

Considering retirement village living

If you are looking for a community where you can feel secure and supported, a retirement village may be worth exploring. Villages differ widely in size, layout and the types of homes available – from units designed for people who live independently to accommodation that includes some daily assistance.

Before deciding, think carefully about the style of village that suits you and what you can realistically afford over the long term. It is especially important to understand how the financial arrangements work, so make sure you ask detailed questions about what it means to “own” or occupy a unit. Speaking with professionals and seeking feedback from the residents’ committee can be very helpful. You should also consider whether the social and cultural aspects of the village match what you are looking for.

What is a retirement village?

Retirement villages provide housing and lifestyle options for people aged 55 and over. Many older adults choose this setting because they want independence but value the added safety, support and sense of community that a village environment can offer.

Accommodation types

Independent living

Independent Living Units (ILUs)—often described as villas or apartments—are designed for people who are active and able to manage daily life without personal care. They vary from small one-bedroom units to larger homes and may be located in high-rise buildings, townhouses, or stand-alone dwellings.

Serviced apartments

Serviced apartments usually have one or two bedrooms and include help with day-to-day tasks such as cleaning, laundry or personal care. Although these apartments normally include a small kitchenette, meals are generally provided in a communal dining area.

Residential aged care on site

Some villages also have residential aged care facilities offering different levels of care, as well as Home Care Packages for people who need assistance. Accessing these services requires an aged care assessment.

Types of retirement villages

Retirement villages generally fall into two categories:

- Resident-funded villages
- Donor-funded villages

Resident-funded villages are run by private organisations or not-for-profit operators on a commercial basis. Residents provide most of the funding by paying for their unit under the relevant tenure arrangement, and they contribute to the village infrastructure and ongoing operational costs.

Donor-funded villages are usually operated by charitable or faith-based organisations. Entry is typically limited to people with limited financial means and involves some level of subsidised support.

Tenure and ownership

The legal right to live in a village is known as tenure. Forms of tenure include strata title ownership, leasehold arrangements, licences to occupy, freehold title or a company share model that grants residency rights.

Regardless of the tenure type, village residents must be consulted on matters affecting the ongoing management of the community. This ensures significant changes cannot be made without resident input.



Retirement Living: Understanding Your Options

Entry contributions and deposits

Most villages require an entry contribution before you move in. This amount is generally repaid when you leave, although a deferred management fee (DMF) is usually deducted. Your contract must clearly outline how the DMF is calculated.

The cost of joining a village varies depending on the facilities and services provided. Residents also pay ongoing fees for maintenance and may be charged separately for additional personal services.

To hold a unit, a small deposit is usually required. Villages set their own time limits for holding a property, and deposits are refundable if you change your mind within that timeframe. Once a contract is signed, the deposit becomes part of the overall entry payment.

Some states and territories provide a cooling-off period after signing a residency agreement. Villages may charge an administration fee for refunds, so it is important to check the details.

Fees and ongoing charges

Retirement villages charge various fees, so it is important to ask for a full breakdown. Regular service or maintenance charges often cover the day-to-day running of the village, which may include:

- upkeep of gardens and shared facilities
- staffing costs
- council and water rates for communal areas
- security services
- insurances (such as workers' compensation, public liability and building insurance)

Part of your fees may also go towards a sinking fund used for major repairs or improvements.

When you leave the village

The resale price of your unit is determined by the market, but factors such as the quality of village management, the condition of the facilities and the overall lifestyle offering can help maintain or increase value.

If purchasing isn't an option

Some villages provide rental accommodation—often called periodic tenancy—for people with limited financial resources. Rent is paid weekly under a Residential Tenancy Agreement, and a bond is usually required. Depending on your circumstances, you may qualify for Rent Assistance through Centrelink.

If you have concerns or a dispute

Your residence contract should include a copy of the village's dispute resolution procedure. If you did not receive one, you can request it from the operator. Any concerns should be put in writing so you have a clear record should the matter need to be escalated.

In South Australia, the Office for Ageing Well's Retirement Villages Unit (RVU) may help if you cannot resolve an issue directly with the operator. Although the RVU cannot give legal advice, it can provide guidance and help mediate disputes. You can request a "Request for Assistance" form and submit it along with any supporting documents. An officer will then contact you to discuss next steps. In some cases, the matter may be referred to SACAT for a legally binding decision.

If you prefer support from an advocacy organisation, the Aged Rights Advocacy Service (ARAS) can assist.

- ARAS: (08) 8232 5377
- RVU: (08) 8204 2420

