



RETIREMENT VILLAGE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION INC

ABN: 16 674 035 984

ALL COMMUNICATIONS, TO THE SECRETARY, Jan Pritchett,

“Caring for Older Australians”

In undertaking the inquiry, the Commission will develop options for further structural reform of the aged care system so it can meet the challenges facing it in coming decades. In particular, the Commission will:

examine whether the regulation of retirement specific living options should be aligned more closely with the rest of the aged care sector

The Retirement Villages Residents Association (RVRA) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into “Caring for Older Australians”. This comment is in relation to the section stated above.

Charitable Organisations and those property developers prepared to build and operate new retirement villages, provide suitable housing for the increasing population of the aged. This allows them to settle into communities designed specifically to suit elderly residents’ needs and enjoyment. Many older people appreciate being able to join a community lifestyle, and testify to its social advantages.

Often, older people, who are committed to staying in their own homes, do not realise the degree of isolation they can experience.

One lady in a village told us recently how, until she moved into the village, she did not realise how isolated she was, and how dependent she had become on her family who visited weekly, and her neighbours, to help out, and also for her to have contact with others. Now, in spite of having health and mobility problems, which make it almost impossible for her to travel by car out of the village, she can use her wheelchair to access a wide range of activities in the village without having to go out of the village environment. She now has access to others with whom to communicate, as well as having a vital call system immediately on hand, which is immediately answered by staff who she knows. Her statement was, “I feel like I’ve gone to heaven!”

While there are financial disadvantages of the Retirement Village structure, it is a wonderful model for living for people as they age. The community spirit and support is a vital part of village life. This is often not found by those trying to stay in their old neighbourhoods, where the surrounding dwellings are occupied by a vast array of different social groupings, the members of which are often away from the area, at work every day.

The benefits of Retirement Village living could be maximized if the responsibility for the villages was being taken by those government bodies which are responsible for hostel and nursing home care. This is one area where there is some confusion, because, even if a Retirement Village has a hostel or nursing home, attached to it or close by, it does not operate on the same basis as the self-care village, and village residents have no rights to a place within hostel or nursing home accommodation. If there was better alignment within the whole of this accommodation sector, the transition for a village resident, or for their spouse, to further care could be made easier and less traumatic.

The Retirement Village industry began with the charitable work of organisations, such as the churches, that recognised within the elderly, some who were lonely, insecure, often poor and no longer physically capable of attending to many of the essentials of daily living.

To-day the elderly are a "demographic" studied by the financial managers. Some are recognised as being within the wealthy group of the community, but more are pensioners depending on Social Service payments to survive. Nevertheless, they have become the target whose wealth is to be tapped, and one of the routes for this is through retirement villages. Thus the "independent-living" retirement village industry is in desperate need of restructure and reform.

All State Governments have different legislation covering Retirement Villages, and can be poorly drafted, or biased towards operators. Hence, there are no cohesive guidelines for Retirement Villages around the country. A national approach to standardisation of all residential care for the ageing would be a great step forward in eliminating confusing and convoluted legislation and the uncertainty and disputation which often accompanies Retirement Village living.

As well as Commonwealth legislation, applying Australia wide, this should include standard contracts for each of the different types of financial arrangement for accommodation (eg Leasehold, Loan-License and Strata Title)

Jan Pritchett

Secretary

Retirement Village Residents Association