

Ageing in Place

Bathroom Design for Independent Living



Introduction

It's no secret that Australia's population is ageing rapidly. Spurred on by increased life-expectancy, falls in fertility, and the maturing of the baby boomer generation, the coming decades will see a massive shift in the make-up of the population. Over the next 40 years, it is predicted for the Australian population that:

- The proportion of people aged 65 years and over will increase from 13 percent to 24 percent¹
- The proportion of people aged 85 years and over will increase from 1.6 percent to 6 percent²

This shift is expected to have far-reaching implications for society, the economy, and those responsible for providing the services and infrastructure to meet the expectations of the community.

For the architects, designers and specifiers entrusted with designing a built environment that will meet the changing needs of occupants over their lifetimes, there will be a host of new and unique challenges which must be addressed.



“With eight out of ten baby boomers wanting to stay in their current homes for as long as possible⁵, home design must advance with changing expectations.”

Independent living – Ageing in place

A key difference to the elderly population of days-gone-by, the baby boomers will have a much stronger preference to remain independent and exercise autonomy in their decision-making³. The concept of 'ageing in place' is central to the desire for independent living.

Ageing in place refers to the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level⁴.

With eight out of ten baby boomers wanting to stay in their current homes for as long as possible⁵, home design must advance with changing expectations.

Livable Housing Australia, a community, government and industry partnership promoting livable home design, has identified four key features livable home design should include for ageing in place.

A home should:

- be easy to enter
- be easy to navigate in and around
- be capable of easy and cost-effective adaptation, and
- be responsive to the changing needs of home occupants⁶

Adherence to these guidelines will enable key living spaces to be more easily and cost effectively adapted to meet the changing needs and abilities of home occupants such as ageing baby boomers, and disabilities which may be acquired with age.

The benefits of livable home design help provide both comfort and quality of life to occupants, as well as greatly reducing future costs.

A recent report from into Housing and Independent Living from NSW Family & Community Services found that:

- 62% of all falls and slip-based injuries will occur at home
- The cost to the homeowner of including key liveable housing design features is 22 times more efficient than retrofitting when an unplanned need arises⁷

Correct planning at the design stage can help allay these incidents.

Bathroom design

Bathrooms are identified as a particular area in need of attention. While being one of the most frequented rooms in the house, as well as a high prevalence of hazards that increase the risk of falls, a recent report has found that most bathrooms do not comply with *AS 4299 Adaptable Housing*.⁸

As levels of mobility and independence change, the bathroom should be flexible enough to accommodate these changing requirements.

However, the Housing and Independent Living report found that:

- 96% of people did not make provision for a folding seat in the shower
- 80% of people did not have a grab rail in the shower recess
- 40% did not have an easy to reach shower tap⁹

With encouragement for both the private sector and government to develop housing products to meet future needs, Con-Serv Australia research and develop products to assist Australia's ageing population.

Balancing form & function in independent living

Con-Serv Corporation Australia assists architects, designers and specifiers in creating liveable spaces which address the evolving requirements of Australia's ageing population. Con-Serv cultivates a safe environment for people of different abilities to live independently, whilst still maintaining a focus on aesthetics and functionality.

Con-Serv Corporation Australia offers a range of products and bathroom accessories to cover every aspect of bathroom functionality; from shower systems to grab rails, shower seats and toilet back rests.

The range includes:

Safe-Assist BACKREST: A support device for toilets that improves the comfort of using a toilet while simultaneously providing an acceptable level of safety for disabled, aged and infirmed.

Safe-Assist FOLDING SHOWER SEATS: Specially designed for use inside the shower recess for people who are unable to, or find it difficult to shower while standing and need to sit down while they take a shower.



Con-Serv Australia

A family owned business, Con-Serv Corporation Australia is a well-established presence in the bathroom and healthcare arena. With a strong focus on sustainable and functional design, Con-Serv has over 30 years knowledge and experience providing architects and designers the confidence and flexibility for bathroom design.

Their knowledge of the industry allows architects and designers to feel certain they are buying from an exceptional local manufacturer, which promises to deliver on experience, function, quality, style and technology.

Con-Serv has a simple aim regarding design; they like to work on aesthetics whilst maintaining the structural integrity and practical useability of products. Importantly, they have a comprehensive testing regime in order to fulfil the requirements of applicable Australian Standards.



REFERENCES

- ¹ http://alga.asn.au/site/misc/alga/downloads/publications/Agfriendly_built_environment_paper.pdf
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17 Glentanna Stree, Kedron · Qld. 4031 Australia
Phone: +61 (0)7 3630 5744 · Fax: +61 (0)7 3630 5755
Email: mail@con-serv.com.au · www.con-serv.com.au