

An Interior Designer's Guide

Maximising Acoustic Comfort in Aged Care

A practical guide to creating aged care environments that meet the new National Design Principles while enhancing residents' acoustic comfort.



Create Calm, Supportive Environments in Aged Care

Most people can discern and interpret noise effectively. However, many older adults experience a degree of hearing impairment, leading to communication challenges, feelings of isolation, and an increased risk of cognitive decline. For some, it can even hinder their ability to comprehend their surroundings.

In residential aged care settings, eliminating unwanted sounds is vital for enhancing quality of life. In this Q&A, we explore how decorative architectural products embody the National Aged Care Design Principles for Acoustic Comfort—with a host of additional benefits.



Eliminating unwanted sounds in aged care settings is essential to improve residents' quality of life.



What are the National Aged Care Principles and Guidelines?

In July 2024, the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care introduced the **National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines**. This comprehensive resource was developed in **response** to recommendation 45 of the **Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety**. Its goal is to guide accommodation design to support the delivery of high-quality, safe, respectful and dignified care for older people living in residential aged care accommodation.

Why does Australia need these Aged Care Design Principles?

These Design Principles come at a pivotal time. By 2041, the number of Australians aged 65 and over is **projected to grow** to 6.66 million, a 54% increase from 2021. The most pronounced rise is expected among those aged 85 and above, more than doubling from 534,000 in 2021 to 1.28 million by 2041.

This surge is driven by increasing life expectancy and the 'silver tsunami' of baby boomers entering older age brackets. According to **KPMG's** 2024 Australian Aged Care Sector Analysis, residential aged care services supported over 190,000 people as at 30 June 2023.

The significant upcoming demographic shift will lead to a greater demand for residential aged care facilities, requiring the construction of new buildings and the transformation of existing interiors to align with the latest Design Principles.

Where does ‘Acoustic Comfort’ sit within the Design Principles, and why is it critical?

Design Principle 1: **Enable the Person** focuses on supporting people living in a place that maintains their health, well-being and sense of identity.

It’s about reducing the cognitive overload of information aged care residents need to process in their living environments. Within this Principle, Guideline 1.2 addresses Acoustic Comfort and emphasises the need to eliminate unwanted sounds from resident areas.

In aged care settings, noise can hinder clear communication and comprehension, making it harder for residents to engage in conversations and interpret their surroundings. It can also contribute to confusion, disorientation, agitation, and stress—particularly for people living with dementia.

For further insights into the impact of acoustic intrusions in aged care, we recommend reading **Acoustics in Aged Care: Optimising Environments for Older People and People with Dementia** by Richard Pollock (HammondCare).

In Aged Care settings, noise can hinder clear communication and comprehension, making it harder for residents to engage in conversations and interpret their surroundings.

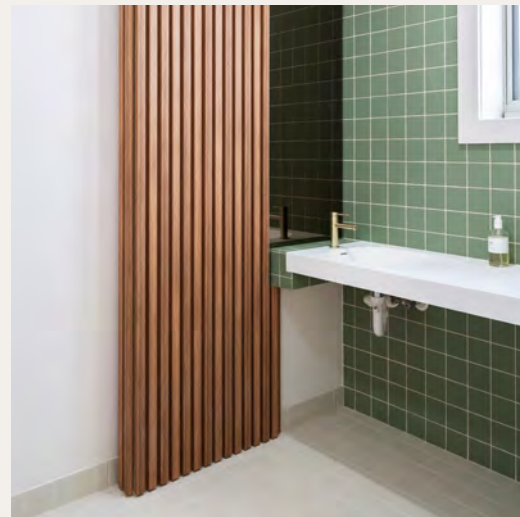


What are the top benefits of installing decorative acoustic products in aged care?

Strategic use of high-performing NRC-rated acoustic products is essential for improving aged care living environments. Acoustic wall and ceiling panels, when applied across large interior areas, serve as highly effective sound absorbers—reducing reverberation and enhancing speech intelligibility.

Selecting a technically and visually resolved prefinished acoustic product empowers visionary interiors. Designers can replicate the familiarity of home, introduce biophilic elements indoors with woodgrain finishes and more—all while ensuring optimal acoustic comfort.

Other elements outlined in the guidelines, such as carpets, curtains, soft furnishings, door dampeners, and silent nurse call systems, further contribute to creating a well-balanced acoustic environment.



Designers can replicate the familiarity of home... ensuring optimal acoustic comfort.



What A-weighted decibel dB(A) and reverberation times should designers aim for?

A-weighted decibels (dB(A)) measures the relative loudness of sounds as perceived by the human ear. This weighting system is the standard for assessing hearing damage and noise pollution.

According to Guideline 1.2's Acoustic Comfort Checklist, designers should aim for:

35dB(A) in bedrooms

40dB(A) in common areas

45dB(A) elsewhere

For reverberation times, Guideline 1.2 recommends aiming for:

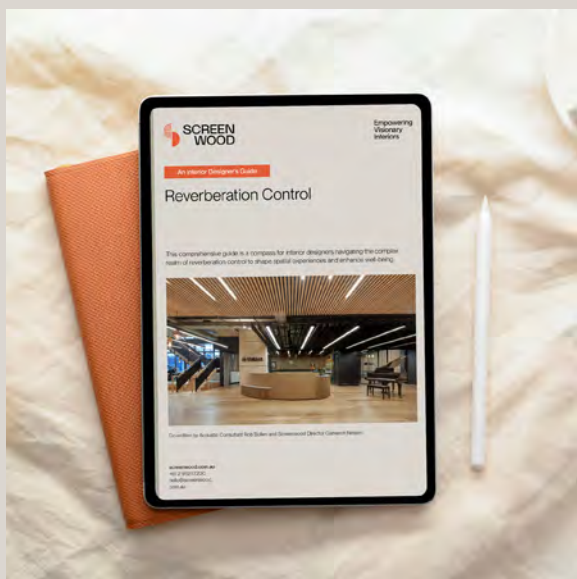
<1 second in common areas

<0.5 seconds in sleeping areas

<0.8 seconds in corridors

For more information about reverberation, download our Industry Paper: [The Interior Designer's Guide to Reverberation Control](#).

Design targets include maintaining sound levels of 35dB(A) in bedrooms and reverberation times below 0.5 seconds.



Inside 'The Interior Designer's Guide to Reverberation Control' you'll find:

- ✓ Key acoustic concepts every designer should know
- ✓ How reverberation time impacts comfort and clarity
- ✓ Material selection tips based on NRC ratings
- ✓ Best practices for a wide range of spaces
- ✓ A check-list for choosing acoustic products

[Download the Guide](#)

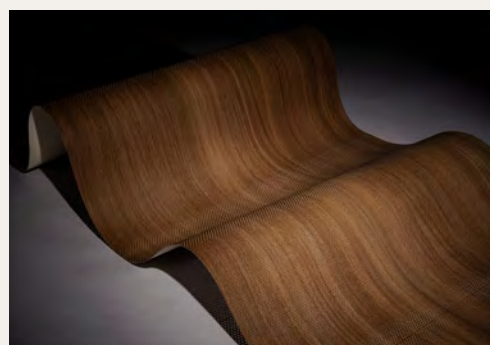
What are your leading acoustic wall and ceiling products for aged care?

Whether designing a new aged care facility or transforming an existing environment, Screenwood's acoustic wall and ceiling solutions empower the exploration of sculptural or environmental design trends.

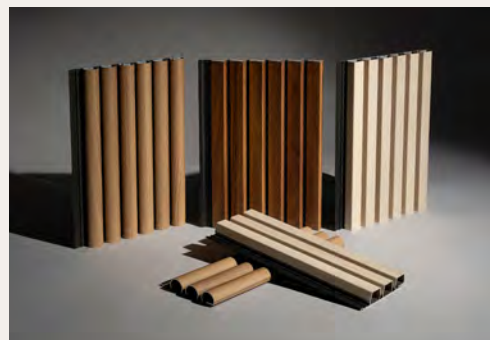
Panels, our prefinished and preassembled acoustic linear batten system, delivers an outstanding NRC of up to 1.0. Trusted by the industry, it blends high-performance acoustic functionality with the natural warmth of wood aesthetics. Panels is a top choice for aged care receptions, corridors, dining rooms, living rooms, bedrooms and other noise-sensitive indoor areas. The product's aesthetic elegance and ability to curve at scale make it ideal for all care models, including hotel-style residential aged care.



Winner of the 2024 Good Design Award, **Soundlina®** is a perforated wall covering for high acoustic comfort. It achieves an exceptional NRC of up to 0.85 when installed as recommended. Thanks to its wallpaper-style application, Soundlina® is ideal for expansive walls, ceilings and architectural shapes, enabling you to achieve optimal acoustic comfort cost-effectively. Soundlina® is also a compelling choice to support Guideline 2.2's Small Households aged-care living models because its wallpaper style creates an exceedingly warm and homely feel.



Modulo® Acoustic, our prefinished tongue and groove lining, is designed to resolve crucial modern interior design challenges. Engineered from perforated aluminium, it integrates a Group 1 fire rating with high acoustic performance and unmatched design versatility—perfect for aged care interiors where safety, functionality, and aesthetics are paramount. The aluminium substrate is wrapped seamlessly in a choice of NAVURBAN™ woodgrain, silky smooth, or industrial-style finishes for elegant and tranquil interiors.



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What other National Aged Care Design Guidelines do Screenwood acoustic products support?

In addition to meeting the Acoustic Comfort Guidelines, Screenwood products help aged-care interior designers achieve the following:

Guideline 1.3 Better Lighting

All our acoustic architectural products are designed to effortlessly accommodate lighting, allowing designers to balance increased illumination with glare reduction and personal control considerations.

Our interior acoustic linings also support the integration of building services and modern aged-care smart technology, such as movement sensors and thermal imaging. While aged care technology sits outside the scope of the Principles and Guidelines, its importance is highlighted in the **Dyer Report** prepared for the Royal Commission. Therefore, choosing a design-ready interior acoustic lining ensures seamless installation of smart technology, now or in the future.



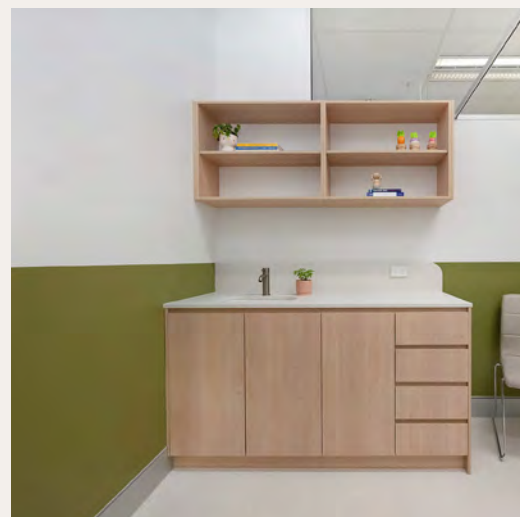
Guideline 1.4 Tonal Contrast

Tonal contrast, measured by light reflectance value (LRV), determines how much light reflects off a surface, influencing contrast, glare, and visibility.

In aged care environments, clear tonal contrast between walls, ceilings, floors, and key fixtures—such as light switches and toilets—is essential for safety and ease of navigation.

Effective tonal contrast enhances visibility for ageing eyes, making it easier to interpret surroundings. When using acoustic products on walls or ceilings, finishes must strike a balance between functional contrast and a familiar, domestic aesthetic.

All Screenwood decorative acoustic products are bonded with NAVURBAN™ non-PVC Olefin decorative films and tested to Australian Standard™ **AS 1428.1** for their LRV. They enable designers to optimise defined contrast without compromising acoustic performance.



Clear tonal contrast between surfaces improves safety and navigation for aging eyes.



Guideline 1.9 Clean Air

Older people are particularly vulnerable to poor air quality, which can impact respiratory health. While multiple factors can affect air quality, we ensure we play our part in making environments healthier by using low-VOC (volatile organic compound) finishes across our product range.

We're proud that our products are **Global GreenTag™** certified to Level B and the world-leading PlatinumHEALTH™ rating. This commitment to non-toxic materials and the healthiness of products foster safer, more comfortable living spaces for aged care residents.

Guideline 1.11 Nature Indoors

While this Guideline generally addresses indoor planting programs, pets, and access to windows and views, it is worth considering incorporating 'wood' acoustic products to bring nature's familiar warmth and texture indoors. Whether selecting solid timber, **PEFC™** fibreboard or aluminium with woodgrain finishes, our products create serene, homely environments far removed from an institutional atmosphere.

Guideline 2.11 Private Staffroom

Much like **staff rooms** in educational settings, a visually and acoustically private space for aged care staff is essential for morale. Installing high-performance acoustic products creates a restful space where staff can recharge, meet, and chat between demanding schedules.

Low-VOC, Global GreenTag™ certified finishes promote healthier air quality for aged care environments.



What are the top 5 considerations for choosing aged-care acoustic products?

A best practice checklist for selecting architectural reverberation control products

The following product consideration checklist encompasses acoustic prerequisites, versatility, aesthetic appeal, cost-effectiveness and ease of installation, certifications, product longevity, obtaining samples, and local manufacturing. Using this checklist will help you to make an informed product choice that balances functionality and design excellence.

1 Select independently rated, fully compliant products.

Performance and design versatility matter. Your fire and acoustic consultants will determine each space's appropriate NRC and fire rating. Their recommendations will enable you to select the best interior aged care substrates. Look for products with maximum design flexibility to empower interior vision.



Screenwood decorative linings are available in a range of NRC and fire ratings.

Pictured: [Poinciana House, Bernborough Ascot](#)

2 Create visually restful interiors.

Choose product finishes that allow finish matching across your project to reduce visual clutter and distractions.



Screenwood acoustic products are prefinished in a range of NAVURBAN™ finishes, empowering seamless finish matching with Screenwood and NAVURBAN™ products.

Pictured: [Lansdowne Gardens Aged Care](#)

3 Prioritise ease of installation.

Prefinished and preassembled aged care acoustic linings enable swift, cost effective installation.



Soundlina® acoustic wall coverings are easy to install using the paste-to-wall method (no joiner needed).

Pictured: interior showcasing naturally homely wallpaper feel.

4 Choose PEFC™ and Global GreenTag™ certified products.

Sustainably sourced and environmentally resolved acoustic products support best-practice green building initiatives.



Screenwood's acoustic **Panels** help interior architects achieve world-class sustainable building goals.
Pictured: **Pullman Hotel/WSCC**

5 Future-proof with a durable, low-maintenance acoustic product.

High-quality, long-lasting substrates reduce the need for frequent replacements, making aged care facilities more cost-effective and sustainable over time.



This waiting area features easy-to-clean **Panels** with UV stable, stain and water-resistant NAVURBAN™ surfaces – no annual staining or maintenance required.

Where can interior designers find more info about residential aged care design?

- The [National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines](#) (July 2024) include a robust reference library, enabling you to delve into the evidence and information behind the scenes.
- [Subscribe](#) to the Department of Health and Aged Care's updates, a weekly newsletter with timely information for this sector.
- Committee members behind the National Aged Care Design Principles have also devised a free four-hour introductory course for Dementia Training Australia®: [Creating Supportive Environments for People Living with Dementia](#). The course uses evidence-based Design Principles and features case studies, making it excellent for increasing knowledge whether you're an interior designer, operator, or staff member.
- For more information about the thought behind the aged care home design guidelines, click to view this [Aged Care Insite article](#).
- Whether building new facilities or transforming existing ones, these [Dementia Training Australia® Environment Activity Cards](#) will spark conversations to improve residents' quality of life.



About Screenwood's acoustic solutions for aged care

We're passionate about creating acoustic aged care solutions that enhance quality of life and support the needs of Australia's ageing population. Our Australian-designed and made products align with Australian Standards™ for end-to-end quality, compliance, and sustainability control. Manufacturing and delivery are super-fast, plus you have an expert local team to guide and advise you throughout the selection, order, and installation process.

For more information, please get in touch with Screenwood at hello@screenwood.com.au. Together, we can create positive environments for everyone living, visiting, and working in residential aged care.

About Screenwood

Screenwood empowers visionary interior architecture by championing the principles of strength, utility, and beauty in architectural and acoustic decorative lining innovations. As designers and manufacturers, the company strives to create a positive impact through technical expertise, master craftsmanship, and genuine care for people and the planet.

Since its foundation, Screenwood has collaborated with some of the world's leading interior architects, designers, and builders, shaping rich and sustainable spatial experiences that enhance comfort, well-being, and a connection to our natural world.

Screenwood is proud to earn customer trust through consistency, delivering meticulously engineered products and systems that set the benchmark in performance, cost-effectiveness and ease of installation.

Today, millions of people experience Screenwood's systems, whether enjoying a library's tranquillity, a stadium's energy, or receiving medical care. Screenwood is proud that its architectural products have also been selected for prominent corporate headquarters, five-star hotels, and countless beautiful residences.

For more information, visit screenwood.com.au.



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We're ready to help.

Screenwood Australia

432 The Boulevard
Kirrawee NSW 2232
Australia

+61 2 9521 7200

hello@screenwood.com.au

Be inspired

Explore our product innovations and
get inspired at **screenwood.com.au**

Acknowledgement of Country

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Screenwood for all

Our products are for everyone, and so is our workplace. We believe in constantly building a diverse and inclusive culture for a more equitable world.

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