

Strata managers, cognitive gymnastics and aging in place policies.

Dr Erika Altmann¹, Dr Max Travers¹, Dr Kathleen Doherty², Prof. Andrew Robinson²

¹ School of Social Sciences, University of Tasmania

² Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, University of Tasmania

Abstract

Population aging is a significant issue for Australia and across the globe. Not only is Australia's population predicted to almost double over the next two decades to around 40 million people (ABS, 2012), the current profile is for those in the 65 years and older age bracket to increase from 3.2 million in 2012 to 11.1 million by 2061 (ABS, 2012). This reflects an overall percentage increase from approximately 13 % of the current population to just over 25% of the predicted population as those born during the baby boomer period reach retirement age. Significant tension exists between past and current housing policies and the move towards age friendly communities. These tensions need to be highlighted and resolved if older Australians are to remain active, healthy and able to contribute to society in later life.

Existing housing policies place emphasis on urban consolidation through increased housing density particularly in inner and middle ring suburbs. There are frequent calls for older people to give up their three bedroom homes in these established suburbs to make way for 'working families' and move into apartments. This continued focus on working families has left little room for discussion of the housing needs of older age groups. There has been an associated failure to address the needs of growing numbers of elderly people living in apartments despite known links between health and housing, none more so than for elderly renters.

Dementia, an age related illness affects both home owners and renters. It has gained prominence as a key health, aged care and social policy challenge. It is predicted to become the leading cause of disability in Australia by 2030. While aged and dementia care places have increased overall, as a percentage of the aged population, they are decreasing and thus limiting access. Current policy targets are that by 2050, 85-90% of the predicted 960,000 people with dementia will live in community (AHWI) with around 40% of this figure in rental accommodation (Gabriel et al. 2015).

It is not possible to support the elderly, including people with dementia in community without taking their housing needs into account. Accordingly, we undertook semi structured interviews with representatives from peak housing organisations and advocacy groups in Australia's fastest aging state to assess how well prepared their membership were for the changing demographics and associated health care needs with an emphasis on dementia. Included in the sample were strata manager representatives. We present a

International Research Forum on Multi-owned Properties
Deakin University, Melbourne 9-10th February 2017

comparison between the different organisations with a focus on strata managers, as a group that provides support and advice to the committee of management on a range of issues but also enacts committee requests.

We found that where the peak body nominated a person who had personal experience of dementia through family or friends, then there was a greater understanding of the needs of people with dementia and how it could impact on committee of management requests and decisions. Additionally, we found that of all the organisations, strata manager representatives were more familiar with and could more easily identify a growing trend for older people to live in apartment buildings and that this trend related to both owners and renters. This trend dovetails with current urban densification policies and indicates a move away from younger age groups being located in apartments and flats. Strata manager representatives noted that physical changes to the common property were sometimes requested and/or carried out to meet the needs of aging owners.

There is a significant push for age and dementia friendly communities at federal, state and local government levels. Developing age and dementia friendly housing needs to be a central part in this process. Though principles for universal design were discussed across all housing rental sectors, the design principles best understood related to physical change rather than cognitive change. This finding supports the need for better understanding and training related to an aging population in which dementia is a key age related health and housing issue.