environment.

"An ideal model would provide a holistic service focused on wellness as well as healthcare needs," she says.

"There would be more opportunities for social interaction within the development and greater connectivity to the wider community."

WI-FI

A spokesperson for Ruckus Wireless says wi-fi is a critical consideration for aged-care facilities, in areas such as the administration of medications, accessing patients' records and monitoring movements.

A wi-fi system allows staff to use tablet devices instead of paper-based medication charts and access patients' records.

"The new system would not only aid efficient and error-free handling, but also assist with the auditing process and reduce administrative resourcing requirements," the spokesperson says.

A radio frequency identification system and real-time location system can be used through a wi-fi network, allowing for tracking of equipment and ID tags that locate patients.

"Rather than walking through the facility on foot to search for equipment or locate patients, staff will be able to pinpoint their exact location on a computer screen in real time," the Ruckus spokesperson says. "With the ageing population becoming more tech savvy, wi-fi provides guests with a secure connection to the internet, allowing them to cost-effectively browse online or stay in touch with family and loved ones via Skype or other applications."

RELATIONSHIP-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

The types of buildings under construction aren't all that's changing. The way owners of aged-care facilities and developers do business is also undergoing shifts. Providers are once again favouring relationship-based partnerships for projects, in a bid to reach their goals in an "increasingly robust construction market", Burger says. "Whether this is through design and construct, or early contractor involvement (ECI), development teams are moving away from fully documented lump-sum tendering."

He explains that ECI allows for targeted budget control with a more focused partnership between owners and design and construction teams, helping avoid costly redesigns and delays in project completion.

"This collaborative approach means the money is spent wisely on value and an asset emerges that is functional, serviceable and healthy for residents and carers," he says. ■