



# COHOUSING FOR SENIORS:

What is  
cohousing?

**UTS:ISF**  
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# What is cohousing?

**Cohousing is an approach to living that is focused on community:** it is about sharing more living spaces and reducing social isolation, while recognising that every household wants privacy and security.

Cohousing is not a single model of housing, but can take several forms, from two households sharing a block to dozens of households coming together to design and share a community. There are both rental and owner-occupied variants.

Cohousing is usually comprised of a mix of private and shared spaces. Each household has their own self-contained dwelling, but shared spaces provide a place for households to come together.

Shared spaces might include gardens, barbecue and entertainment areas, community rooms, common lounges, shared guest facilities or common kitchens.

Residents generally manage cohousing developments. Like the body corporate committees that manage strata housing, decisions about cohousing are made by the people who live there. Often, the eventual residents also get involved in the design process to make sure the mix of private and shared spaces meets their needs.

## Is cohousing for you?

Independence and remaining connected to the community is key to our happiness as we retire. Cohousing offers an affordable and sustainable housing option for seniors who:

- Want to **reduce living costs** and downsize but don't want to move cities/towns to afford retirement
- Want to stay near **family, friends and local services**
- Value neighbourliness but want to **maintain privacy**
- Want to remain **active and engaged** in a community
- Want to live somewhere **stable, secure and safe**
- Want to find a way to **share skills and knowledge** with others
- Want to reduce the **environmental footprint** of their housing.

Cohousing can take many forms, so there are types to suit everybody's retirement vision. Some cohousing communities are

intergenerational, allowing seniors to maintain connections with young people and families. Others are seniors-only, allowing residents to enjoy a quiet retirement. Cohousing can also provide opportunities to share health care costs—whether through a live-in carer that is shared among residents or a similar arrangement that helps offset the costs of accessing in-home care.

Cohousing is about sharing—but you get to have a say in how much you share. It's also about managing your own community—but you can determine how involved you get in this, too.





## How does it work? FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

### What does it cost?

Cohousing often costs less to build or rent than more conventional property. Small-scale cohousing and deliberative development provide opportunities to reduce the costs of housing, while cooperative rental is focused on providing affordable rental properties to residents.

### What happens if I want to sell?

This depends upon the model, and the arrangements that have been put in place for each cohousing development may vary. Typically, however, owner-occupied cohousing will be set up using strata title, meaning that selling your cohousing unit is as easy as selling any other home.

### What about inheritance?

In general cohousing should not have implications for inheritance. Cohousing will typically be set up using strata arrangements, so your family will easily be able to sell your cohousing unit and recover its value, the same as with any other housing unit. If the cohousing development is set up using company title, it may be slightly more challenging to sell the unit, as banks often restrict lending to company title lots. However, this will vary on a case-by-case basis.

### What will happen to your pension?

This will vary depending on your specific circumstances. If you own and live in a cohousing development, this would be considered your primary residence, and therefore would not be included in the assets test for the pension. However, if you are downsizing and expect that you will pay less for your cohousing unit than you make selling your existing home, there may be implications for your pension. You should speak to Centrelink for advice on how cohousing might affect your pension.

If you are renting and receiving a pension, there would be no implications related to moving to a cooperative rental cohousing arrangement. If you are eligible for the Commonwealth Rental Assistance payment, this can continue to be used to subsidise the cost of your rent in cooperative housing.



## How does it work? MANAGING CONFLICT

### What happens if there's a conflict in a cohousing community? What if there's someone I don't like?

Cohousing is focused on community and neighbourliness, however there's no guarantee—no matter where you're living—that you'll like all your neighbours! In this spirit, cohousing developments typically have processes in place to help people manage the challenges that may come with living with others. Often, this will include training for all community members in conflict resolution to help them deal with challenging situations. There is often a commitment to consensus decision making, which encourages the community to work through issues together. This can make conflicts far easier to manage than in regular strata situations.

### Is this just share housing? What about my privacy?

Cohousing is different to share housing. Share housing usually involves several people living together in a single home—often sharing bathrooms and kitchens. Cohousing, in contrast, involves a self-contained home for every household, but provides shared space in addition to these private spaces, to facilitate social opportunities and shared activities.

### Can I have visitors?

What you do within your home is up to you, so having visitors stay is always allowable. Some cohousing developments also set aside specific units for visitor accommodation.

### Is it difficult to set up cohousing?

Cohousing is a relatively new housing model in Australia, so there are likely to be challenges establishing cohousing developments. However, some organisations have been working hard to develop cohousing models that work and are replicable. The Nightingale Model is a great example of one development model called deliberative development that is gaining traction across Australia, and Common Equity have a well-established cooperative rental model with many long-standing communities.



### Want to find out more?

[www.nightingalehousing.org](http://www.nightingalehousing.org)  
[www.commonequity.com.au](http://www.commonequity.com.au)  
[www.henryproject.com](http://www.henryproject.com)