

Dementia design good for all



There's a growing trend toward incorporating dementia-friendly design throughout a facility to accommodate seniors with all cognitive abilities, writes NATASHA EGAN.

With a piazza at its centre, Scalabrini Village's newest facility sees residents living in small groups in individual houses, each with its own care team. The village has been designed to be homelike and accessible to all. All areas, internal and out, are designed in a way that supports people living with, or without, dementia.

There are no steps, ramps or thresholds to restrict resident movement. Nor is there any unnecessary clutter, which aims to emphasise the detail relevant to residents, explains Katie Formston, Scalabrini Village project design manager.

"All areas are designed to support people living with dementia. It is recognised that what is good for people living with dementia is good for all residents," Formston tells *Australian Ageing Agenda*.

The facility in Drummoyne, in Sydney's inner-west is due to open in February. It has 126 beds across two levels where groups of 12 to 14 residents live in individual homes, each referred to as a "casa" – the Italian word for house.

All homes have their own kitchen, resulting in a new food service that combines fresh cooking in the commercial kitchen coupled with in-casa cooking and a traditional family dining experience, says Formston.

"Scalabrini residents will live in their own homes doing things they love such as cooking, going to the hairdresser and the theatre," she says.

Each casa has a front door or lift opening directly into the village central piazza, which

includes a café, general store, gelateria, barber shop and hair salon. The community hub also features an olive grove, vegetable patch and landscaped garden plus dance, musical and theatrical performance spaces, a wellness centre and chapel.

On level three is the "Palazzo" which features assisted living in five one-bedroom and 11 two-bedroom apartments designed for individuals and couples, including those with differing care needs who want to remain together.

Dementia-friendly features throughout include automated lift access, ceiling hoists in bedrooms and fully-accessible ensuites. Toilets have been placed in line of sight of the bed to assist with prompting a resident with dementia as to why they may have woken during the night, says Formston.

"Hidden compartments outside each room where staff can leave amenities for a resident without having to access their casa via the front door also assists with offering as much privacy as possible."

Technology also plays a key role in making the facility dementia-friendly, she says, and includes keyless access to rooms, automated doors and lifts that aim to support residents' free movement for as long as possible, and sensor floors that automatically detect falls and provide discreet monitoring.

"This approach removes any restrictions on resident location, providing everyone maximum choice of accommodation given all rooms are dementia-friendly and designed to support ageing in place," says Formston.

Just over half of Australia's aged care residents have a diagnosis of dementia (52 per cent), according to the latest statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, so catering for dementia care in building and design makes sense.

Kirsty Bennett, manager environmental design education services at Dementia Training Australia, says the environment has a key role to



Kevin Mercer



Kirsty Bennett

play in the wellbeing and support of us all, and especially residents in aged care.

Dementia-friendly design will make it easier to empower and support people regardless of their needs and as those needs change over time, says Bennett, an architect who specialises in improving the design of environments for people living with dementia.

"Think of this as good design for everyone – all of us wish to pursue our interests, do things that are important to us," Bennett tells AAA.

"Dementia-friendly design aims to make it easy for the person to do what they want to do; use their skills and abilities; continue to live their lives and pursue their interests; and be respected for the person they are."

Typically, a dementia-friendly facility will be small scale with a variety of places that offer familiar settings and experiences for residents, she says. "It is a place where people can move about easily indoors and outdoors and see where they wish to go, where potential risks are minimised unobtrusively through good design, and people are not overwhelmed by high levels of stimulations such as noise or visual clutter."

Bennett points those providing aged care to the 10 key design principles that can be applied to the physical environment (see breakout). The principles were developed from work carried out by Bennett and University of Wollongong colleague Professor Richard Fleming.

"These principles can and should be applied to interiors, fixtures and furnishings through the selection of colours, materials, recognisable furniture and familiar objects, and also to the scale of rooms and detailing of the building such as door handles, rails, windows and door designs."



All areas are designed to support people living with dementia at Scalabrini Village's new facility in Sydney.

The principles also impact on the layout of the building, the relationship between spaces and the size of rooms, says Bennett.

"Large noisy spaces, large areas that gather people together with no focus but to sit and look at each other, rooms with little access to daylight and long corridors should be avoided."

A growing trend

Going with dementia-design principles as a core element of new facilities is a growing trend, particularly in the last 12 months, says Daniel Hammon, aged care development manager at Woollam Constructions, which specialises in aged care.



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