The "Seniors Village Hub" Movement

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Preamble:

Studies reveal that 3 out of 4 adults 50+ years want to remain in their homes, streets and communities as they age. The "Seniors Village Hub" movement is a grassroots response to this overwhelming desire of most people to ''age in place'' and continue living independently for as long as possible and engage socially within the local community.

The "Seniors Village Hub" is simply a local ''mutual support" network that enables people to live independently in their own homes with access to a network of support including volunteer services, trusted business referrals, social connection and community engagement.

The movement originated in the USA. The first village – the Beacon Hill Village in Boston, was established in 2002 by 11 friends and neighbours as a mutual support arrangement. Currently in the USA, there are 200 "Seniors Villages Hubs" in 45 states, with 35,000+ members. Another 150 "Village Hubs" are at the developmental stage. Across the globe, there are over 400 "Village Hubs", which can be found in countries as diverse as South Korea and Finland.

The first Australian Village Hub was established in 2013 as The Waverton Hub, in North Sydney. It defines itself as – *"an organisation run by members for members. It enables us to age well in our own homes: for as long as possible; as meaningfully as possible; and as inexpensively as possible.*" – see www.wavertonhub.com.au

The second is in Victoria Park, Western Australia – Connect Victoria Park – see www.connectvictoriapark.org

Current Realities:

Australian Bureau of Statistics data estimates that 3.3 million people in Australia are aged 65 years and over - 14.9% of the total population. Approximately 200,000 older Australians live in retirement villages, while almost the same number live in residential aged care facilities (nursing homes). This indicates that 82% of older Australians are living in private dwellings - living in their original family home, a downsized home or with family. Most have that desire '*to stay put'!*

The Australian population over 65 will grow to 5.8 million in 2031, and to 11.1 million in 2061. Australia is not able to provide enough traditional retirement and aged care home arrangements and services to meet current demand, let alone contemplate future forecasts.

The Concept:

As mentioned, the "Seniors Village Hub" is a networking arrangement operating as a not-for-profit organisation that enables people to live in their own home but enjoy (in fact exceed) the benefits that could be experienced in a retirement facility. Through the coordinated network, participating members have access to –

- A wide range of vetted, trusted, discounted and affordable services e.g. household repairs, home care services, personal trainers etc.
- A volunteer support network who offer personal support and services like transportation, gardening and friendly visitors.
- A "buddy" system where *"ask a member first"* policy operates – members share information, do small tasks for each other and look out for each other.
- Community and social connections and engagement through group and learning activities such as health and wellness programs, recreation and educational activities, "happy hours", men's dinners, tool lending library and group trips.
- Opportunities to contribute one's gifts and interests to the "Seniors Village Hub" and wider community.

One of the key characteristics of a "Seniors Village Hub" is that they build upon existing community assets and natural networks within the community. Each "Village" reflects its own community character, resources and needs.

"Villages" typically create strategic alliances with local businesses to offer their services at a discounted price for "Village" members. These businesses range from home service contractors and financial planners to home health agencies and reverse mortgage lenders. "Villages" also enter into MOU's with relevant community and age service providers to avoid duplication of services and enjoy the benefits of collaboration.

In summary, a "Seniors Village Hub" provides programs and services, so its members can lead vibrant, active, healthy and contributing lives, while continuing to live in their own homes, streets and neighbourhoods. It is simply all about "*ageing in place"* with all the benefits and comforts of home, and at an affordable cost. The Waverton Hub states that the benefits for members are –
- Healthy body;
- Active mind;
- Friendships;
- Belonging to community;
- Help with small and large tasks; and
- Connections to aged care service providers.

In summary, The Waverton Hub believe strongly that their Hub "*builds networks of connection, friendship, mutual support and compassion."*

Business Models:

"Senior Village Hubs" are membership-driven, grass-roots organisations that, through both volunteers and sometimes-paid staff, coordinate access to the above services and opportunities. The average cost of membership in a US "Senior Village Hub" can range from $300 -$1200 per annum, though most offer some form of reduced or waived fee to people with modest means.

"Senior Village Hubs" tend to average about 300 members. The Waverton Hub in North Sydney has a membership of 360 local women and men. They have no paid staff. 80 active contributing members share and contribute the organisational work and charge a very modest annual membership fee of only $66.

Currently three models are in operation across the globe; namely –

- **Grassroots/Volunteer stand-alone not-for-profit community group**

This business model is the most common structure for a "Seniors Village Hub". Members and volunteers are encouraged to participate in the governance by serving on the board and/or working committees. These "Seniors Village Hubs" have a strong reliance on volunteers to coordinate and execute the needs of "Village" members.

- **"Village Hub" under a parent organisation**

Within this business model, a community services organisation acts as the parent organisation, serving as an administrative agent by supporting the "Village" network by providing the administrative support, legal support, financial management and office space. The "Seniors Village Hub" may be established under the parent organisation's umbrella and then separate itself after a few years.

- **Hub and Spoke arrangement**

This involves a central, connecting entity. It could be an established "Seniors Village Hub" or a community services organisation that enables other emerging "Villages" to piggyback, offering economy of scale savings by handling their administrative, accounting and marketing functions. Therefore, instead of each "Village" needing to take care of these functions for themselves, the coordinating entity handles them for everyone. Each of the "Spoke Villages" operate independently, delivering services within their own communities and having their own governing councils, but sharing the same not-for-profit organisation as parent Hub.

Establishment Assistance:

The Federal Minister for Aged Care, Ken Wyatt, has made a grant to The Waverton Hub to encourage and help other communities across Australia to develop similar projects. The Waverton Hub has an excellent Manual which is freely available (see details below in "More Information"), and members willing to share their story and experiences. Their email address is - hub.replication@gmail.com

In the USA, a "Village to Village Network" was launched in 2010 – a national organisation that collaborates to maximise the growth, impact and sustainability of individual "villages" and the "Seniors Village Movement". The Network provides expert guidance, resources and support to help communities establish and maintain their "villages" including a Village 101 Toolkit. Their contact details are – www.vtvnetwork.org

More Information:

The following provide additional useful background information on the concept.
- The Waverton Hub – The Waverton Hub Manual: http://wavertonhub.com.au/hub-manual
- ABC Report on 'Connect Victoria Park' – https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-04/village-hub-in-victoria-park-is-changing-the-face-of-ageing/10457726 and view You tube – https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=22&v=z6IIJWNFW6Q

- *'For Some Seniors, a Cultural Shift and a Vital Volunteerism'* article by Robert Weisman of the Boston Globe newspaper '
  https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/07/07/volunteer-movement-becomes-more-vital-for-older-mass-residents/yeCQS3L6ITCfZY4Y55nAyI/story.html?utm_source=&utm_medium=&utm_campaign=
- *'Can the Village Movement Scale to Enable Aging in Place'* article by Tobi Elkin in Stria
  https://strianews.com/the-village-movement-supports-aging-in-place/?fbclid=IwAR3_g-MfTfmdGoAr1YEY495OB9fSjFQpcIccZjognhDZgU4n8uPEDagLyIA
- Right at Home, *'The "Virtual Village" Movement - Ageing's New Frontier How to stay independently in your own home but have all the benefits of a retirement village'*
- https://www.rightathome.com.au/general/entry/the-virtual-village-movement-ageing-s-new-frontier-how-to-stay-in
- Seniors Housing Online, *'"Virtual Retirement Villages" coming to a suburb near you'*
  https://www.seniorshousingonline.com.au/news/81/Virtual-Retirement-Villages-coming-to-a-suburb-near-you
- Senior Housing News, *'Village model fills seniors ageing in place needs'*
  https://seniorhousingnews.com/2011/10/23/village-model-fills-seniors-aging-in-place-needs/
- US News, *'How to build your own retirement village'*
  https://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/the-best-life/2010/02/08/how-to-build-your-own-retirement-village-
- Beacon Hill Village, Boston – https://www.beaconhillvillage.org/content.aspx
- PNA Village Program – https://www.phinneycenter.org/village/
- Village Technology – https://www.helpfulvillage.com/
- National USA Hub Survey (2016)
  http://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/docs/MLIA_VillagesSurveyBriefFEB17_FNL.pdf