



Cohousing for seniors: Sustainability



Benefits of cohousing

A key feature of cohousing is that residents are actively engaged in the design and management of their residence.

This enables residents concerned about the impacts of housing on society and the environment to promote sustainability outcomes.

This factsheet sets out some of the potential sustainability benefits of cohousing. Yet due to the diversity of cohousing, these outcomes are likely to be shaped by the priorities of residents and type of cohousing development model (see *Cohousing for Seniors: Diversity of models* factsheet).

Social



Cohousing developments aim to encourage social contact among residents, with the potential to reduce isolation.

Participatory decision-making keeps residents actively involved in the community, including decisions on their neighbourhood. Close-knit communities provide a sense of social connectedness and meaning, which are relevant factors for well-being. Based on the preferences of residents, cohousing can be used to bring together like-minded people (e.g. residents of a similar ethnic background or similar demographics) to create a community. Other communities may wish to prioritise diversity (e.g. an intergenerational development), with opportunities to share knowledge and life experience. For vulnerable individuals, cohousing provides an opportunity for residents to pool the costs of care and may enhance feelings of safety and security.

Economic

Well-designed cohousing can reduce ongoing overall living expenses and provide an affordable housing alternative.

While cohousing developments may reduce the size of private living spaces, efficient use of shared spaces increases the total liveable area that each resident can utilise. As cohousing residents are involved in the design of their future home, they can prioritise technologies and design aspects that may increase upfront costs, but significantly reduce the ongoing operation costs of their homes. Depending on the cohousing model, affordability gains can be realised through:

- capping of developer profit by reducing their speculative risk and avoiding the need for pre-sale marketing costs;
- shared spaces mean fewer materials required in the design of new housing developments, relative to access to liveable area;
- reducing ongoing operation and maintenance costs;
- pooling resources to reduce the costs of services and facilities (e.g. the costs of care for seniors).



Environmental

There are a number of reasons why well-designed cohousing can be good for the environment.

Sharing of less commonly used spaces in the home (e.g. laundries) can reduce the size of private dwellings. Clustering dwellings and increasing housing density increases total access to liveable area.

This can minimize the physical and environmental footprint of resources needed to build housing. Sharing facilities also improves resource efficiency (embedded energy and water) and cuts the ongoing costs of living. Through active engagement in the management of cohousing developments, residents can exchange knowledge and expose others to lesser-known environmental practices.

Residents might also elect to implement pro-environmental practices such as, installing community scale renewable energy, reducing the number of car spaces to encourage car share and public transport, or choosing to use more sustainable materials in the construction of new developments.



This fact sheet is based on research funded by a Liveable Communities Grant from the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, with additional funding and resources from the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage Sustainability Advantage Program. Any advice provided in this factsheet is general advice only. It has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. Before acting on this advice you should consider the appropriateness of the advice, having regard to your own objectives, financial situation and needs. <http://bit.ly/2sqP7uR>