An investigation of the IRT retirement community landscape: A pilot study

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This study was about:

- What the current literature says about retirement communities and housing for older adults
- Examining the areas in which IRT villages are located and the experiences of residents.
Methodology

- Review of current literature
- Analysis of general population statistics
- Analysis of statistics from IRT databases
- Survey of current IRT residents.
Review of the current literature:

1. What is a retirement community?
   - many terms used: retirement village, self-care unit, ILUs, seniors’ housing etc
   - State based, consumer protection legislation
   - NOT aged care, no government subsidies.
2. Who lives in retirement communities?

- Limited research into who considers relocating and who lives in retirement communities
- From ABS data, Towart (2013) found that:
  - 57% of residents likely to be full or part pensioners (but varied between regions)
  - less likely to need assistance with core activities than general population 65+ (but varies between states)
  - more likely to participate in volunteering (but wide variation between retirement communities).

3. Perceptions of retirement communities

- **Negative** perceptions include fear of risk to privacy and independence, inequitable and confusing financial arrangements.
- **Positive** perceptions include sense of security, opportunities to socialise and for a change of lifestyle.
- Residents generally have positive perceptions of their communities.
4. Integration with wider community

- Older people generally prefer to be close to local communities, families and friends
- Price of land etc may push developments to fringes of suburbs
- Need for retirement communities to be integrated into surrounding communities to encourage healthy, active ageing.
5. Assessing age friendliness of environments

- Well being in later life is related to built, natural and social environments in which people live
- WHO “Age-Friendly City Guide” for indicators of cities & communities
- No assessments relate specifically to retirement communities.

World Health Organisation (2007)
*Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide*
Geneva: WHO Press
6. Factors influencing relocation to a retirement community

- Wide range of socio-demographic, community and social factors may influence housing choices
- Include changes in personal autonomy & independence, need for social connection, losing a partner, financial status & disincentives (effect on pension) and perceptions about retirement communities.
7. Benefits & effects of relocation

- Can affect older people, families & wider community in many ways
- A number of benefits have been found, including higher quality of life
- Unclear whether specific factors may influence apparent benefits, & effects on subgroups of older people.
8. Alternative accommodation

- 94% older people live in private housing, of which 78% were separate houses (decreases with age)
- Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCS) & cohousing may offer similar benefits to retirement communities – little is known
- Home modifications may be of benefit.
9. Ageing in place & retirement communities

- Many factors influence desire & ability to age in place
- May be disconnect between desire & ability to do so
- Baby boomers more attached to general location than the family home
- Perceptions of social cohesion & networks, safety etc associated with physical & mental health
- Policy action enhancing neighbourhood quality may assist older Australians to age well in place.
Locations for pilot study

1. IRT Macarthur (Campbelltown, NSW)  
   - 262 apartments

2. IRT Kangara Waters (Belconnen, ACT)  
   - 150 residences (including 94 apartments)

Both have co-located Care Centres with dementia specific accommodation.
Experiences of residents

- Majority reported *improved quality of life* since moving in and found the environment easy to move around in
- Greatest benefits:
  - less cleaning & maintenance
  - increased social contact
  - feeling of community
  - social activities available.
Accessing aged care services
Age at commencement of aged care services - 2010 and 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Residents from broader communities</th>
<th>Residents from IRT retirement communities</th>
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<th>Residents from IRT retirement communities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community care services</td>
<td>82 80.7</td>
<td>84 81.4</td>
<td>83 83</td>
<td>87 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential aged care</td>
<td>82 80.7</td>
<td>84 81.4</td>
<td>83 83</td>
<td>87 88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Age at *commencement* of aged care services and *duration*

- **Residents from broader communities**
- **Residents from IRT retirement communities**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Services</th>
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<th>Duration</th>
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<td>Community care services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential aged care</td>
<td>76</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- Retirement communities support older people to live longer in a familiar place independently or with some assistance.
- Important implications for ageing in place service provision & for aged care sector – potential cost savings for Australian Government.
- This research needs to be extended across IRT and the retirement community landscape more generally.
The full final report is available at:


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Thank you!