

8 Hill Street

Kilkivan Q. 4600

March 8, 2020

Dear Sir

Re: "Aged-care facilities in trouble...", Weekend Australian, March 7-8, 2020

John Rawling makes some excellent observations about the investment ramifications for aged care companies of the trend for older Australians to choose to remain in their homes, thanks especially to more government-subsidised packages for home-care and home-modifications.

But perhaps less well known is the reality for elderly residents in rural and regional areas, and what needs to be considered by government.

Nearly all older people I know want to stay in their own home for as long as possible. But when one considers the currently inefficient, unnecessarily expensive delivery of retro-fitting services and in-home care services to clients on farms and in country towns, lots of tax-payer money is being spent on much-less-than-ideal solutions. However, if older residents can accept that it isn't possible or feasible to remain "at home", then the next best thing is to stay in their local area. In most rural circumstances this is not possible: when their often high-set, older, timber homes on farms or large blocks in small country towns are not practicable for their frail or disabled years, the option is nearly always to move well away from all of their familiar connections. The effect on their mental health, and that of their counterparts left behind, and their families, is significant. What society is asking of these people is for them to suddenly and completely re-establish themselves in a "foreign" environment, in what is almost always their most vulnerable adult years.

If they happen to be self-funded retirees, they also pay huge RADs to be in places they don't want to be! Far better use of tax-payer dollars is surely to develop a concept whereby older residents can see a pathway to remaining in their local, familiar community.

In our small rural Queensland town, we are trying to develop a place-based, affordable solution that will suit many of our older low-care residents by accommodating them in disabled-access homes on a large, appropriately-landscaped block in town. The plan is for them to be freed from the responsibilities of home and garden/farm maintenance; to be able to bring their companion animal with them; to have a communal vibe to the complex; and to have additional support services layered on this concept as and when they need them. We believe that their mental health outcomes will be optimized because there will be a pre-existing safety net underpinning the concept: all of their usual social supports can be maintained by remaining in the area they love and where they are known.

Admittedly, this concept is not generally achievable for persons with high-care needs. But we know that most of the over-75's in our area are still low-care. Furthermore, they are often lonely and may display low levels of dementia. If they can be persuaded to move from inappropriate housing (some remain without complaint simply because the alternative in a distant location where they can't take their pet is too traumatic to contemplate) to a safer, local alternative, they may avoid the high incidence of falls, etc. which often results in ad hoc, dramatic, sudden changes of circumstance, and expensive solutions.

And by designing a local solution to a local situation for locals, we hope to reinvigorate our local economy by providing local construction and post-construction jobs, and by favouring local suppliers

wherever possible. (We also hope that grant applications for capital works funding will be received in a spirit of looking for options outside the usual paradigms.)

We regard our older residents as jewels to be celebrated and cherished – many are regularly contributing to our community into their nineties and have no desire to rest on their laurels! Surely it behoves us all to find innovative “pathways to heaven”, lest it be our turn to need care.

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