

A GUIDE TO RETIREMENT VILLAGES

FOR OLDER PEOPLE - FOR WHĀNAU

A place to call home.

THE ISSUE, IN BRIEF

A clear-eyed guide to retirement village living in Aotearoa. What villages are, how they work, and how to decide if it's the right fit.

01

What a village is, and other living options worth knowing.

02

The ORA, weekly fees and the deferred management fee.

03

Accommodation types, and what to ask before you choose.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

What's in here.

Six chapters, helping you to make a clear, confident decision about retirement village living — whether for yourself, for a parent, or for someone you love.

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| 01 | What is a retirement village? | THE BASICS |
| | Village living explained, and the other living options worth knowing about. | |
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| | Standard units, serviced apartments, care suites, and support packages. | |
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A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

We've been writing about ageing in Aotearoa for nearly thirty years. This guide is the result of conversations with hundreds of older New Zealanders and their whānau — and it's the clearest, plainest map we know how to draw of a system that can feel anything but clear.

With aroha, the Eldernet Team

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CHAPTER ONE

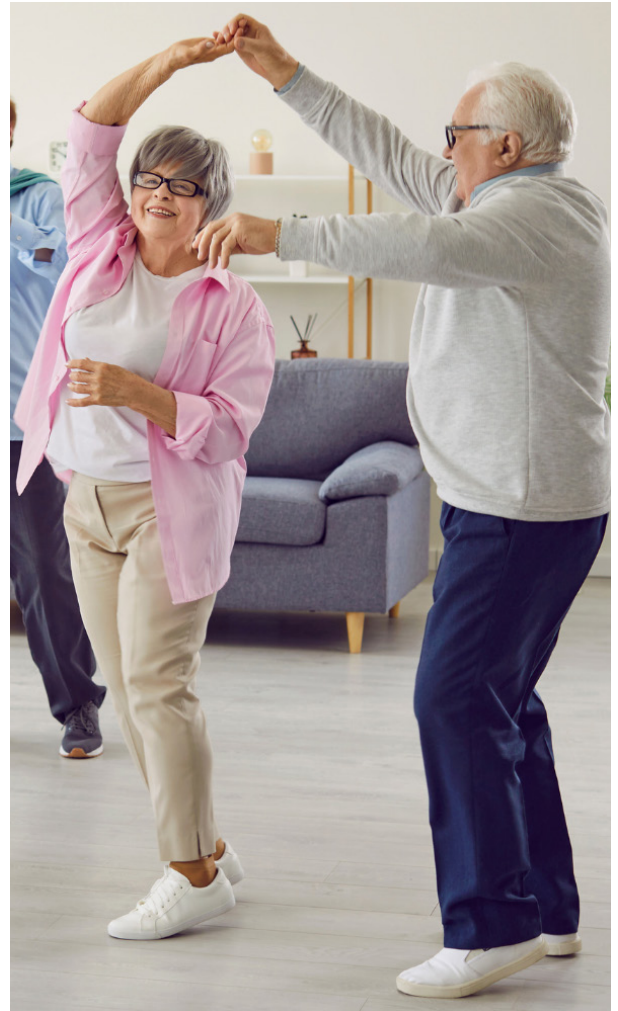
What **is** a retirement village?

A retirement village is a community designed for older people, usually aged over 65, who want to live independently with like-minded neighbours.

Every village is different, but many offer:

- Low-maintenance living
- Shared amenities such as gyms, cafés and gardens
- Social activities and opportunities to connect
- Optional support or care services

A retirement village is just one option, and it may not be right for everyone. Approximately 14%* of people over 75 currently live in a retirement village. Many people explore several possibilities before deciding what suits them best.



What other options are there?

01

Downsizing

Moving to a more manageable property can reduce maintenance while allowing you to remain independent in your preferred community.

02

Family living

Living with or near family can provide companionship and practical day-to-day support, while shared costs may make it more affordable.

03

Senior rentals

Some rental developments are designed with accessibility, security and community in mind, although availability can be limited and demand high.

04

Shared housing

Options such as Abbeyfield provide private rooms within a shared home, offering independence alongside companionship and some shared support.

Find more information on alternative living options and what might suit your situation on www.eldernet.co.nz/knowledgelab.

*Source: JLL NZ Retirement Villages and Aged Care Whitepaper, 2024.

CHAPTER TWO

Is it the **right** option for me?

Before exploring specific villages, it's worth considering whether the lifestyle itself suits you.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Am I a social butterfly, or do I prefer to keep to myself?
- Would I enjoy having amenities and activities close by?
- Am I ready for a change in how and where I live?
- Do I want neighbours at a similar life stage?
- How important is easy access to age-related services for me?
- Would I prefer less responsibility for repairs, gardening, and upkeep?
- Have I considered how this might impact both my day-to-day and later-life finances?



! GOOD TO KNOW

Signs it might not be the right fit.

- You strongly value complete property ownership or control
- You prefer privacy or a large personal space
- You dislike structured communities
- You move frequently or want maximum flexibility

For most of these questions, there's no wrong answer — villages differ in culture, and something that's perfect for one person might not work at all for another.



CHAPTER THREE

The legal and money side.

Moving into a retirement village involves legal agreements, one-off and ongoing costs, and a fair amount of paperwork. Understanding some of the terminology can help you ask the right questions.

Retirement villages operate under the Retirement Villages Act 2003, which is designed to protect residents.

Key protections include:

- Disclosure information before you sign, and a cooling-off period after signing
- A Code of Residents' Rights
- A Code of Practice
- A statutory supervisor
- Access to a disputes resolution process

Where the money goes:

01

Entry payment (ORA)

Unlike a traditional home purchase, an entry payment gives you the right to occupy a home within the village, rather than own it outright. Independent legal advice is required before you sign.

02

Weekly/ongoing fees

Regular weekly fees help cover the day-to-day running of the village, including grounds and building maintenance, shared facilities, staff, rates, insurance, and security systems.

03

Deferred Management Fee (DMF)

This fee is deducted when you leave the village and is usually calculated as a percentage of your entry payment, increasing over time up to a predetermined maximum.

DMF AT A GLANCE

- **Builds over time:** often over several years, until it reaches the maximum.
- **Every village is different:** the percentage, how long it takes to build and how it's structured will be set out in your ORA.
- **Pays for:** village maintenance, refurbishment and shared facilities.
- **Getting your money back:** there is currently no legal deadline for repayment. Timing is set out in your ORA and often depends on the unit being resold, which can take months.



PLAIN ENGLISH

What does ORA mean?

Occupation Right Agreement.

Most residents purchase the right to live in a unit — they don't own the property or land outright. Every ORA is different, so read it carefully. You're required to get independent legal advice before signing.

CHAPTER FOUR

Accommodation options.



Retirement villages often use different names for similar types of accommodation, so it pays to look beyond the surface to understand what's on offer.

Three types of accommodation:

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| 01 | Independent Living
<small>MOST COMMON</small> | A standalone villa, attached townhouse, or apartment, usually 1–3 bedrooms. Some have a garage and private garden; others share gardens. |
| 02 | Serviced Apartment
<small>EXTRA SUPPORT</small> | Independent living with a bit of extra help, such as meals delivered and cleaning. Not funded by the public health system. |
| 03 | Care Suite
<small>HIGHER CARE</small> | Blends village living with residential care. Care costs are typically higher than standard village living costs and may be partly funded if you meet the relevant assessment and financial eligibility criteria. |

? PLAIN ENGLISH

What is a support package?

Many villages offer support packages to residents living independently. Some allow outside home-support providers on-site; others require you to purchase services from the village operator. Check your ORA to see how it's structured.

! GOOD TO KNOW

Moving to a higher level of care

If a village can no longer safely support you to live independently, you may need to move to a care facility on-site or another care home. This will depend on your needs, your ORA and the availability of care.

CHAPTER FIVE

How to choose well.

There's no such thing as the 'best' retirement village — what suits one person might not suit another. Villages vary greatly in size, location, facilities and services and price.

Spend plenty of time comparing your options, visit multiple places, and be realistic about your current and future financial situation.

Many residents say they wish they'd moved in sooner.



Questions to ask:

☐ Location

- Is it easy for whānau to visit?
- Is it close to services that matter to you?

☐ Amenities

- Are there on-site services you'd use, such as a bowling green, café, gym or pool?

☐ Unit

- Is it the right size and layout for your needs?
- Will your belongings fit?
- Can you host family and friends?

☐ Activities

- Is there a variety of activities and social opportunities available?
- Can you visit to meet residents and get a feel for the community?

☐ Support

- Is there a care facility on-site?
- What happens if there is no vacancy when you need care?

☐ Practicalities

- How might this affect your privacy?
- Are pets allowed?
- Is there a residents' committee?

☐ Financial

- Can the weekly fees increase, and how are increases decided?
- Do you continue to pay fees while away on holiday?
- What if the number of occupants changes?
- What is the maximum DMF, and how long does it take to reach it? What if you leave before the maximum is reached?
- How and when will your exit payment be repaid?

CHAPTER SIX

We don't just help people **navigate** retirement villages.

For nearly thirty years, The Eldernet Group has been working towards a better future for older Kiwis by helping people make informed decisions. Retirement village information is just one part of what we do.



FOR STAYING AT HOME

Making Life Easier at Home

Our free online directory of home-support services — local community groups, care providers, home help. Helping older New Zealanders find services and support to continue living at home.

eldernet.co.nz/making-life-easier

FOR RESIDENTIAL CARE

Residential Care

Search every care home in New Zealand in one place, compare care options and find real-time bed vacancy updates.

eldernet.co.nz/residential-care

FOR DEEPER QUESTIONS

Knowledge Lab

Your go-to source for information on the ageing journey — health, wellbeing, dementia, financial and legal issues.

eldernet.co.nz/knowledge-lab

A PRINTED GUIDE

Where from Here • He Ara Whakamua

The ultimate guide to ageing in Aotearoa. Find one in your local library, GP clinic, or order online.

0800 162 706

eldernet.co.nz/where-from-here

