

Co-housing options for older people to live independent, fulfilling lives

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Co-housing has the potential to address housing affordability and social isolation for older people, yet it has an image problem. Credit: bigstock.com

Older people in co-housing could lead independent and socially fulfilling lives in their communities at an affordable cost, new research has found.

However, the researchers found co-housing has an image problem – people reimagine the share houses of their youth or anticipate giving up their privacy.

Housing the ageing population of NSW presents a major challenge for the state, particularly in a time of rising housing costs with one in three NSW households destined to be single-person households within a decade.

The research team from the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) spent a year exploring alternative living options for older people, talking to housing and ageing policy-makers, co-housing developers and older people themselves.

The research was conducted in partnership with the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage's Sustainability Advantage Program, who provided funding support along with the NSW Government's Liveable Communities Grants Program.

Professor Chris Riedy, who led the research, said co-housing offers an attractive housing option but few are aware of its potential – "most people still think of hippies, communes or share houses".

"We found co-housing can help older people stay in a part of the city they love, in a supportive environment that will provide them with social interaction and greater access to services as they age.

"There are fantastic modern co-housing options that are perfect for the mainstream, with great design and a balance between privacy and community."

Professor Riedy and the research team identified three co-housing options:

- Deliberative development, where future residents participate in the design of a new multi-unit building that they will eventually live in. Nightingale Housing has pioneered this approach in Melbourne and the idea is spreading to other states;
- Co-operative tenancy, where residents form a housing co-operative to manage their tenancy of a building. Common Equity is the leading proponent of this model in NSW, with 39 housing co-operatives established;
- Small-scale cohousing, where an existing single dwelling is renovated to accommodate one to three additional dwellings.

NSW Minister for Ageing Tanya Davies commended UTS on their research into innovative solutions to affordable housing for older people.

"One of the most important ways to ensure the quality of life of older people around NSW is to increase access to housing that is affordable, appropriate to their physical needs, and which allows them to stay connected to their community."

Professor Riedy said there was much to be done in myth-busting and in raising awareness of co-housing among older people.

"Very few [older people](#) in the focus groups had heard of co-housing, though guessed it involved sharing living space. 'A nice idea but not for me' was a common response," he said.

"If we are going to realise the housing affordability and sustainability benefits of co-housing, there is an urgent need to fund and promote demonstration projects to raise awareness of co-housing options.

"We also need web platforms that can link up the growing number of [people](#) who want to live in co-housing"

More information: Cohousing for seniors: [www.uts.edu.au/research-and-te ... arch/social-change-4](http://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-te...arch/social-change-4)

Provided by University of Technology, Sydney

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