

My home is my retirement castle

Emma Connors

Baby boomers may be nearing retirement age, but they don't intend to go anywhere near retirement homes and the aged-care industry is ill-prepared for this generation's demands for privacy and independence, a survey suggests.

Four out of five of those aged between 55 and 65 favour independent living in future, even if they have significant health problems, according to research commissioned by technology company Fujitsu.

The survey of 1291 people reveals a well-educated, technology-literate group that are healthier, more active and wealthier than previous generations and reluctant to retire. Twenty-seven per cent plan to keep working into their 70s and 12 per cent expect to work "until they drop".

They are also the first wave of what has been described as a demographic "tsunami". The Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2006 census showed almost 2.65 million Australians were 65 or older. The ABS expects this will increase to 9.35 million by 2051.

The research shows most baby boomers consider nursing homes or other aged-care facilities something to be feared rather than factored into future plans. More than half of those surveyed cite living in such a



Still running . . . nursing homes don't factor in boomers' plans. Photo: SIMONE DE PEAK

facility against their will as one of their greatest fears.

But this determination to live independently is at odds both with government policy – which focuses on building more aged facilities rather than increasing support services for those in their own homes – and most aged-care service providers, which concentrate on retire-

ment villages and nursing homes rather than community care services.

A few aged-care providers offer community care to people in their own homes as well as residential options, but this involves dealing with multiple levels of government. The Aged Care Association Australia has called for a single department, preferably led by a cabinet-

level minister, to take control and simplify administration.

"We need to bring all of this under one level of government. A seniors' care and housing environment that is collected into one package would help legislators to create a single service continuum. Right now, it's split across three levels of government," ACAA chief executive Rod Young said.

Technology should also play a significant role, according to the research, which notes that while many assume the elderly are technophobes, most baby boomers are the opposite.

Monitoring services that sound alerts when an irregular movement occurs – such as that which might suggest a fall – are in use at some aged-care facilities and could be used more widely in homes.

Doctors are also impatient for "self-care" technology that could, for example, enable people to carry out their own blood tests, freeing up time to deal with the many medical challenges posed by an ageing population.

But efforts to deliver industry-wide reform have proved slow. After five years of lobbying, the aged-care industry is still waiting for two states to pass legislation enabling electronic orders to replace paper prescriptions and speed up delivery across the nursing home-pharmacy-GP triangle.