

Listening first: how Gavin Young is reshaping care at Mercy Health

When Gavin Young stepped in as CEO of Mercy Health this year, he wasn't just taking a new job – he's helping shape a better future for aged care at a time when it matters most. His leadership brings both continuity and fresh energy to a sector that is ready for both.

"In my career I have had the opportunity to work in executive level roles in an acting capacity in residential aged care businesses. I believe now is the right time for me to continue the strategic vision of Mercy Health, which is 'We are a growing recognised leader of compassionate and contemporary care for people of all ages,'" says Gavin.

Before joining Mercy Health Healthy Ageing two years ago, Gavin held senior roles at Australian Unity and Bupa, building operational experience. His leadership philosophy was shaped early at St Vincent's Health, where he completed the Catholic leadership course at Australian Catholic University. "I learned the importance of listening to people and ensuring teams have everything needed for success. I measure my own success by the success of people working with me — principles I've maintained throughout my career."

That belief shows up clearly in how Mercy Health Healthy Ageing designs care. Rather than large, institutional style facilities, the organisation is pioneering small household models, with communities of just eight beds (and medium households of 15), each with its own dining, lounge, and activity spaces. This contrasts with traditional aged care homes featuring long corridors and 30-plus beds. A new 30-bed facility in Edgewater, Western Australia, is being redeveloped into a 128-bed small household home while continuing operations – Mercy's Health's fourth of its kind.

"It's that real homely feel," Gavin says. "We want to take away the stigma of moving into aged care. Your community is eight beds, not a long corridor with 30-plus beds." This model has proven successful in Mentone, Victoria, which reached full occupancy within four months of opening. It offers residents genuine community without compromising care quality.

For Gavin, these environments do more than look different. They change how people feel. He rejects the notion that aged care is "God's waiting room." Instead, he sees residents "bounce back" when they receive consistent medication, regular meals, social connection, and a safe environment. Many arrive from hospital or home situations where they can no longer care for themselves, and the stability of care often leads to improved wellbeing.

However, Gavin notes a shift: residents are entering aged care later, often with dementia, palliative needs, or complex clinical conditions. Exceptions exist, such as Mercy Place Claremont in Perth, where some residents are still well enough to drive.

Mission-led strategy

At the heart of Mercy Health Healthy Ageing's operations is a mission that has guided the organisation for more than 100 years: This mission, paired with a vision of creating a ministry where associates want to work, clinicians want

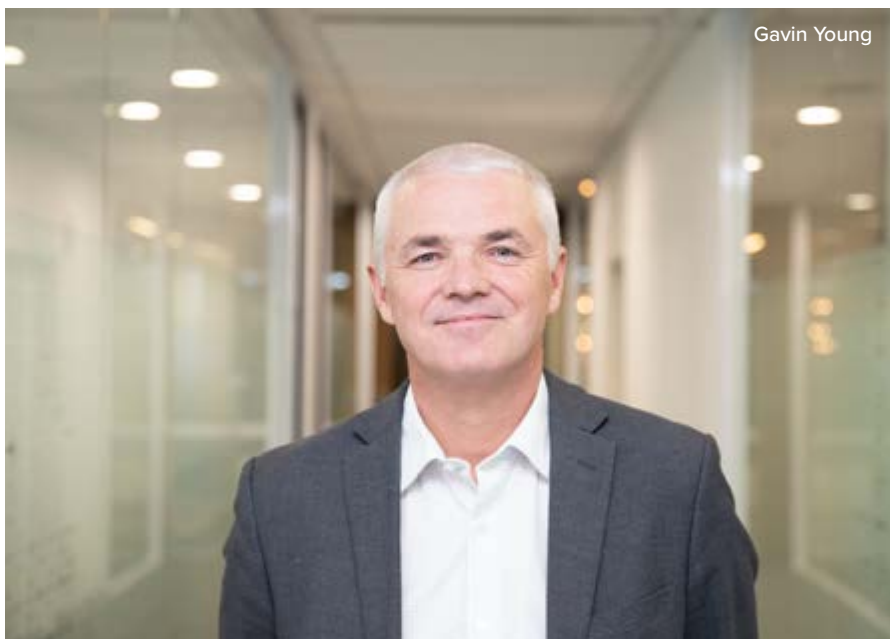
to practice, people seek wellness, and communities thrive, shapes every aspect of aged care delivery. This underpins not only how Mercy Health Healthy Ageing delivers care, but also how it grows and responds to community needs.

Under Gavin's leadership, the Healthy Ageing division of Mercy Health is operating to a clear strategic framework — one designed to balance growth, quality and sustainability in a changing aged care environment.

The strategy is anchored in four strategic commitments: invest to meet unmet need; offer exceptional, differentiated services of the highest quality; ensure efficient operations and empower our people; and drive sustainable Healthy Ageing growth.

Recent acquisitions in Yarrawonga and Myrtleford, and the expansion of home care services in Newcastle, reflect this commitment to meeting unmet needs. Mercy Health maintains at least a 30 per cent presence in regional centres where aged care is most needed.

"We're bridging care and services shortfalls where they matter most — regional presence is about meeting unmet need."



Gavin Young

grounded in what matters most: staying connected to residents, clients, and staff.

He shares a story from Mercy Place Parkville, where a resident arrived high-risk for falls and living in memory support. Within three months, the resident became ambulant, conversational, and was enjoying coffee at the café. This transformation was achieved through proper medication management, consistent meals, socialisation and a safe environment.

“It’s moments like these that remind me why I do this work,” Gavin says. “How lucky I am to lead such wonderful people who can make such a difference.”

Looking ahead, Gavin’s legacy ambition is clear — shifting Mercy Health from compliance-driven to innovation-focused, while maintaining quality

oversight. This includes exploring digital technologies to reduce administrative burden on clinical staff.

New service models — such as free webinars on Living Fees and Support at Home services — have attracted strong engagement, with around 100 attendees per session. Promoted via social media, they reach beyond current Mercy Health clients and reflect a broader commitment to community education.

Gavin also plans to introduce a concierge service where people can call with any aged care question — not just about Mercy Health, but about the sector more broadly. It’s a practical way to live the mission of serving the community.

He encourages emerging leaders to stay true to their values, remain accessible, and listen across all levels to lead with purpose and impact.

“In my career I have worked with, and for, some wonderful people that I have learnt from along the way. They were people that never compromised their values, listened to their people and customers, and aligned themselves with the values and mission of the organisation. I think as an emerging leader if you can do this, and demonstrate your own skills and ability, this will set you up for future success.” ■

Saleha Singh

“We’re bridging care and services shortfalls where they matter most,” Gavin says.

He outlines plans for new developments in Western Australia and Victoria, aimed at strengthening regional reach and introducing new technologies to improve care quality.

He stresses about cultural considerations, recognising the low number of Indigenous residents and Mercy Health’s commitment to improving representation.

Improving care by empowering people

Gavin’s operational expertise is evident in his approach to workforce challenges. At Mercy Place Fernhill, a service manager joined Mercy’s transformation and performance improvement program, focusing on reducing agency staff reliance. Within six months, agency usage dropped from nearly \$100,000 monthly to virtually zero.

“Residents having familiar people caring for them really matters,” Gavin says. “It’s not just about the bottom line — it’s about knowing what time you want to get out of bed, what you like for breakfast. And it has a positive impact on the team, because they can rely on their colleagues.”

This example reflects Gavin’s leadership philosophy: listen to frontline staff, give them the tools and permission to innovate, and measure success by their success. “I see my job as making sure they have everything they need to be successful,” he adds.

He values staying connected to frontline staff across all roles — care, clinical, hospitality, maintenance, and administration — as they share insights that strengthen services across Mercy Health’s 30 homes, 10 retirement villages, and nearly 5000 home care clients. Regular visits and events help leaders understand staff experiences and respond effectively. This culture is embedded across Mercy Health Healthy Ageing, with executive and Board members regularly visiting services.

As the sector manages the new Aged Care Act, new standards, and accreditation processes, Gavin remains

