

## Fire Safety and Security imperatives in light of the new Aged Care Quality Standards



By Zachariah Reisch

### Background

The past few months have seen an already teetering Australian aged care industry go from bad to worse as many RACFs were the site of deadly outbreaks – and given the negligence turned up in light of these outbreaks, it appears regulatory bodies have a long way to go before the industry is at an acceptable standard. This article explores the current state of Australian aged care in July 2020 and outlines a path forward that allows construction industry specialists to benefit from the work in this sector while also healing its broken core in the process.

Earlier this year, Lote [investigated](#) the present and upcoming changes to the aged care industry being implemented through the Aged Care Quality Standards (ACQS) scheme, aimed at increasing the standard of aged care in response to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

The adoption of the ACQS model opened up several avenues for practitioners of Fire Safety Engineering and Security Consultancy to engage with the process of improving aged care quality. More specifically, via engaging with the ACQS stipulations regarding The Organisational Service Environment, Organisational Governance, and Ongoing Assessment and Consumer Planning, practitioners could make themselves indispensable to aged care providers in meeting the new guidelines – particularly for new establishments.

Moving onwards from the [previous article](#), this piece will examine the current situation around aged care and whether a position still exists for practitioners to provide services for aged care providers.

In Australia and other countries around the world, COVID-19 epicentres have unfortunately often occurred around aged care facilities. Many public scandals have been front-page or prime-time news, detailing the poor procedural handling of infection risks or lack of isolation and control measures. Many homes have been closed in recent days in response to this, often smaller organisations. Some have even shut their doors voluntarily, citing the risks of remaining open and an inability to achieve outcomes with available funding.

However, this isn't just confined to the smaller organisations. [Aged care juggernaut BUPA, the fourth largest provider of aged care services in Australia, has allegedly failed audits across the board – in some instances even failing all eight ACQS measurements.](#) Very apparently, there is something rotten at the core of the aged care industry.

Much speculation has been made of the underlying causes of the poor treatment of seniors in the aged care system. The two resounding issues appear to be understaffing concerns and disputes around funding.

Understaffing in these facilities is long documented, and [Australian aged care residents receive a little over three hours of contact a day as a result \(188 minutes average\).](#) This number correlates to a regrettable lower bell-curve of residents who receive little to no care daily. [Subsequently, only 15.4% of Australian aged care residents are rated 4 or 5 out of 5 on an internationally recognised scale, and 57.6% of residents are in 'unacceptable' \(1 or 2 out of 5\) levels of care.](#)

Tied to the understaffing issue are pay concerns on every side of the situation. Providers claim to need more subsidies, workers claim to need more pay, and the government is hesitant to provide funding as the ageing population of Australia continues to grow.

So, where does this leave providers of Fire Safety Engineering or Security Consultancy – or other construction and development safety specialists?

The aged care industry is reaching critical mass for implosion – already we've seen scandals, poor performances across the board and sanctions being laid out. [There have been 58 recorded sanctions against aged care providers since 2000, and 21 of them have been in the last 18 months. Something has got to give.](#)

The newly emerging aged care regime is built around strict compliance standards, and development safety specialists are set to be at the core of developing new aged care facilities that replace the outdated models currently dominating the market. As some established players in the market decline and the public is awakened to the reality of mass-model aged care, smaller and more personalised establishments are sure to emerge in numbers.

Similarly, [to the previous article on aged care](#), Fire Safety Engineering and Security Consultancy will be used to address the needs of the ACQS. Appropriate employment of these disciplines during design and construction phases of development for new centres will built the ACQS into the foundation of the building and assist carers in providing better services. The previously discussed role of these consultants is unlikely to change, given where the industry is headed.

However, aged care providers and specialty services consultants have a unique opportunity to go beyond the essential services of their field to shape the future of Australian aged care.

How can Fire Engineering Solutions be developed to allow the same or even greater fire protection while maximising occupant freedom? Does this open up new avenues for how aged care residents can live, and can it be used to create better environments for living and activities? How can Alternative Solutions be employed to solidify other factors such as visibility and resident safety?

Similarly, how can Security Consulting create new possibilities? Can monitoring systems be established to track residents' care levels and generate alerts accordingly? How can emerging access control methods be utilised to maximise resident freedom? Can use of various monitoring systems empower carers to service the needs of a greater volume of residents, and at reduced expense?

The possibilities for mutual financial benefit and improving the landscape of Australian aged care will be laid out in front of service providers and consulting specialists in the

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coming months and years. It will take a caring, inquisitive and innovative collaboration to create smarter solutions for the aged care industry, but with careful attention and effort consultants can solidify a market-share as leaders of the new aged care movement – and help fix the broken core of the industry in the process

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