

How different senior housing types impact quality of life to be studied in NUS project

The aim is to design future homes to meet the diverse needs and evolving preferences of elders living alone or with family, says Sim Ann

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THE government is exploring how different types of senior housing influence the quality of life of seniors in a S\$2.9 million project led by the National University of Singapore.

On Tuesday (June 4), Senior Minister of State for National Development Sim Ann said that the aim of this study is to enhance the planning, design, and provision of future senior housing, taking into account the diverse needs, evolving preferences and changing aspirations of seniors who may be living alone or with their families.

Announcing the study on the third day of the World Cities Summit held at Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre, Sim said: "With increasing life expectancy and low fertility rates, the proportion of Singapore's citizen population aged 65 years and above is rising rapidly. It is estimated that by 2030, one in four people will be in this age category and we know that many of our seniors wish to age-in-place."

To prepare for the silver generation, the government has launched Age Well SG, a national programme to support seniors in ageing well in their homes and communities, she added.

Seniors who would benefit from assisted living options can stay in

Community Care Apartments, a senior-friendly type of flats designed with on-site care services, such as 24-hour emergency monitoring and response, basic health checks as well as group activities.

The first Community Care Apartments were launched in the Harmony Village @ Bukit Batok project in February 2021, followed by Queensway Canopy in 2022.

"We have also been piloting other new purpose-built senior housing typologies, such as the co-location of senior housing with social and community facilities at Kampung Admiralty, as well as a sandbox programme on Shared Stay-in Senior Care Services, to trial the feasibility of having live-in domestic helpers to care for several seniors sharing one apartment," explained Sim. She noted: "As we continue to explore new ways to support our seniors, we will need continued research to inform our decisions."

In the private sector, assisted living options include St Bernadette Lifestyle Village at Adam Road, Bukit Timah and Sembawang, where private residential houses are retrofitted for senior co-living.

Last year, a Perennial Holdings unit was awarded a tender for a private assisted-living development in Parry Avenue for S\$71.9 million. The development will comprise 200 assisted-living apartments, a

nursing home with 100 beds, a wellness clubhouse and a geriatric care centre, said Perennial Holdings. Each unit, ranging from 366 to 666 square feet, will have one or two bedrooms, a private lift and access to balconies.

A dementia-friendly zone within the development will allow residents living with dementia to move around safely. At the wellness clubhouse, seniors will have access to a strength-training programme. Perennial Holdings will also partner Wilmar International to provide its residents with meals that cater to their dietary needs.

Perennial Holdings said: "The development will cater to various types of residents, ranging from the healthy to those with mild dementia, as well as seniors requiring assisted daily living and nursing needs."

The authorities had also launched a tender for a dementia-care village comprising 10 bungalows to be built at Gibraltar Crescent in Sembawang in 2019.

However, it was not awarded as the sole bid of S\$15 million was

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deemed too low.

Over a three-year period, NUS researchers will develop a framework and tool to provide a baseline measurement and comparison of seniors' quality of living across the different housing typologies. They will also analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each housing typology and establish minimum standards for senior housing from a quality of living perspective.

Sim said that government-led efforts need to be complemented by community input and feedback from seniors.

The Age+ Living Lab, launched in March this year, is an example of a community-led collaboration that brings together businesses, social enterprises and researchers to help seniors age better at home.

The lab fosters a two-way exchange through which seniors and their caregivers can physically try

out assistive living products so that solution providers can obtain feedback and finetune the products to cater to the needs of seniors, she added.

Desmond Sim, chief executive officer of Edmund Tie, said that policymakers and developers can consider three main areas when planning assisted living projects for seniors – financial affordability, health status and social status.

More affluent seniors would expect to maintain their lifestyles, and seniors who are widowed or single may want to live with or near other seniors to have friends within the same age group, Edmund Tie's Sim said.

"There must be a basic care package and there could be additions depending on the needs of seniors. For instance, there could be one wing (in the building) for dementia patients, and another wing for patients with chronic health conditions who may require daily medication and supervision," the CEO added.

To make private sector assisted living projects more affordable, the government can consider allocating land with a shorter lease with an option for developers to ex-

tend if they meet certain conditions such as offering more value-added services or improvements, he noted.

No matter what form it takes, assisted living should be based on integration and not segregation, as seniors would still want to contribute to society, he said.

Sing Tien Foo, provost's chair professor of real estate at the NUS Business School, said that while Kampung Admiralty, the first Housing Board project which integrates senior housing with social, healthcare and communal facilities, is a good model, it requires a large enough catchment of seniors to be sustainable.

He said: "If we cannot replicate this model islandwide because of costs, we can look at what is most relevant to ageing seniors. Community Care Apartments are a good option for active seniors or those who are still mobile and want some support in their daily lives, such as basic repair services and food delivery."

Such services can also be rolled out to seniors who prefer to age in place, especially those who do not live with their children, added Prof Sing.