



Article from the Weekly Source

Staying in Place: the rural WA model keeping older Australians at home and in community

Sub-heading:

In the small Wheatbelt town of Pingelly, Western Australia, an innovative aged care model is quietly transforming lives – and it's being led not by bureaucrats or large operators, but by the community itself.

by Lauren Broomham

At the heart of this success is Staying in Place, a person-centred, flexible home care model championed by the Pingelly Somerset Alliance Inc (PSA), a volunteer-run, Not-for-Profit aged and community housing provider. The model is enabling older Australians to remain in their homes and communities for longer – even allowing some to leave aged care facilities and return home.

Originally launched with Federal seed funding from the Department of Social Services to reduce loneliness and improve connectedness, Staying in Place began in Pingelly, 158 km southeast of Perth, in 2022 with just 15 clients.

Today, it supports 90 clients – and counting.

“We’ve had people discharged from nursing homes to come home,” says Helen Morton, a former WA Cabinet Minister and Member of Parliament, who has coordinated the program since 2018. “Because now, they can get the services that just weren’t available before.”

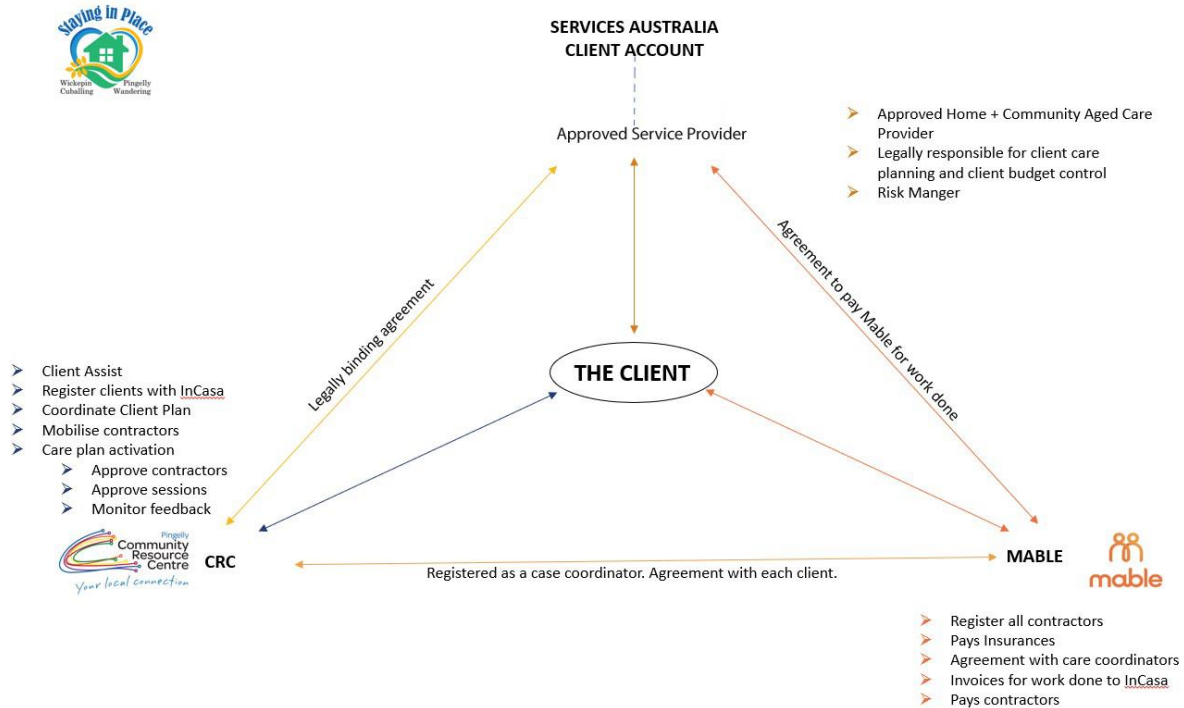
Five elements of success

Before launching, the Pingelly Somerset Alliance held community workshops to identify five essential elements for helping residents age in place:

- Accommodation options – designed to support ageing in place.
- Access to state and federal services – often missing or underprovided in rural areas.
- A virtual village – a non-residential concierge network that connects over 270 participants with activities and support.
- A local, capable workforce – drawn from within the community itself.
- An evidence-based approach – ensuring services are evaluated and data-driven.

A simple triangle, a radical change

At its core, the model is built on a simple triangular structure



At the centre is the client, who directs their own care.

At the top is the approved provider, responsible for funding and legal compliance. Two home care providers –based in Perth and Sydney – currently serve Pingelly.

The base includes local contractors and a coordinating organisation.

Care workers operate as self-employed contractors through aged and disability support platform Mable, which manages checks, insurance, and credentials. Coordinators use the platform to match clients with suitable carers.

Currently, around 60 locals – farmers, parents, pensioners, and others previously unemployed – are delivering services across Pingelly and surrounding towns: Wandering, Brookton, Popanyinning, and Cuballing.

Coordinated by the Pingelly Community Resource Centre, the system is flexible, personal, and responsive to local needs.

“If a contractor has a sick child, they call their client directly to reschedule,” Helen explains. “It’s that personal relationship that makes it work.”

Real impact, real savings

Most clients are on Level 3 or 4 Home Care Packages. About 95% of services provided focus on independent living – like cleaning, transport, and meal preparation.

The remaining 5% – services requiring higher-level care such as showering, dressing, or nursing – are sourced locally or brought in as needed.

“We work with occupational therapists or physiotherapists from nearby towns who are willing to travel and support multiple communities,” Helen says.

The program also partners with the WA Country Health Service to deliver in-home palliative care through the Mobile Palliative Care Service.

“We support people being discharged from hospital to return home to die – because that’s what they’ve chosen,” Helen says.

Tech with a human heart

The model also integrates smart technology through InteliCare, a non-intrusive home monitoring system that uses sensors and AI to support independent living.

In one case, a man was rescued after collapsing in 40°C heat, thanks to inactivity alerts. In another, a woman triggered an alert by simply staying in bed reading – giving her daughters peace of mind from afar.

“We’ll never let virtual care replace real human contact,” says Helen. “But when used well, tech can provide security without intruding.”

Economic boost

Staying in Place has also delivered a substantial economic return to the community:

- The 90 care packages inject around \$4 million into the local economy.
- The Pingelly Community Resource Centre earns \$400,000 annually for its coordination role.
- The program has become Pingelly’s second-largest employer, after the local council.

More than care – it’s connection

The program preserves not just independence and health – but connection.

In Pingelly, the nearest aged care facilities are 30 to 45 minutes away. For many, moving means leaving behind friends, neighbours, and familiar places.

“If you leave the community, you’ve left,” says Helen. “People want to stay near their friends, their neighbours, their life’s work. This model lets them do that.”

No barriers to entry

The model is intentionally open and shareable – no licenses, no trademarks.

It’s now active in around 50 WA communities, each adapting it to local needs.

Recently, the WA State Government – despite aged care being a federal responsibility – provided additional funding to expand to 10 more communities, with another 10 on a waitlist.

Resources and knowledge are shared via Linkwest, a Not For Profit now coordinating a growing community of practice, supported by the State Government.

“We’re not precious about it,” says Helen. “This isn’t a franchise. It’s a movement.”

Ending the heartache

The Department of Social Services, which funded Staying in Place as a pilot, praised its cost-effectiveness and health outcomes. But one line from the evaluation by RPS Group stood out:

“The humanitarian benefit of ending the heartache and pain of being forced to leave family, friends and community late in life.”

Helen agrees. She’s seen it firsthand – people who leave their communities often don’t thrive.

Staying in Place gives them the chance to age with dignity – in the place they know best.

ENDS