

Older Persons

Introduction

By way of scoping the issues to be considered, the forum broke into focus groups. A remarkable homogeneity of ideas resulted:

- diversity and choice of services is important; higher-rise developments may be quite suitable for some older people, as well as those housed more closely on the flat in grouped living situations supported by a warder etc;
- diversity and adaptability in housing type is important, together with security of tenure;
- integration of all housing types together, and within and part of the wider community should be sought;
- the ability for tenants to transfer from one housing type to another is important, as their needs and wants change over time;
- older people should not be isolated by these developments, but integrated as part of the community.

From these recommendations, six overall goals were suggested that could overlay the themes of the older people's housing section of the social housing strategy, taking their stimulus from the Positive Ageing Strategy.

Goals for an older peoples housing strategy:

Goal 1: People are supported wherever they are

Participants were aware of some older people having to move from their present location if a wide enough range of support was not available. One or two hours of community support may not be enough to meet their needs. Some secondary urban areas e.g. Queenstown have only one rest home/hospital as facilities for older people. If people don't meet the entry requirements, and cannot receive enough support at home, there are no other housing choices.

Another issue in effective support for older people is that support services often don't have reliable staff. This is related to the issue of status; working with the elderly is regarded as the lowest status in community work. Status, terms and conditions of the work need to be improved to attract better staff and services.

Agencies in the voluntary sector fulfil a very important role, and deserve increased recognition for the work they carry out associated with the social, spiritual and cultural needs of people in the community. Another group of support people deserve more recognition; that is family/whanau caring for other family/whanau members. Such carers and supporters don't get the same recognition or re-imburement from government agencies as carers who are not family members, and this could be addressed by the health and social welfare agencies.

It is important that Government values and recognises the role and breadth of supporting groups within the community that provide for peoples' social, emotional, physical, cultural, and financial needs. Increased recognition for breadth of roles for organisations in the community which can take an holistic approach to meeting such needs, including even ostensibly social needs provided for by bowls clubs and the like.

Recommendations

Reliable, trained and resourced community workers are an important part of an older person's environment.

Goal 2: Inclusion In Diversity

Older people need to retain their inclusion in the community, rather than being regarded in isolation. The provision of more choices in suitable accommodation could in itself act as an incentive to move to more appropriate housing. Individual choice needs to be recognised.

The importance of the linkages between social and health support services and housing were noted. The social housing sector is not able to provide for all needs on its own. The emotional, physical and mental well-being of older people needs to be catered for too. The social housing sector can provide the physical envelope, but other needs are more complex.

Recommendations

That housing policies ensure the integration of older persons with their community.

Goal 3: The Provision Of Supporting Services To Enable Ageing In Place

The linkages between health and housing, and the contribution that warm, dry housing can make to maintaining the good health of occupants were noted. Nevertheless, housing may not always be a *solution in itself*; people need houses, and also need support in some instances. Security can be a concern for older people; personal alarms can be added for people as a support measure. Wiring-in of security features, and the provision of other housing amenities e.g. wheelchair-accessible showers, security stops on windows and adequate ventilation systems at the building stage is less expensive than re-fitting, and should be considered as part of a design guide for older people's housing. 'Smart' housing systems were advocated.

It should be recognised that provision of more government funding at an early stage is cost-effective in heading off problems that can cost more money at other end of the intervention. Providing increased capacity for housing providers to actually identify what needs a person has would be valuable, as would be organisations to help specifically older people. Two areas could be help with gardening needs etc. when these become too onerous for their current property, and for crisis support in helping with depression, which is more prevalent among older age groups

Practical ways in which support services could be improved, allowing people to age in place, include:

- provision of a single point of contact for the range of community information available,
- networking with the range of service providers, and
- outreach into the older people's community to spread the message out there.

The role of a social worker/community liaison officer/residence caretaker was envisaged, able to work with and refer people to the whole range of community services. The position could be part voluntary, and part Government-funded, able to play a similar role to that carried out in the recent Glen Innes re-development, where all tenants were interviewed about where and how they would like to live in the newly developed housing. It is important that the position be seen as separate from Tenancy Manager type of positions, where officials are coming round to collect rent, dealing with tenancy issues etc.

Sites could be set up, linked by the Internet, listing what's available from all social housing providers in different localities. People could then make informed decisions about where they want to live, and how want to live according to the different types of social housing listed by providers. The concept could be similar to the community offices set up in and by local councils. This would provide a one-stop shop for social housing information, but being supported by the community liaison officer going out into the community concentrating on the older age group, rather than waiting to be contacted.

Recommendations

- That "smart" housing principles be adopted with appropriate design manuals being developed.
- That support services, including information services be provided and be accessible.

Goal 4: The Support For Alternative Models Of Housing

The most important practical form of support was seen as capacity-building for providers, intending providers and participants in third-sector housing. Capacity and knowledge is noted to be low at present. Advice is needed on different options for co-operative housing models and sustainable housing, and how financing could be arranged. It was felt that a person skilled in the housing field, with experience in housing models and financing mechanisms could be nominated or appointed for that liaison position to work with the third sector agencies and interested participants.

More flexibility is needed in Government and quasi-government agencies' approaches. HNZA could assist with suggesting and promoting alternative financial models and advice, e.g. underwriting or guarantees of finance if more direct help is not possible. Perhaps as part of pay-back for assistance and advice, or more formally as part of the financial mechanisms, HNZA could purchase a proportion of "licences to occupy" within the community homes it helps to set up, for its own tenants to move into.

Assistance could also include the design of non-traditional building methods, as well as different models. This could extend to support for building to maximum standards rather than the minimum, and design of "smart houses" and modular systems. It may also require changes to the Building Act and Building Code. It was noted that HNZA housing currently tends to be built by developers, and is not a source of great innovation. Innovation could be encouraged through HNZA's own building codes; e.g. a zero-energy house may be possible in some districts, that would not require any heating. Appropriate design codes should be developed.

Recommendations

- That capacity building options for providers be extended.
- That Government initiatives and flexibility be reviewed.
- That design codes be developed.

Goal 5: Appropriate Housing (including Location) to Maintain the Wellbeing of Older People

There are a number of areas which contribute to well-being, which can be maintained or improved with the proper design and location of housing which is “appropriate”. Well-being has mental, physical and spiritual dimensions for the whole person. Both “well-being” and “appropriate” housing are on-going processes, closely tied to an individual’s health and feeling of worth and being valued. As there are many factors which contribute to well-being, so there are many factors which need to be taken into account in planning and building houses which are intended to be “appropriate”.

These can include:

- the physical envelope of the building, which should be built to better than minimum standards for health and safety, so that it will not need to be modified structurally in future, at extra cost. Interiors should be built wide enough so that a wheelchair can manoeuvre round all corners etc., windows at a height that can be seen out of when occupants are sitting down;
- other building issues including the need for good insulation, easy to heat (able to close rooms off) and orientation to sun;
- properties need to be designed with security concerns in mind;
- mobility issues for older people dictate space needed for off-street car parking, and provision for mobility scooters which need cover and outdoor power supply. Verandahs for scooters and enjoyment of sitting outdoors;
- Modern communications are important; computers, phones, TV, internet, security issues etc. require that these facilities and enough power points should be incorporated into the building at the design stage for ease of building and to reduce cost;
- Locational issues within the wider community dictate that housing for older people needs to be in easy terrain and close to facilities used more frequently by older people; specifically mentioned were easy access to public transport, shops, doctors and medical facilities;
- Appropriate housing needs to focus on surroundings too as well as the house; outlook can be greatly improved if it is positioned to take advantage of views and the wider outside environment, outdoor areas and gardens etc are provided for. Just a little more care and attention to the overall feeling of the properties could lead to people taking some delight in what they’ve got. Outdoor needs such as transport are important here too; going beyond the essential indoors – the ability to get to trees, beach, to local theatre if that’s what’s wanted.

It was suggested that these issues should be looked at in replacement of time-expired housing. Where issues of maintenance vs. replacement suggest that replacement would be the most cost-effective option, then the areas should be assessed along the lines above for their suitability for establishing dedicated housing for older people.

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Recommendations

That the issues identified above be reflected in appropriate design codes.

Goal 6: Incentives to Encourage Older People to Move to More Appropriate Housing

It was noted that provision of more choice in better quality, more suitable two-bedroom housing would be an incentive in itself to stimulate older people to move out of properties that are less appropriate for them, or are now too large for their immediate needs. There needs to be an advantage for older people to move (rather than an incentive).

The incentive would be provided by having the other, more appropriate, housing actually there. Means by which this could be developed include in-fill housing, through the subdivision of larger sections. This could allow newly developed houses suitable for older people to be built, with all new mod cons. Older people would be able to remain settled in their usual neighbourhood with all links and support structures. They would be able to move just a short distance to more suitable housing without having to uproot long-established networks and familiarity with the surroundings and facilities.

Assistance could also be provided by HNZC with aspects of the move/transfer itself. For many, the thought of moving is far too daunting. For people on fixed incomes, costs can be a big factor. Assistance in meeting the removal costs, or part of the total costs of the move including packaging-up, insurance, or subsidising independent removal contractors could be provided. Other possibilities could be to offer secure storage facilities until tenants are able to settle in, or waiver of cleanup costs from the previous tenancy.

Recommendations

That policies which increase, or maximise, the use of existing housing stocks be developed, consistent with the wish of older people to move and stay within their existing communities.