



(Left and above) NewDirection Care's new Bellmere development in Queensland aims to resemble a typical suburban community.

# Small-scale returns to aged care

While arguments for economies of scale have led to larger facilities in recent years, a band of providers is showing that domestic style residential care is both viable and adaptable, reports DARRAGH O'KEEFFE.

At first glance, NewDirection Care's \$35 million Bellmere development, located between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, resembles a typical Australian suburban community.

Sitting on two hectares of land, 17 houses are dotted around a retail precinct and fitness centre.

The development's similarity with a run-of-the-mill, suburban community underscores the provider's small-scale living model which aims to create "as normal a life as possible," according to Alasdair McDonald, director of operations with NewDirection Care, which was formerly known as Synovum Care.

"Within each of our 17 houses up to seven residents live with their own private ensuite bedroom and share a fully-functional kitchen, dining room, laundry and sitting rooms," he says.

Residents live together based on values and lifestyle, not a diagnosis of their health and wellbeing, McDonald explains.

"They are assisted by what we call house

companions in their daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, personal care and medication management," he says.

Registered nurses, physiotherapists, exercise physiologists and a dementia support specialist are available as well as dental and GP services, he says. Also onsite are a corner store, café, hair and beauty salon, barber and cinema.

"Over 50 per cent of the area is outdoor accessible to all residents, and this includes a men's shed, chook pen and fruit and vegetable boxes," McDonald says.

### Moving away from institutional

In comparison to traditional large-scale, institutional models of residential care, NewDirection Care is about creating a care community, says McDonald.

"There is no central large kitchen or laundry, meaning no mass production of food or laundry services. There is no large dining room or dedicated meal times. You won't find corridors of hospital-style bedrooms."

far greater choice and control for seniors.

"In 2017, consumers want greater choice and say in how and where they spend their final years. They won't accept a one-size-fits-all approach. Like any business seeking to survive, we need to listen to the customer, understand the market dynamics and develop products the consumer is asking for," Chadwick says.

### Re-emergence of small-scale

As a long-time observer of building trends in residential aged care, Dr Ralph Hampson says that after years of building increasingly larger facilities in the name of economic viability, the sector is now seeing a movement back to smaller, homelike units.

Hampson, a senior lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University of Melbourne, recounts that during his time working in the Department of Health and Human Services, from the late 1990s to mid 2000s, the perceived ideal size of facilities went from small to around 120 beds.

Hampson's view now is that smaller scale can provide the intimacy and warmth that is often lost in large congregate care facilities. "Because however hard we try to convince ourselves that a 150-bed facility is homelike, I think we are kidding ourselves," he tells AAA.

"Design should be about the needs of residents and the research to date, although limited, does suggest that smaller, more intimate and homelike spaces are where we should be headed. But unless we push for this change, the economics will be the key driver."

### Trend towards large-scale

Another veteran in the push toward embracing smaller scale residential aged care is HammondCare

Driving this approach is NewDirection Care managing director Natasha Chadwick, an experienced aged care executive who founded the organisation in 2011 to provide strong relationship-based care "where an individual resident is treated as an individual" and they can have the same life as they had at home.

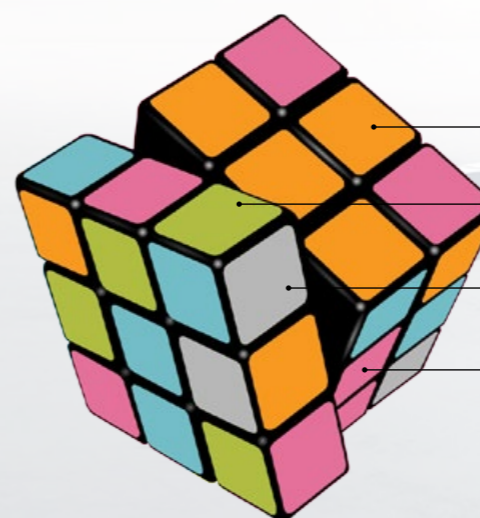
The new Queensland development comes after a successful pilot of the model at the provider's Wynyard Care Centre in Tasmania, where two houses are co-located with its residential aged care facility.

The model was informed by extensive research from around the world, including a visit by the NewDirection Care's management team to the De Hogeweyk Dementia Village in the Netherlands, as well as a masterclass with them.

"Much of the industry continues to provide products and services that are not inline with the Aged Care Roadmap," Chadwick says of the blueprint for future reform, which advocates



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