

Look to NDIS for new income sources

Residential aged care providers are well-placed to consider expanding into purpose-built accommodation for young people requiring permanent care, writes Robert Caulfield.

MORE THAN 6,000 young people throughout Australia with advanced degenerative disease or disability have been consigned to aged care facilities, which are designed specifically for the requirements of Australians with an average age of 85.

While the aged care sector does its best to provide care, it's not equipped to deliver individualised multidisciplinary health and rehabilitation supports, or the quality of life that a young person requires.

Now, the Federal Government, through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), has embarked on a program to provide more suitable accommodation, which includes funds to pay for the construction of facilities alongside care management.

With creative thinking and entrepreneurship this emerging field provides aged care operators with the opportunity to work with the NDIS to create adjunct housing suitable for young people with disabilities thereby expanding existing facilities, operations, sources of income and profits.

An appropriate residential home can be built either next door or close by an existing aged care facility and existing amenities including kitchens, laundry and staff can be utilised to service it.

These homes should be designed and built so that they can be sold as a normal house if the aged care operator decides to discontinue this line of service. It may have special features such as a sprinkler system, wider hallways,

more robust fittings and fixtures and higher ceilings, but it should still look like a normal house.

The design requires attention to several levels of support including full wheelchair access, robustness for people with behaviour issues such as reinforced walls, 10mm laminated windows and other safety features, and high levels of physical support.

The NDIS concept aims to deinstitutionalise housing and get as many young people as possible into accommodation that's as close to a home as possible, which makes the suburban position of aged care facilities ideal.

According to the *NDIS Specialist Disability Accommodation Decision Paper on Pricing and Payments*, the program encourages new builds from a broad range of building types, and new incentives for Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) providers to develop smaller, innovative forms of accommodation. They seek to enable the development of a vibrant supply market of accommodation to meet individual needs.

Family needs are also important. We're currently working on a shared housing facility. While designing, we catered for the family's wishes and placed decks outside the bedrooms for privacy during visits. Within limits, you can provide customised solutions that enhance lives.

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