



## **President's Report to 2020 Annual General Meeting**

This meeting's purpose is to report to you what RRVV and your committee did during the 2019-2020 financial year and on developments since the end of the financial year. The current committee's term ends after these reports. We then elect committee members and office bearers for the coming committee period.

Our main activities are ensuring members are aware of their rights as residents and customers, helping you solve the problems that arise from living in a retirement village, plus promoting retirement village living and RRVV.

Requests for information and help continued throughout the year at much the same level as in previous years. During the stay-at-home periods, traditional queries about maintenance, management, residents' committees and help with complaints dropped significantly. COVID 19 queries made up for the fall-off in traditional queries. We could not make any formal village visits during the crisis, although we did visit some individual members when the rules allowed.

Margaret Pridham, our office administrator, retired late in 2019.

The summer bushfires further exposed weakness in the law governing emergency evacuation of retirement villages. One village's residents reported that the owner repeatedly told them that their contract only offered independent living as the fires came closer. Eventually, the owner recognised this advice's folly and quickly developed and implemented a plan. Luck was on the residents' side as the threatening fire burnt out and spared residents the evacuation disruption.

Residents deserve better than a hastily devised and untested plan. We continue to press the Government to act.

The COVID 19 crisis disrupted our work in the latter half of the 2019-2020 financial year and the first half of the current financial year. It also prevented us from hiring a replacement for the almost irreplaceable Margaret Pridham.

The stay-at-home rules prevented us from working from our Caulfield office. Most of our systems required someone to attend the office regularly. We managed much of our work efficiently from home, but it proved difficult to distribute our quarterly newsletters with the committee spread across the metropolitan area. We were late getting both our March and June newsletters from the printer to you. For this delay, we apologise.



The COVID crisis exposed weakness in the management of retirement villages and highlighted some advantages of living in a community of likeminded people. Mutual support helped us get through a very trying time.

The better operators acted quickly to keep the virus out of their villages and prevent spread should the virus get in. Not all residents accepted the restrictions, and a few challenged their operator's authority to introduce them, notably when they exceeded those of the Chief Health Officer.

A majority contracts allow operators to unilaterally impose restrictions on the use of the common property and visitor entry. RRVV advocates removing operators' right to act unilaterally. Nevertheless, most of our members in villages that took measures to protect residents from the virus appreciated the effort.

Recent market research shows a jump in resident satisfaction in recognition that many operators acted in their customers' best interests. The key to responding to an emergency is to act quickly and decisively. RRVV recognises a case for giving operators the power to act rapidly in an emergency. Defining what constitutes an emergency presents a challenge, but a government declared state of emergency would qualify.

At our last AGM, we reported an added service - building inspection supporting residents in dispute with operators over defects and maintenance. We have had to limit this service to villages in the outer south-eastern suburbs. Our member doing the inspections only has limited time and cannot travel all over Melbourne.

We also said that we expected the 2019 amendments to the Owners Corporations Act to take effect early in 2020. Parliament still has not passed the bill.

The Retirement Living Council and Leading Age Services Australia's Code of Conduct came into effect in early 2020. Feedback from residents has been minimal. In villages where the operator is paying the costs of scheme participation from village funds, there has been some pushback. Similarly, operators have received some pushback over unilateral adoption of the Australian Retirement Villages Accreditation Scheme.

We would like to know more. Please write to us outlining your experience with both the code and accreditation scheme.



In mid-March, RRVV and the Consumer Policy Research Centre presented the final report from the University of Melbourne survey on improving consumer decision-making about retirement housing. Over 900 residents responded to the survey. RRVV thanks you for your participation. The University of Melbourne did a remarkable job on a limited budget.

Important as supporting individual residents and their villages is, the RRVV Committee also works behind the scenes lobbying both government and retirement village operators.

Throughout the year, we stayed connected with various State politicians interested in retirement living reform, irrespective of their party affiliations.

We also continued to make representations to Consumer Affairs Victoria and other government departments on various matters relevant to retirement living.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2019, Consumer Affairs Victoria announced the long-awaited review of the Retirement Villages Act 1986 by releasing an Issues Paper for public comment. RRVV submitted a detailed response. Around 130 residents also responded. We thank all members who contributed for your support.

We also maintained contact with the Retirement Living Council and a cross-section of operators during the year. Throughout the pandemic, RRVV and representatives from the residents' associations of Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, and Western Australia met regularly with representatives from the Retirement Living Council using Zoom.

Our financial year ended on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, but the hectic pace did not slow. We continued to meet monthly with the Retirement Living Council. The meetings proved to be productive, and now bi-monthly meetings are a permanent fixture of our 2021 calendar.

For the last three months, Margaret Pridham has been back working on a project to automate more of the tasks of distributing our newsletters and keeping email contact with members.

We **are** planning to return to our office.

I thank my overstretched fellow committee members Charles Adams, Kaye Graham, Brian Hedger, Rosemary McIndoe, Graeme Seymour, and Jo Watkins, for their valuable contributions. I also thank Mike Leighton and Mike Turner, who worked with us early in the financial year but later resigned.



I cannot finish without thanking David Kelly for his ongoing law reform advice.

I must also thank Julie King for her tireless work supporting RRVV at Consumer Affairs Victoria's Stakeholder Reference Group meetings and generously contributing her public policy and legal skills.

I thank you for your attention and for your continued loyalty.