

# A New Residential Aged Care Accommodation Framework

Overview

The Australian Government is building an aged care system that provides high quality and safe care for senior Australians.

The Australian Government subsidises and regulates residential aged care, so that senior Australians who can no longer live independently have access to quality aged care services. In 2019-20, 244,363 people received permanent residential aged care from 2,722 residential aged care services.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (the Royal Commission) recommended that the Australian Government should guide the design of residential aged care accommodation by developing and publishing a comprehensive set of National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines on accessible and dementia-friendly design for residential aged care, that can be:

* applied to ‘small household’ models of accommodation and enablement and respite accommodation settings, and
* amended as needed to reflect contemporary best practice.

The Australian Government accepted this recommendation and will work with senior Australians and the aged care sector to develop a new Residential Aged Care Accommodation Framework (Accommodation Framework). The new Accommodation Framework will begin from 1 July 2024. It will guide the design of residential aged care accommodation to help improve quality of life for senior Australians.

Consultation on the new Accommodation Framework will consider options to:

* improve the design of aged care homes, (sometimes referred to as residential aged care facilities) by developing National Aged Care Design Standards for residential aged care (design standards)
* promote and demonstrate adoption of the new design standards, and
* support industry to respond to the increasing demand for age appropriate, accessible, dementia‑friendly and innovative accommodation solutions.

This paper is part of the consultation on the Accommodation Framework. It is intended to outline the process we will undertake and the context in which the consultations will take place.

The new Accommodation Framework is part of a broader package of measures to improve residential aged care services and sustainability of the sector. There are several related reforms that must be considered in developing the Accommodation Framework, including:

* A new star rating system that will highlight the quality of aged care services. This will provide informed decision-making for senior Australians, their families, friends and carers.
* A new funding model for residential aged care that will allow transparency, and independent assessors that will resolve fairer aged care support for all residents.
* Discontinuation of the Aged Care Approvals Round (ACAR) from 1 July 2024. Residential care places will no longer be allocated to providers. Instead places will be allocated to senior Australians, which will generate a more competitive market and allow people greater choice over which approved residential provider delivers their care. Providers will also have more control over their business planning and investment decisions. Australian Government funding will be directed to the provider the consumer chooses.
* Reform activities that will strengthen the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.
* A review of the Aged Care Quality Standards.
* Support to help people remain in their own homes for longer, including a significant increase in home care packages and respite care places as well as additional support for family or informal carers.

More information on the aged care reforms is available at: [www.health.gov.au/aged-care-reforms](http://www.health.gov.au/aged-care-reforms).

## Consultation themes

The Accommodation Framework will focus on two key themes. More detail on each of these themes is on the following pages.

### Light bulb iconDesign and Innovation

* How do we ensure residential aged care facilities are appropriate, dementia-friendly, accessible and inclusive?
* What elements need to be included in the design standards to support quality of life for senior Australians?
* Are these elements the same across different models of accommodation?
* Should the design standards vary for refurbishment of existing buildings compared to newly built accommodation?
* What do senior Australians value in residential aged care design?

### Trophy iconPromoting and Demonstrating Adoption of the Standards

* To what extent are providers already meeting the proposed standards (once developed)?
* What mechanisms should be used to encourage aged care providers and technical experts, including architects and others to adopt and apply the design standards?
* How can providers demonstrate their adoption of the standards?
* How can senior Australians be empowered to influence residential aged care design?
* Should the design standards be voluntary or mandatory? If mandatory, should they apply to all aged care accommodation i.e. existing buildings, refurbished buildings and newly constructed buildings or new builds only?

## Next steps

A Design Survey is under development to consult with senior Australians, their families and carers. The Design Survey will encourage consumers to advise about what characteristics they consider contribute to good residential aged care design.

A Design and Innovation discussion paper, targeted to a wider aged care audience including peak bodies, service providers and other experts has been developed. The Design and Innovation paper invites submissions from key stakeholders to provide additional detail on current requirements and discuss the characteristics of good residential aged care design. It also asks what elements need to be considered to achieve promotion and demonstration of adoption of the design standards.

Based on research and the feedback from these initial consultations, a more detailed understanding of the design standards will be developed. This will inform the second phase of consultation that will also include consideration of ways to promote and demonstrate adoption of the standards.

Targeted consultation sessions will be held to discuss issues most relevant to different stakeholder groups. These sessions may be delivered through different channels including webinars, online consultation sessions and face to face workshops.

| Action |  | |
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| First phase | | |
| ‘Overview’ and ‘Design and Innovation’ discussion papers released | |  |
| Design Survey for senior Australians, their families and carers | |  |
| Consultations with senior Australians, their families and carers and design experts. | |  |
| Second phase | | |
| Detailed consultations | |  |

For more information on consultation sessions and how to register please visit <https://consultations.health.gov.au>

## Light bulb iconDesign and Innovation

The Australian Government is looking to create new design standards for residential aged care facilities. These design standards should support independent functioning and a high quality of life for those in care.

Design standards will consider:

* the role of accessibility, inclusiveness and dementia-friendly design
* the role of smaller group home models and existing larger scale facilities, and
* appropriate safety features, including infection protection and control and ventilation requirements.

Design standards will also ensure the specific needs of diverse populations are supported and met.

The intention is to create design standards that guide the sector to develop quality aged care homes without limiting innovation.

**Key considerations**

Older people prefer to remain within their own home as they age rather than moving into a residential aged care facility. Location, independence and social networks are important factors in this preference but physical differences between residential housing and aged care homes may also play a part.

As part of the Royal Commission, the Commissioners noted the importance of the built environment, which can be:

* supportive, familiar and therapeutic, or
* a barrier to independent functioning and high quality of life.

More than half of all people living in aged care have a diagnosis of dementia. One of the most important things to consider in the design of any aged care home is how it caters to people with dementia. Evidence provided to the Royal Commission indicates:

* good design in residential aged care, particularly for people living with dementia, consists of smaller, lower-density congregate living arrangements rather than larger, more institutional settings
* smaller, lower-density congregate living arrangements can promote better quality of life for everyone, and
* large, noisy institutional environments can worsen the adverse consequences of dementia.

Despite this emphasis on smaller home models, the Commissioners did not agree that only smaller home models are appropriate in residential aged care. The Commissioners recognised the importance of establishing design standards that allowed innovation and the ability to meet the needs of those to be accommodated.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Independent Review of COVID-19 outbreaks in Australian Residential Aged Care Facilities identified the built environment and infrastructure as one of the key lines of defence to minimise the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks.

Costs and other practical considerations, such as land requirements, will also need to be considered in the development of design standards. Senior Australians will be unable to benefit from new design standards if they are unaffordable (for senior Australians, providers and the Australian Government) or land requirements make them impractical in certain locations.

It is important to recognise that design alone is unlikely to result in improved outcomes for residents or the operation of aged care homes. The design of aged care homes should be considered in the context of the needs of the residents, the aged care home staff and the model of care. Implementing a smaller home model without considering these requirements, for example, could be detrimental to the operation of the home. Similarly, the development of an Accommodation Framework will be considered as part of the full range of reforms arising from the Royal Commission which include matters of funding, regulation, consumer empowerment and workforce.

To develop suitable standards, which improve quality of life, there are several elements to consider, including:

* preferences of senior Australians
* the role of small-home models
* dementia-friendly design
* accessible design
* suitability for diverse populations
* location
* appropriate safety features
* encouraging innovation, and
* affordability.

Creating national accommodation design standards for residential aged care will contribute to improving a person’s quality of life in residential aged care. This aligns with recommendation 45 made by the Royal Commission.

## Trophy iconPromoting and Demonstrating Adoption of the Standards

As part of the development of an Accommodation Framework, the Australian Government will consider ways to promote and demonstrate the adoption of these standards.

The new design standards will also empower senior Australians to make more informed choices when selecting residential accommodation by improving transparency around the standard of accommodation available.

### Key considerations

In developing a new Accommodation Framework, the Australian Government will consider how best to promote and demonstrate the adoption of the design standards. The right approach will depend on the design preferences of senior Australians identified in the first phase of the project and the high-level standards that are developed.

The Royal Commission suggested a number of ways to support the building or upgrading of aged care homes to meet any new design standards, including through capital grants, funding and financing, commissioning, policy direction or regulation. The Australian Government will explore these and other ways to promote adoption of the design standards and provide assurance and transparency of their uptake once consultation on the design and innovation theme has identified the likely content of those standards. In doing so, we will also consider the impact of reforms which have already been announced, such as the introduction of the new Australian National Aged Care Classification (AN-ACC) funding model and a new independent pricing authority.

To ensure a financially viable residential aged care sector into the future, there will need to be consideration of the cost of adopting design standards. This includes considering how the associated costs could vary across different types of facilities and different locations to ensure sustainability for providers.

A key component of aged care reforms is to empower senior Australians in making choices about, and influencing, the aged care services they receive. This is fundamental to the reforms to provide residential aged care places directly to senior Australians and the introduction of star ratings.

As part of the development of an Accommodation Framework, the Australian Government will explore ways to empower senior Australians to make more informed choices around accommodation standards. This may include publishing to what extent aged care homes have adopted the design standards or creating similar tools that could be made available through My Aged Care to assist senior Australians, their families and carers in assessing the suitability of accommodation to meet their needs. In doing so, consideration will be given to whether providers would be allowed to freely advertise that they meet the design standards or whether there should be a verification process before they can make these claims. A verification process may give senior Australians greater confidence about whether design standards have been met but would increase red tape for providers and may be unsuitable if the final design standards are highly principles based.

Consideration will also be given to whether regulatory measures are required to support and encourage adoption of the standards. These considerations will need to allow flexibility for providers to innovate and be suitable for different models of care and groups of residents. The decision on appropriate regulatory measures will also need to reflect the treatment of existing facilities and long lead times involved in building new aged care facilities.

The Royal Commission noted that while the design principles and standards should initially be voluntary, there is a risk that if they remain so their adoption and application will not be sufficiently widespread. It also noted that there is already a range of dementia-friendly design resources available in Australia, however, there is no indication they have been widely adopted or utilised in designing, planning or building residential aged care accommodation.

No decisions have been made that the design standards will be mandatory. Consultation on the high-level design standards will inform the development of approaches to regulation.

Residential aged care providers are subject to existing assessment and regulatory processes. The purpose of these is for accreditation and gaining or retaining aged care funding. These processes range from self-assessment and declaration processes to detailed on-site assessments. Similar processes could potentially be used when developing a regulatory process.

A current example specific to accommodation is that a higher rate of the accommodation supplement is paid to aged care homes that have been built or refurbished since 2012. To receive the higher rate, a provider must complete an application and give evidence they have significantly refurbished their premises.

To develop the new Accommodation Framework, changes to the existing approval pathways may be required. The project will consider a range of regulatory options, from a self-assessment process to the use of dedicated assessors. The timing of assessment will also be considered, such as one-off assessments or whether there is a need for regular compliance checks.

The introduction of design standards will be managed to ensure that there is an appropriate transition to new arrangements for existing facilities. There are a range of ways that this could be achieved including the use of voluntary design standards, applying design standards to new builds only and transition periods. Importantly, providers will not be expected to update their existing facilities to meet new standards by 1 July 2024.

Another approach that Government could explore is industry education initiatives. Through industry education, the Australian Government could promote the benefits of designs that meet the standards for both providers and senior Australians.

**Conclusion**

The Australian Government is seeking to engage with and consult senior Australians, carers, families, service providers, peak bodies, architects and technical experts to provide advice and inform the development of the Accommodation Framework. The new Accommodation Framework will guide the design of residential aged care accommodation to help improve quality of life for senior Australians from 1 July 2024.

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