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**Ryman Healthcare secures landmark site in Karori**

Former university site to be transformed into a retirement village

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Ryman Healthcare is planning to convert a landmark Wellington site into a new retirement village.

New Zealand's largest retirement village operator has bought Victoria University of Wellington's former Karori campus which will be converted into a retirement village with independent and serviced apartments and a care centre.

"We're absolutely delighted to have secured this site for the retired people of Wellington. It is an iconic site in the city's largest suburb, and we're pleased it will continue to be a significant community asset for the city," Ryman Group Development Manager Andrew Mitchell said.

Victoria's Vice-Chancellor Professor Grant Guilford is similarly pleased with the outcome. "We have listened to a wide range of varying views about what should happen to our former campus. The divestment process has provided all parties, whether they are public, community or private, to put forward the most practical, beneficial and realisable options for future use of the campus land and buildings. On balance, we believe Ryman Healthcare has the community focus, professionalism, experience and resources to make the best use of the campus land and buildings." Ryman plans to convert the campus into a retirement village offering independent and serviced apartment living options as well as hospital, resthome and dementia-level care.

This continuum of care – where residents are cared for as their health needs change over time – has been the basis of Ryman’s model for more than 30 years.

Mr Mitchell said he expected considerable interest from the community in plans for the site and the Ryman team would be consulting widely with local people, community groups, Heritage New Zealand and local Iwi.

“Ryman is not a property developer, our villages become an integral part of the local community over the long term, providing a safe living environment for residents, as well as other social, economic and employment benefits for many people throughout the community. It is important to us that we build strong, ongoing relationships with the community and we are committed to work in with them.”

The Karori campus was built to cope with the large numbers of ‘baby boomers’ in tertiary education in the 1960s.

“We think it could be a great quirk of history if a site that was built for the baby boomers could now be converted into a community asset for them. We think they deserve to be able to remain in the communities they helped create as they age and their health needs change, rather than having to move to find appropriate care,” Mr Mitchell said.

The campus has been an important hub for Karori community groups and Ryman will continue to work with them, he said.

“We think Victoria University has been a careful guardian of the site for a long time and the university has impressed upon us the responsibility that ownership brings. We will ensure it continues to be a great asset to the community,” Mr Mitchell said.

Wellington has an ageing population in line with the rest of New Zealand. The number of people aged over 75 is set to more than double in the next 30 years. The site appealed because of the shortage of care in the area.

“Demand is going to grow for retirement living options and Karori is an area we’ve identified as having an urgent need for care, and dementia care in particular,” he said.

More than 62,000 New Zealanders have dementia and this is set to grow to more than 170,000 by 2050, according to Alzheimer's New Zealand.

Ryman Healthcare has been in business for 33 years and has won recognition as one of New Zealand's most trusted brands.

Its villages are home to more than 10,500 residents in New Zealand and Australia.

Ryman already owns and operates five retirement villages in greater Wellington which are home to more than 1,750 retirees. Ryman employs more than 600 staff in the region and is a significant contributor to the economy.

Mr Mitchell said Ryman would be asking Karori residents for naming suggestions.

Ryman Healthcare names all its villages after local people. Ryman's other villages in Wellington include Rita Angus, Bob Scott, Shona McFarlane, Charles Fleming and Malvina Major.

"The best suggestions come from the people who know the place well so we'd love to hear any suggestions there are out there," he said.

Ryman designs, builds and operates its villages itself. The company was founded in Christchurch in 1984. It was named New Zealand's Most Trusted Brand in the sector in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

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**Victoria University's Karori campus.**

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