

Where have all the Elders gone? The need for a Nursing Home in Mallacoota.

By Linda Bruce (CHIRF)

In the 2015-2017 financial years 48 Mallacoota residents were admitted to Nursing Homes 2-8 hour return drive from Mallacoota. In July 2017, 13 people were in Eden BUPA and the remainder who had not passed away, were in the other nine Nursing Homes that Mallacoota feeds into. Mallacoota currently has 80 people aged over 80 years and 500 people over 60 yrs. (ABS) The need is dire.

Once admitted into permanent residential aged care (RAC), few people leave to return to living in Mallacoota. What happens to them? How long do people live once admitted to permanent care?

Using survival analysis the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare reports that, for 2001-02, one-quarter of people admitted into permanent RAC died within just over 7 months of entering RAC and one-half died within 14 months. Four out of ten people were still alive after 3 years.

The most significant variable for predicting survival time after RAC admission was level of care needs on admission to RAC, followed by age, sex and whether the person was admitted into RAC from hospital. People admitted to RAC from hospital had lower expected survival times than others: one-quarter of people admitted from hospital were expected to die within 4 months of admission. Even if you go into a Nursing Home direct from home, 25% of people die within 7 months of admission into permanent RAC (not short term respite).

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/aged-care/movement-from-hospital-to-residential-aged-care/contents/summary>

Moreover, according to a review by the National Ageing Research Institute on behalf of Beyondblue, people living in residential aged care facilities are five times more likely than those living independently, to experience mental health issues. More than 50 percent of people living in aged care facilities suffer depression or anxiety

<https://www.agedcareguide.com.au/talking-aged-care/people-in-aged-care-facilities-are-five-times-more-likely-to-be-depressed-says-beyondblue>

"I have heard that up to 40 per cent of people in residential aged care have no visitors 365 days of the year," Minister for Aged Care, Ken Wyatt revealed in a national address, earlier this year.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-25/aged-care-residents-suffering-from-loneliness.-ken-wyatt-says/9085782>

One clear factor causing lack of visitors and higher depression, is moving residents to a Rural Aged Care Facility (RAC) further from the family. That makes sense. Most people (70%) prefer to stay at home or go to a Nursing Home near their relatives and friends.

Mallacoota has one of the oldest population of any Australian village. It is ranked 5th in its proportion of oldest residents. (The median age of Mallacoota residents is 58.3 years and for Genoa residents (60 years). The ABS Census found 271 people over 70 yrs in the township and 321 within the Mallacoota District defined as including Wallagaraugh and Cann River. 80 people are over 85 years old.

Mallacoota has become a retirement village without after-hours and weekend Medical care. Unlike other towns with old populations, Mallacoota has no access 24-hour Nursing Home.

The numbers of people needing to access a nursing home, increases yearly, and is reaching crisis point. ¹

According to the government aims of 78 Residential Nursing Home beds per 1000 people, the Hilvert Advisory Report (2018) found that the Mallacoota District, which included Cann River and Wallagarough was 25 Nursing Home beds short, Bega Valley was 7.5 beds short and East Gippsland was 10 beds short. The further away from the cities, the higher the bed shortage.

In June 2018, elderly people from Mallacoota were living in Nursing Homes scattered from Mid coast NSW to Melbourne. The distance for relatives who live in Mallacoota to visit ranges from a 2 hr return trip to Eden, 4 hour return trip to Orbost to a 12 hour round trip to Melbourne. This distance cuts community ties and limits visitors. Even so, demand for closer places exceeds supply. Most places also have a bed shortage. Therefore they have waiting lists for both Short term respite and long term accommodation.

Aged Care Facilities Mallacoota residents feed into.

Lochiel House Orbost (20 beds), Waratah Lodge Orbost (Orbost Regional Health 17 beds), Opal Lakeview Aged Care Lakes Entrance and Opal Paynesville, Bairnsdale Aged Care Lakes Entrance, Imlay House Eden NSW, Bupa Aged Care Eden NSW, Aged Care Bimbimbee (Bateman's Bay), Maddocks Gardens Bairnsdale, Canberra and Melbourne.

There is a great need for Aged Care Residential Beds in Mallacoota, and Mallacoota Inlet Aged Care (MIAC), Community Health and Infrastructure Foundation (CHIRF), with support from Mallacoota Senior Citizens are progressing on making this a reality.

The next article will look at how you can calculate how much a Nursing Homes will cost.

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