



Webinar series: Home matters – Rethinking aged care design Questions & Answers

Webinar 3: Principle 1 – Enable the Person

31 March 2026

Thank you to everyone who attended and submitted their questions. This document provides answers to questions that were not addressed by the panel during the live session. If you have any further questions please contact: design.dementiasupport@health.gov.au

Design

Do you have any tips to reduce noise and 'busyness' within a large unit?

The [National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines](#) encourage minimising visual clutter and noise in resident areas to reduce physical and cognitive stress. Older people, particularly those living with dementia, can experience sensory overload and physical challenges in cluttered or noisy environments. This can lead to disorientation, agitation and confusion.

There are a range of easy strategies to reduce noise and busyness within the home. For example, Guideline 1.1 – Minimal clutter recommends:

- removing unnecessary signage or notices from living areas where possible
- providing discreet and adequate storage space for clinical equipment
- avoiding patterns on floors, walls and seating
- avoiding mirrors in common areas as they can be misinterpreted and add to visual clutter
- creating landmarks with familiar objects and artwork to support wayfinding to reduce the need for signage.

Guideline 1.2 – Acoustic comfort also provides further strategies to reduce noise, including:

- replacing or reducing noisy equipment such as phones, call systems, alarms, televisions
- using carpet, curtains and soft furnishings to reduce reverberation
- providing alternative resident spaces, where people can make noise or retreat from a noisier space
- ensuring commercial kitchens, delivery areas and back of house spaces are separated from resident living areas.

What are your thoughts on: 1) lights that light up the flooring? 2) what is called the colour runway where tiles may be different colour behind the toilet? 3) what actual colours do you suggest for contrast? 4) CHAT is great – used on a number of our facilities.

The [National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines](#) recommend that lighting is designed to suit older people in residential aged care. This helps older people to see better and feel confident when moving in a space or doing tasks. Guideline 1.3 – Better lighting suggests aiming for ambient light levels around 300 lux. For task areas such as toilets and washbasins, providers and designers should aim for higher light levels of 500 lux.

We do not recommend having lighting, either spots or strips, recessed into flooring, such that you can see the light source. This will likely be a source of glare and particularly problematic for someone with a vision impairment.

Tonal contrast is important to clarify key surfaces in a room. A tiled accent panel can be used to create contrast between the wall and the toilet. This panel should also contrast with the floor and ideally not be very dark. Rather than specific hues, Guideline 1.4 – Tonal Contrast suggests using tonal combinations with a difference of more than 30 light reflectance value to improve visibility. The cultural impact of the use of colour should also be considered. Strong tonal contrast supports older people with poorer vision to see objects

easier and is reinforced in Guideline 1.8 – Stress-free toilets. It recommends using domestic, familiar fittings and fixtures with large, high-contrast controls and ensuring key elements are made visible through tonal contrast and appropriate lighting.

It's great to hear the [Care Home Assessment Tool \(CHAT\)](#) has been a helpful resource for assessing your homes against the Principles and Guidelines. CHAT can also be used multiple times, allowing you to assess and track improvements over time.

It seems you have great ideas about designing a residential care building but what about the cost(s) in relation to the existing building?

The existing stock of aged care homes includes older buildings that no longer meet the needs and expectations of older people. The [National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines](#) encourage practical, retrospective changes to existing homes, alongside more substantial design strategies better suited for new builds. Importantly, we know that even small, low-cost changes can make a meaningful difference.

Principle 1 – Enable the Person is among the easiest to apply retrospectively. The Guidelines under it include suggestions that are low-cost and non-structural like decluttering programs, upgrading furniture or renewing flooring as part of routine maintenance programs. For example, Guideline 1.1 encourages minimising visual and physical clutter in resident areas to create calmer, quieter and more supportive environments. The department encourages providers to refer to the Principles and Guidelines and consider practical, achievable ways to improve existing environments over time. [Webinar 8](#) will focus on case studies and learnings from refurbishing existing homes, including through staged work and small projects.

Providers can also apply for the [Aged Care Capital Assistance Program \(ACCAP\)](#). ACCAP provides grants for building, extending, or upgrading homes and staff accommodation where there is limited or no access. Eligible activities are determined on a round-by-round basis and clarified through grant opportunity guidelines. There is currently an [expression of interest](#) process targeted to providers in Adelaide and Illawarra that closes on 22 April 2026. For more information, visit [Grant Connect](#).

In response to the Aged Care Taskforce, the Australian Government also commissioned an independent [Accommodation Pricing Review](#). This review is considering accommodation pricing arrangements, including incentives for providers to develop and maintain good quality accommodation. The Review's final report will be tabled in parliament by 1 July 2026.

I struggle with stakeholder engagement. How do we encourage contributions from families, residents and staff to make physical environments work better for all?

Under the [strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards](#), all aged care providers are expected to work in partnership with older people, their families and carers to make sure the care environment meets their needs, goals and preferences. This includes encouraging older people to actively take part in decision-making processes and seeking, listening and responding to their feedback and concerns.

The [National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines](#) support co-design by involving older people, their families and staff in design decisions. Co-design helps people agree on a

shared vision, ensures design solutions suit local needs and addresses any safety concerns from staff. For example, Guideline 3.4 – Garden destinations, suggests setting up a variety of outdoor places with meaningful activities to encourage older people to spend time outdoors. These may include domestic activities, morning tea, gardening, animal tending or exercise. Involving residents and families in decision-making about how spaces should be used helps ensure they reflect people’s interests, feel familiar and support cultural traditions. It can also help provide quiet areas for rest or reflection or to entertain family and visitors. To ensure risk strategies are in place, providers should engage with staff to address any safety concerns when accessing these spaces.

Additionally, under the *Aged Care Act 2024*, residential aged care providers must also give care recipients regular opportunities to form or join a [consumer advisory body](#). This allows older people to connect and share feedback on the care and services they receive. The consumer advisory body's feedback must go to the provider’s governing body, who is required to respond. More information about provider governance obligations, including consumer advisory bodies, and supporting resources is available on the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission’s [website](#).

Dementia support

What resources are available for People Living With Dementia (PLWD) and LGBTIQ+ people who are also PLWD? What information is also available for Aged Care Services At Home?

There are a range of resources available to support LGBTI older people and people living with dementia, including:

- a [Guide for Consumers](#) to express their needs when speaking with providers and help aged care workers to better understand LGBTI needs
- a [Guide for Aged Care Providers](#) which outlines what providers can do to deliver more inclusive services to LGBTI elders
- an [LGBTI and Dementia - Understanding Changes in Behaviour](#) booklet by Dementia Support Australia to help aged care staff understand the issues LGBTI older people living with dementia may face
- Dementia Australia’s [Dementia and LGBTI+ people](#) webpage.

The Australian Government also funds LGBTIQ+ Health Australia as the national organisation representing Australians from LGBTI backgrounds. This includes funding for [Silver Rainbow training](#), which aims to improve the experiences of LGBTI people as they age and enter into aged care. The training includes a [factsheet](#) for aged care workers on how to support LGBTI older people with dementia.

People living with dementia at home may need extra support in their everyday life. The National Dementia Support Program, delivered by Dementia Australia, offers information and resources to support [home life](#). The [Focus on Dementia booklet](#) also provides an overview of government programs and initiatives that support people living with dementia, including those who are living at home.

The [Support at Home Program](#) delivers government-funded aged care services to help older people stay independent and live at home for longer. Through the [Commonwealth Home](#)

Support Program, providers can also offer entry-level services to help older people live independently and safely at home in their community. My Aged Care helps older people, their families and carers find information about aged care and access services. For help, visit the My Aged Care website or call 1800 200 422 Monday to Friday, 8 am to 8 pm, and Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm.

General

Can we please discuss the wait times for concession elders waiting in respite for permanent care?

The government is aware that there is currently a shortage of supply that is impacting the ability of older Australians, particularly those with low means, to access residential aged care in a timely way.

On 30 September 2025, the Minister for Aged Care and Seniors, the Hon Sam Rae MP, announced the independent Residential Age Care Accommodation Review (Review), which is focusing on how to achieve equitable outcomes for supported residents and contribute to a sustainable sector that can build, upgrade, and maintain high quality accommodation. The Review's final report will be tabled in Parliament by 1 July 2026. Further information on the review can be found at www.health.gov.au/committees-and-groups/residential-aged-care-accommodation-pricing-review.