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Challenges ahead as aged care faces another year of change

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The start of a new year is an opportunity to set some goals or resolutions for the year ahead.

For the aged care sector, 2024 represents another year of ongoing change.

In July this year, a new rights-based Aged Care Act commences, together with revised Aged Care Quality Standards.

And, for the first time, residential aged care places will be assigned to individuals, as opposed to aged care providers.

This means people can choose where they have their residential aged care service delivered.

This announcement, together with the lack of funding certainty in recent years, has resulted in a capital freeze, with very few new aged care homes being built nationally.

This is concerning. While it is widely accepted that most people would prefer to age in their own home, there still needs to be provision for people who require 24/7 care.

Residential aged care is a vital service for people who require the additional



support that it provides.

Australia is projected to reach the peak population of people over the age of 85 in 2032 – only eight years away.

The Aged Care Financing Authority projected that the number of operational residential aged care places was likely to exceed or match demand until at least 2040.

However, a large proportion of existing homes have not been redeveloped, and are unlikely to meet the expectations of future residents due to their age and configuration.

As part of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, a review of international models of aged care found that small-scale domestic models of residential aged care were reported as better meeting resident preferences. Only a few of

these are currently in operation in Australia.

Residential Aged Care homes built in recent decades already incorporate many of the features that new residents expect, such as single rooms, private ensuites, small dining rooms and a home-like welcoming atmosphere.

The challenge for the sector is to either rebuild or retrofit older homes that require redevelopment to meet the projected demand.

This year is shaping up as another significant year of change.

We look forward to working together with government to find a long-term solution to meet the increasing needs of our ageing population – for 2024 and beyond.

Darren Birbeck is the Chief Executive Officer of Resthaven Incorporated