

Operations

MannaCare's aged care facility in Doncaster, Victoria, was redeveloped by Billard Leece Partnership.



Supporting purposeful and active ageing

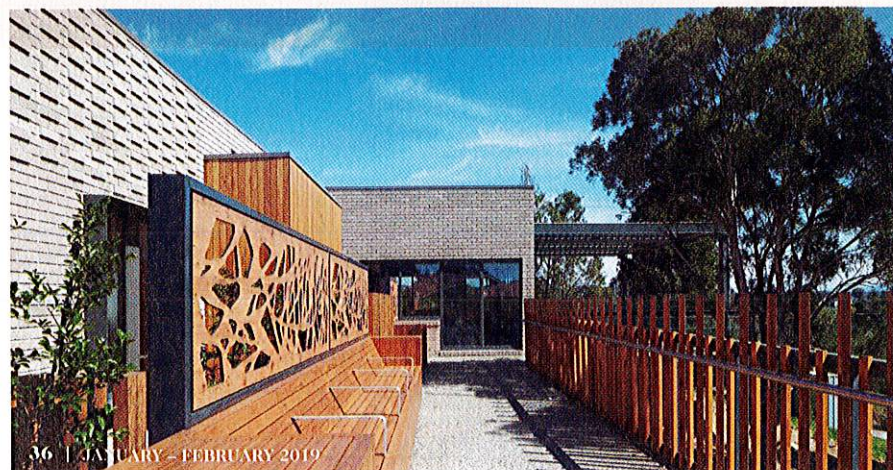
The new quality standards can help direct refurbishments at older residential aged care facilities, writes EMILY GILFILLAN.

Contemporary aged care is primarily concerned with promoting independent and dignified active ageing in a safe and secure environment. It is no longer about residents being captive within a controlled environment, but about autonomy and personal choice. It is about living in a home-like environment bathed in natural light with views and access to the outdoors, and the ability to open windows for fresh air should the need arise.

The new Aged Care Quality Standards, which providers will be assessed against from 1 July 2019, require providers to "identify and address areas for improvement". Standard 5 relates to the "Organisational Service Environment" and will no doubt highlight some concerns with older residential aged care facilities.

The standards aim to ensure that residents will be treated with dignity and respect whilst being able to exercise their independence, autonomy and choice regarding their personalised care options. They also promote and will lead to building upgrades to older residential care facilities.

This has already happened at MannaCare, which partnered with Billard Leece Partnership (BLP) to



redevelop the residential buildings of its community-managed aged care facility in Doncaster, Victoria.

MannaCare's mission is to assist older people in the Manningham community to sustain and reinforce their independence, social relationships, personal wellbeing and community interaction. The original residential facilities built about 1985 were no longer meeting market expectations or MannaCare's current model of care delivery.

Our brief for the MannaCare redevelopment was to:

- provide individual living and dining areas within each household rather than centralised living and dining spaces
- upgrade each household to provide single rooms with private ensuites in lieu of double rooms and shared bathrooms
- extensively refurbish and extend the secure, 30-bed dementia-specific Banksia household to enable residents to wander freely and safely within the household, dementia sensory gardens and terrace areas.

Designing the Banksia household

We have a strong commitment to investigating emerging trends in residential care homes and our research provides us with the design intelligence to create innovative living environments for seniors.

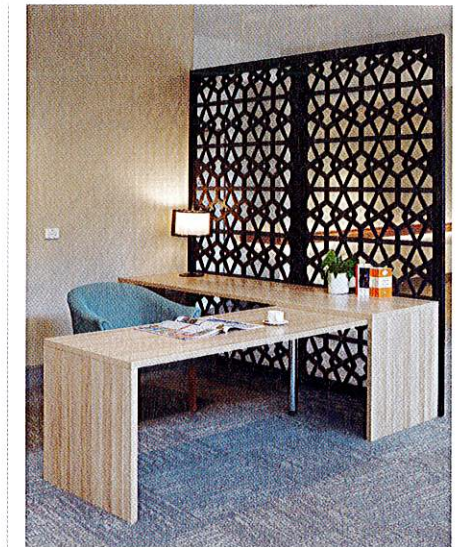
During the briefing process we undertook extensive stakeholder

"Our starting point was to return to the fundamentals of conventional residential design."

consultation meetings including a detailed workshop with resident family members, which with our research resulted in a clear framework to commence design.

Elderly residents are not a homogenous population. Each resident is an individual with their own aspirations, concerns and needs. Importantly, each person's needs change as they age. Research has shown the elderly wish to remain in their own homes for as long as they can and should they choose to move into residential care they want to reside within a home-like environment.

Our starting point was to return to the fundamentals of conventional residential design. From this point we overlaid the necessities of residential care design to provide an environment that is safe, that enables residents to move freely between inside and outside, and most importantly to provide an environment to receive care that is welcoming and inviting. The refurbishment therefore needed to create an environment where the residents wanted to be and a place they could enjoy.



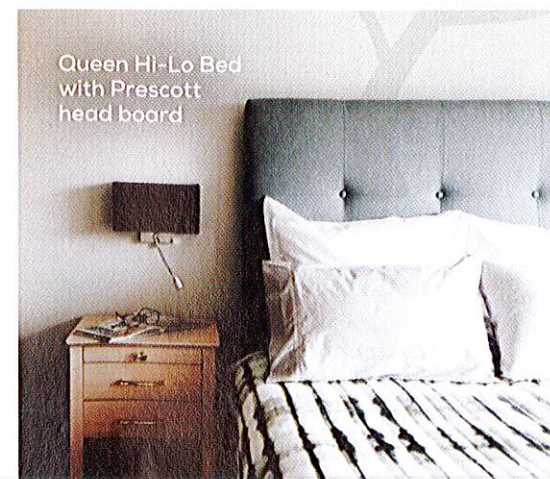
We also considered the following key project drivers:

- flexibility and adaptability
- ease of navigation
- connectedness to the outdoors
- familiarity of spaces
- balancing the amounts of stimulation through different spaces
- fostering a sense of community between residents, staff and visiting family and loved ones.

Just as no two elderly people are the same, each person living with dementia is unique. There are many different symptoms of the disease, which makes designing a dementia-specific household

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“While over-stimulation can cause stress and agitation for people with dementia, the right stimulation is fundamental in fostering creativity.”

that can cater to all residents living with the illness a challenge. Doing it successfully requires knowledge of the stages and progression of the disease, as well as the acknowledgement that it can remain impossible to predict the exact future needs of each resident as their dementia changes and evolves.

Flexibility is a key consideration and we designed the Banksia household to allow it to be modified and adapted over time in response to individual resident’s needs.

To encourage purposeful wandering and to avoid confusion and distress, we designed an environment that residents can easily navigate through integrated architectural wayfinding techniques that avoid word-based signage. It incorporates stepless thresholds at each external doorway to reduce the risk of falls, as mobility and gait can be affected as dementia develops. Outdoor terraces and courtyards are designed to encourage strolling and to provide a safe and stable surface for residents to enjoy.

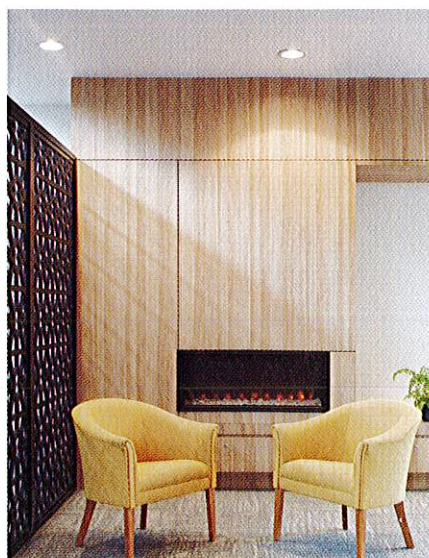
The Banksia household is linked to other areas within MannaCare, which enables residents to access amenities in other areas of the residential facility and promotes staffing efficiencies. We carefully designed the residence so that access did not compromise clear sight-lines for both residents and staff. According to the Aged Health Network at the NSW Government Agency for Clinical Innovation, the residential care environment “shall enable people with dementia to see their destinations and be seen by staff.” Good visibility and visual access promote residents’ engagement in activities and exploration of surrounding spaces. This helps to reduce resident, family and staff anxiety.

Visual and physical connections to the outside are equally important and

research shows it can reduce anxiety, stress and agitation in residents. All common areas have direct views and access to secure outdoor gardens, promoting a sense of openness. These gardens and courtyards help the residents maintain a connection to nature and the outdoors. This is crucial for their mental, emotional and physical wellbeing and can also help reduce the negative effects of over-stimulation.

While over-stimulation can cause stress and agitation for people with dementia, the right stimulation is fundamental in fostering creativity and joy. Sound and music that resonates with residents can provide an impetus for positive memory recall. The design team carefully considered acoustics within the lounge, dining and bedroom spaces to reduce extraneous noise, with an aim of leading to greater emotional health and fewer medication restraints.

We included interior themes and other features to intrigue residents and enhance their creativity and activity.



Sensitive use of colour, material and screens disguise and manage unavoidable negative stimulation while enhancing access to positive stimulation such as with paintings and the placement of images and other works of art. Given each resident is unique and may familiarise themselves with spaces by one or a combination of multiple design features, we incorporated visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory sensory stimulation cues where appropriate. Overall, these design features are balanced to avoid both over-stimulation and sensory deprivation.

Lighting selection is key, as lights with a higher colour rendering index can compensate for the effects of ageing eyes, which include a smaller pupil and reduced elasticity of eyes lens. A warm white light is preferable to a cool white light as it feels less clinical and more akin to the type of lighting you find at home. Public and semi-public spaces within the residence have lower lighting levels while areas of interest in the lounge and dining spaces are more brightly lit. All ensembles have enhanced lighting intensity to assist residents with differing severities of cognitive decline in performing their activities of daily living and other fine tasks, thereby promoting independence.

As mentioned earlier, familiarity of space is a key consideration when designing dementia-specific residential

care facilities. The Aged Care Network advises that “the buildings and spaces encountered by a person with dementia shall not intimidate or confuse them by their size or the numbers of people in them.” The lounge areas are small and intimate, reminiscent of a family living space that residents can easily identify with. The common dining areas as well as private areas are more in keeping with a domestic scale through design features that assist residents to feel they have control of their surroundings. An atmosphere of accessibility and warmth permeates the entire Banksia household. The environment is welcoming, small-scale and non-intimidating, to make residents feel safe, cared for and at home.

Residents are able to readily adapt when transitioning between public and private spaces as the environment progressively moves from the most private zone, where residents have full control and autonomy, to areas with opportunities for social engagement with others. The more public zones foster a sense of community and social belonging, which ties in with the the Aged Health Network’s vision that “the built environment shall encourage family and friends to visit and maintain links to the community.”

We partnered with MannaCare with the understanding that design features are crucial to promoting the de-stigmatisation of dementia. The design delivers an environment that is



friendly and attractive for family, friends and volunteers to spend quality time with residents. Well-connected links to the community allow residents to be supervised while accessing community-based amenities and participating in meaningful community projects. In this way, MannaCare provides support to its residents so they can maintain their hobbies and interests.

The positive nature of residential care design can lift up the mood of residents, staff and visitors alike. As with most redevelopment projects, part of the design process includes a constant review of opportunities and constraints

including the rigorous management of design, cost and quality.

This meticulous review and management process has ensured that contemporary residential care design engages the aspirations and hopes of all those who cross its threshold. Most importantly, our shared aim is to enable residents to maintain an enjoyable lifestyle and support their journey in a purposeful and active ageing process. ■ Emily Gilfillan is an associate director and seniors living sector leader at Billard Leece Partnership, a company of architects, interior designers and urban designers.

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