

SUBMISSION FROM KAYE COLE TO REVIEW
OF THE
RETIREMENT VILLAGES ACT 1986

I am currently a resident of [REDACTED], a retirement village located in [REDACTED], owned by [REDACTED]. I have been resident here since [REDACTED]. My date of birth is [REDACTED].

I wish to comment on four topics from the Issues Paper, which I will identify by the numbers of the questions provided in the paper.

QUESTIONS 7, 14 & 16: The deferred management fee.

Clarity regarding the deferred management fee and other departure fees and charges is essential information which should be provided in advertisements and early in any sales process, to anyone considering entering a retirement village. This information needs to be provided with sufficient emphasis to ensure that the potential resident or their adviser clearly understands what effect it would have on their finances. Residents should be advised on a regular basis (say every 2 years) of the percentage amount of their individual deferred management fee. In my view village owners and managers should also be obliged by law or regulation to give all residents copies of the various booklets about retirement villages published by Consumer Affairs, including the Good Practice Protocols. When I moved here no-one among the staff even knew this material existed.

QUESTIONS 17 & 18: Accreditation

In my view we need to move towards mandatory accreditation for retirement villages. This will clearly have to be a staged process and will require a range of supports, including increased formalisation of training programs.

Why mandatory accreditation? (1) While retirement villages are not nursing homes, they are increasingly becoming home to an older cohort of residents. Age of entry is now on average a good deal higher than 55, while the policy of Ageing in Place and the increasing provision of Home Care (however much constrained) lead to a much more vulnerable population than previously. These facts alone indicate a need for built-in and independent sources of protection for these more potentially frail citizens.

(2) Accreditation needs to be mandatory. We have seen that self- or voluntary regulation does not work, it is equivalent to no regulation- (Banks, Franchises, Aged Care – need I say more?). Given the profit motive and the private for profit nature of much of the Retirement Village Industry the temptations of self-regulation are too great.

(3) Accreditation needs to be independent of the Retirement Village Industry (see 2) and to be rigorously and regularly monitored, with suitable penalties applied for breaches.

(4) Accreditation will clearly come at a cost, but marketing benefits will flow to the industry itself as well as benefits to residents and their families. Not only will accreditation make choosing a retirement village easier for residents and families, it can also provide and maintain better quality

service provision and protection for residents. In my view governments have the obligation to protect the wellbeing of society's more vulnerable members, which would justify the provision of partial ongoing government funding and supports for a mandatory accreditation system, in conjunction with funds provided by the Retirement Village Industry which itself stands to benefit.

QUESTIONS 22&23 Staff training and development

Effective and appropriate training for village management and staff is an essential and critical element in the development of accreditation and quality improvement on the ground. Training programs need to be professionally designed and based on an in-depth industry needs analysis before being piloted. Basic skills need to be complemented with a range of specific skills from an unusually wide range of disciplines, to be commensurate with the nature of the responsibilities undertaken by managers. As the Retirement village Industry itself becomes more professionalised, so too must all the staff at the coalface.

Clear career paths and a variety of entry points need to be identified for the industry, based on consultation with the full range of stakeholders, including resident representation. Training programs need to be provided by organisations with accredited educational standing, and to be made accessible both in and out of the workplace. Ongoing refresher courses should form a regular part of course design. Recent experience of the disastrous VET program requires a responsible and rigorous approach to the further development of courses. An ongoing independent board to oversee the standards, coordination and accessibility of training provisions is essential.

QUESTION 46 External dispute resolution

The use of VCAT or the Courts is really not practical for most retirement village residents, as even though VCAT was originally designed to be a "People's Court" it has become the expensive and complicated province of high powered lawyers. The vast majority of retirement village residents and their peak body, Residents of Retirement Villages Victoria (RRVV), favour the Ombudsman system as their preferred external dispute resolution process. As I understand it a petition to that effect has been presented to the Victorian Parliament.

While the Retirement Village Industry is not in favour of this approach, since owners/managers are always in the position of power vis- a- vis residents, in my opinion their view should carry less weight on this issue than the views of residents.

Kaye Cole


