

The Aged Care Act and its Implementation

Designing the future of Senior Living

GRAY
PUKSAND

Executive Summary

The Aged Care Act (commenced 1 November 2025) is a generational reform that recasts Australia's aged care system around a rights-based, person-centred model. The shift elevates the built environment from a compliance item to a strategic enabler of resident autonomy, wellbeing and community connection. Paired with the National Aged Care Design Principles and the Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards, the Act requires providers, designers and owners to demonstrate how places deliver outcomes that are clinical, social, operational and commercial. .

For leaders, owners, developers, operators, and project managers, the new law is not just a compliance hurdle but a strategic opportunity to create extraordinary places. This is an opportunity to future-proof assets, attract and retain workforce, strengthen occupancy and reduce regulatory and reputational risk.

Reform Timeline



1. Context: The Shift to Human-Centered Care

Design Now Matters More Than Ever

Following the Royal Commission, the new Act and national design guidance embed older people’s rights into law and design expectations, delivering a shift:

- From compliance-driven, provider-centric care
- To rights- and outcomes-driven models where the built environment is a key enabler of resident autonomy, wellness, and connection.

The New Paradigm: Rights, choice, connection, and wellness embedded in the physical environment.

The National Aged Care Design Principles translate those rights into actionable design objectives and checklists that support co-design and flexible application across contexts. The Strengthened Quality Standards require providers to show measurable outcomes and continuous improvement that design must enable.



Before: The noise, clutter and busyness of the nurses’ station, signage clutter and lack of orientation increases confusion and stress of residents.



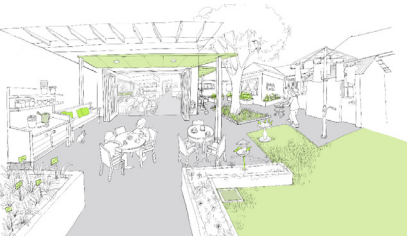
After: The same setting changed to be a more comfortable, peaceful, and less institutional environment with the nurses’ station removed and basin area discreet, prompting more social activity.



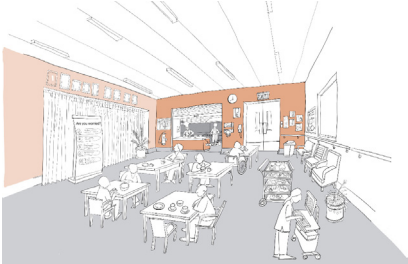
Before: The garden itself is decorative, rather than a place that supports activity for individuals or small groups.



After: The same garden has now been enhanced through introduction of shaded areas, planting, better pathways, connection to living spaces, and provision of outdoor activities.



Before: The environment is set up for people to be together in large numbers which lends itself to a pre-determined program of activities.



After: The noise, clutter and busyness of the nurses’ station, signage clutter and lack of orientation increases confusion and stress of residents.



Before: The care home below has a professional, hotel-like appearance that is not welcoming to locals.



After: Changes to the building in the previous image have created opportunities for the service to provide welcoming services to the wider community.



Diagram: National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines

2. Why This Matters to the Industry

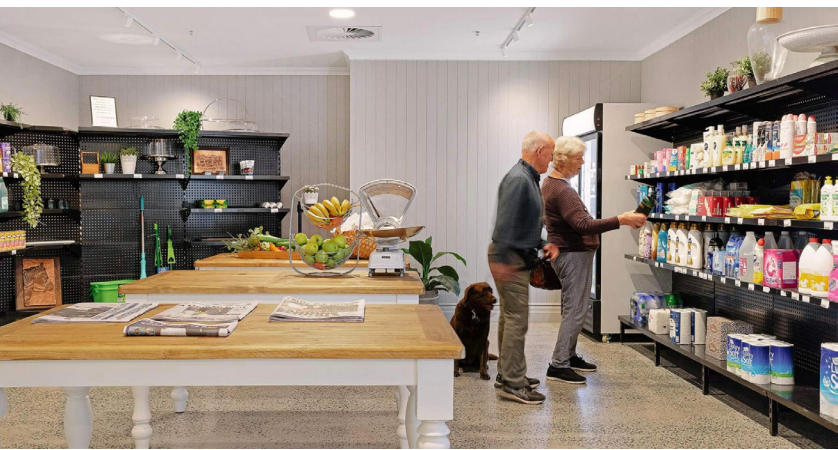
Design Led Regulatory Outcomes

The new regulatory framework means built environment decisions now influence:

- Regulatory risk and compliance
- Consumer choice and competitive positioning
- Marketability, occupancy, and investment returns
- Workforce attraction and retention
- Operational and reputational risk management

Who needs to act:

- Board directors and owners: asset future-proofing and reputational risk
- Operators: competitive differentiation and occupancy
- Project managers/developers: time/cost/quality balance in adapting assets or new build
- Designers: leadership in human-centered, agile, tech-enabled solutions



3. What Has Changed and What It Means for the Built Environment

Feature	Old Act	New Act implemented November 2025	Design Implications
Allocation of beds	Places allocated to providers	Places allocated to individuals	Focus on flexibility, consumer experience
Residents Rights	Limited + provider-led	Legally protected, non-negotiable	Built-in privacy + dignity and support
Home care model	Fragmented	One integrated system (Support at Home)	Agility for both home + facility settings
Entry and assessment	Multiple, complex	Single, simplified, culturally safe	Clear wayfinding, intuitive reception + screening spaces
Regulatory approach	Quality Standards + Audits	Stronger, rights-based, transparent	Demonstrable outcomes in design & user metrics

4. Setting the New Standard:

The Four Design Principles in Practice

- 1. Enable the Person**
 - Adaptable, human-centered spaces for independence, health and wellness
 - Universal design as standard
 - Technology integration for care and social connection
- 2. Cultivate a Home**
 - Home-like, non-institutional settings
 - Small-household models, resident personalization
 - Warm materials, familiar domestic finishes
- 3. Access the Outdoors**
 - Clear, easy access to green space at all sites
 - Biophilic features for those who cannot go outdoors
 - Gardens, walking paths, and sensory landscapes
- 4. Connect with Community**
 - Inviting entries, “community hub” spaces
 - Integration with local neighborhood and services
 - Visitor-friendly design

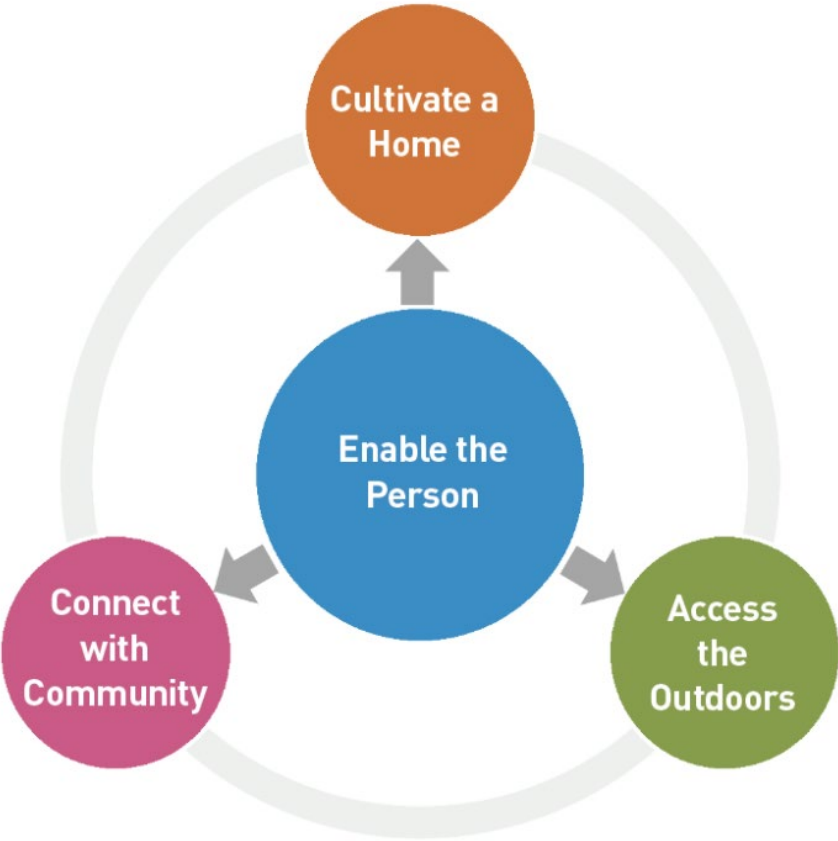


Diagram: National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines Executive Summary

5. Tangible Recommendations:

Your Roadmap to ‘Future Ready’ Assets

- 1. **Audit Assets Now:** Use National Design Principles as a self-assessment tool for compliance and opportunity.
- 2. **Co-Design Approach:** Involve residents, families, and staff in design and refurbishment projects from the outset.
- 3. **Flexibility First:** Plan for modular, reconfigurable spaces to adapt to evolving needs and regulation.
- 4. **Invest in Tech and Sustainability:** Specify for digital care, operational efficiency, and climate resilience.
- 5. **Enhance Resident + Visitor Experience:** Implement intuitive wayfinding, adequate drop-off/seating, and comfort.
- 6. **Focus on Staff Needs:** Optimise staff circulation, quiet zones, and operational efficiency via design.



Diagram: Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards February 2025

6. Strategic Takeaways for Leaders

The Four Design Principles in Practice

- Early Movers Gain:** Competitive advantage and reputation as sector leaders
 - Quality Design = Value:** Higher occupancy, staff retention, and community pride
 - Design as Risk Management:** De-risking regulatory, financial, and social outcomes
 - Implementation Urgency:** All new projects, refurbishments, and investments must readjust for rights-based care now
- Proactive action will:
- Enhance resident wellbeing and occupancy
 - Reduce regulatory and reputational risk
 - Attract and retain workforce talent
 - Future-proof your investment
 - Elevate community engagement



7. How Gray Puksand Can Partner With You

- Asset Readiness Reviews:** Rapid analysis of existing environments for compliance and competitive advantage
- Strategic Masterplanning:** Scenario modeling, site optimization, and future-proofing your portfolio
- Purpose-driven Co-Design:** Engaging all stakeholders for practical, human-centered outcomes
- Innovation in Delivery:** Tech-enabled, sustainable, and adaptable solutions aligned to your operational and market objectives



Final Thought

This is not just about compliance. The Aged Care Act issues an invitation and a challenge to our sector: to build environments worthy of the lives and stories within them. Our obligation, and opportunity, is to embed respect, independence, and hope into every space we design.

At Gray Puksand, we invite you to lead this transformation with us.

Robert Puksand is the founding Partner of Gray Puksand, bringing decades of leadership and strategic design expertise across a broad range of sectors, including health, aged care and senior living. His continued commitment to delivering high-quality professional services and fostering efficient organisational structures has been instrumental in establishing Gray Puksand as one of Australia's leading architectural practices.



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