

Co-living Models for an Ageing Population

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19.1% of Singapore's population is currently aged 65 and above (2023), with projections indicating a rise of approximately 23.6% by 2030. 82,000 older adults in Singapore have been predicted to require assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) by 2030.¹ These statistics point to a substantial demographic shift, requiring a deeper understanding of the needs and preferences of older adults. While many older adults express a desire to continue living in their current homes and receive caregiving support, the increasing demands on caregivers, coupled with the adverse effects of caregiving on their well-being, present significant challenges.

Co-living, as an alternative housing model, seeks to promote social contact through living environments and has been proposed to address loneliness and a lack of diversity in available housing options. The concept of co-living is particularly relevant for older adults as it provides a way to address social isolation and foster mutual support. Co-living arrangements

¹ Centre for Liveable Cities. (2022). *Towards future seniors' housing and care models: Ageing-in-place in Singapore today.*

<https://www.clc.gov.sg/docs/default-source/commentaries/future-senior-housing-commentary.pdf>

for older adults vary, but often incorporate elements of community, shared resources and tailored care.

Ageing in Place

Ageing in place is a concept that refers to older adults continuing to live in a community with a degree of freedom, rather than in residential care. Several co-living models have emerged that support ageing in place, addressing various needs and preferences of older adults. Ageing in place can mean in the same home, within the same neighbourhood, or anywhere in a community that is not an institutional care facility. Specific location tends to carry different values for different individuals.

The concept of ageing in place also encompasses the idea of adapting the living environment to meet the changing needs of older adults. This can involve modifying homes with features that prevent falls, adding grab bars, or using technology to increase comfort and safety. In addition, the surrounding neighbourhood plays a vital role in supporting ageing in place, with features such as accessible sidewalks, public transport, and nearby local facilities enabling older people to remain active and socially connected. Furthermore, having access to healthcare services and support is vital. Ultimately, the concept of ageing in place is about providing options and choices for older adults, allowing them to maintain their autonomy and dignity while receiving the support they need.

Box 1: The Ibasho Model

The Ibasho model is a community-based intervention that promotes resilience and community by integrating older adult residents into social networks and encouraging their participation in leadership activities.

The project operates from a flexible physical space, such as a repurposed farmhouse, that can be used as a space to bring together people who may have limited social contact. It emphasises an elder-led, community-centred approach, empowering older adults by encouraging them to take active roles in the community. The program aims to change the narrative around ageing and to better prepare communities for future crises by building social connections and community resilience.

Ibasho is designed to be informal, allowing older adults to participate in meaningful activities such as cooking, volunteering, storytelling, and teaching. The Ibasho model creates a shared community space for people to interact and build social connections with others who may be experiencing social isolation or loneliness. The program has been shown to have a positive impact on participants, expanding their social networks and deepening their sense of belonging. The low-cost and easily implemented nature of Ibasho makes it a scalable model for enhancing community resilience and serving as alternative care for older adults.

Source: Aldrich, D. P., & Kyota, E. (2017). Creating Community Resilience Through Elder-Led Physical and Social Infrastructure. *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 11(01), 120–126. <https://doi.org/10.1017/dmp.2016.206>

Features of Ideal Co-living Models

Co-living models are an application of the ageing in place concept further developed through various approaches that aim to support older adults' independence, social connections, and well-being. However, implementation may prove more complex compared to traditional care facilities because they require extensive planning and resources, including securing suitable locations, whilst navigating complex regulations. These models also rely on residents having a certain level of independence and the ability to actively participate in a community, which is not always the case with older adults. Furthermore, they often involve adapting existing spaces or designing new ones, while also addressing potential conflicts and uncertainty about the long-term viability of such schemes. Some essential features to consider include:

- **Social support:** Co-living models promote social interaction through various shared living arrangements. These models provide opportunities for residents to engage in both emotional and recreational support. Emotional support includes close friendships and active listening, while recreational support is fostered through resident-organised activities. For instance, intergenerational co-living enhances social support by facilitating the exchange of skills and knowledge between older and younger residents, promoting personal development and mutual aid. Practical assistance is provided

to address age-related challenges, establishing a system of reciprocal support whilst also enhancing community engagement and social integration.

- **Sense of Community:** Co-living models create a sense of community by encouraging social connections, cooperation, and understanding among residents. These models create an environment that is supportive and promotes a shared sense of belonging. Participatory design is key in co-living, with residents actively involved in the planning and development of the community. Residents share responsibilities and participate in decision-making, fostering a sense of collective ownership. A strong sense of community motivates residents to engage in shared activities and develop friendships. Involvement in all stages of cohousing development, from initial planning to the self-management of shared spaces, is important for building community.
- **Sense of Security:** Co-living models enhance the sense of security by improving physical and social environments. Physical features such as well-lit, open areas and secure recreational spaces contribute to residents' feelings of safety and security. Strong social ties and trust among neighbours are crucial. Co-living can also reduce economic uncertainty through shared resources. Additionally, a sense of security fosters trust, reduces anxiety, and

improves overall well-being. Prioritising security measures and creating a secure environment ensures the safety and comfort of all residents, allowing them to interact freely without fear.

Kampung Admiralty, Singapore

Kampung Admiralty is a pioneering, integrated, intergenerational development that serves as a co-living model for addressing the needs of an ageing population within an urban environment. The design of Kampung Admiralty encourages social interaction and active ageing through shared spaces and a variety of integrated services. For example, the inclusion of an active ageing clubhouse, which offers group programs in physical exercises and social activities. This demonstrates an intentional approach to creating opportunities for social engagement. These design choices are examples of how Kampung Admiralty promotes the emotional and recreational aspects of social support through both the physical design and its programming.

The project's "vertical village" concept integrates different functions to promote cross-programming and intergenerational interaction. The inclusion of a sheltered plaza for events, a hawker centre, and a community park, all contribute to an environment that is both supportive and inclusive. Residents are encouraged to participate in various activities, which foster a shared sense of ownership and belonging.

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Figure 1: Hawker Centre at Kampung Admiralty (Source: WOHA)

Furthermore, Kampung Admiralty features well-lit, open areas and a barrier-free design that creates a safe and secure environment for residents. The presence of a neighbourhood police post within 250 meters of the site further enhances the sense of safety. Additionally, the development is designed with features such as non-slip flooring and handrails to provide a safe and comfortable environment for older adults.

Humanitas Deventer, Netherlands

The Humanitas retirement village in Deventer, Netherlands, cultivates a strong sense of community through its intergenerational living model, where older adult residents and students actively engage and share their lives. This environment diverts from the traditional concept of a care facility to create a home where residents are viewed as active members of the community. This integration is further enhanced by the "Adelbold Project," which welcomes people from the local neighbourhood in need of social or practical support, reinforcing Humanitas' role as a central part of the wider community. The Humanitas model encourages all individuals to contribute their ideas, promoting a sense of shared ownership.

Social support is a central aspect where an intergenerational living arrangement facilitates interactions between older residents and students. Students dedicate their time to interacting with the residents and assisting them with technology, while residents enjoy the company and experiences of the younger people. This creates an environment of mutual support from which both generations benefit. Shared experiences and conversations offer emotional support and foster opportunities for mutual learning.



Figure 2: Humanitas resident participating in an activity alongside a volunteer (Source: HumanitasDeventer.nl)

This co-living model also emphasises on fostering a comfortable and welcoming home environment. This ideology does not aim to be a sterile and controlled environment but instead encourages freedom, acknowledging that "a certain degree of friction is what makes life lively". The emphasis is on the autonomy of the residents, viewing residents as capable individuals who can make their own decisions about the risks they may take. This attitude, combined with positive relationships between residents,

² Tan, J. (2024, April 21). *Commentary: Co-living with youths among ways Singapore can expand and improve assisted living options for seniors.* TODAY.

Co-living Models for an Ageing Population staff, students and neighbours, fosters a sense of trust, comfort and overall well-being.

Conclusion

Co-living models present a promising approach to address the challenges of an ageing population. These models, which support ageing in place, offer alternatives to traditional care facilities.

Examples such as Kampung Admiralty in Singapore and Humanitas Deventer in the Netherlands illustrate successful implementation of co-living. These models demonstrate how co-living spaces can foster social support, community engagement, and security for older adults while also being scalable. At present, such initiatives have mainly been implemented on a small scale and pilot basis, with many of such initiatives in Singapore lacking the capacity and capability or remain unaffordable to many.² While co-living arrangements are generally more affordable than private nursing homes, they can still be financially burdensome for seniors, especially those from lower-income groups. For instance, Red Crowns Senior Living offers co-living spaces at approximately S\$3,000 per month, which includes caregiving, meals, utilities, and housekeeping. Additionally, cultural norms and personal preferences play a significant role in seniors' acceptance of co-living arrangements. Some seniors may prefer to age in their own homes due to familiarity and a sense of independence,

<https://www.todayonline.com/commentary/commentary-co-living-youths-among-ways-singapore-can-expand-improve-assisted-living-options-seniors-2232976>

while others may associate co-living with a loss of privacy or autonomy. Addressing these perceptions is essential to increase the adoption of co-living models. While implementing these models can be complex and require careful planning and resources, their potential to enhance the quality of life for ageing populations makes them a valuable alternative to traditional care.

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