Housing Our Elderly Means Protecting Them from the Heat, Too

Thermal comfort for the elderly is not an option. It is a public-health issue.

Switzerland must create more than 150,000 senior-friendly homes by 2032. We talk a great deal about their number, their accessibility, their financing. We talk far too little about their temperature.

A bright, peaceful home for the elderly — but behind the visible comfort lies an invisible thermal challenge: the building's ability to remain liveable during heatwaves.

At REM SWISS 2026, one figure kept coming up: Switzerland will need to create more than 150,000 senior-friendly homes by 2030-2032. A massive, urgent need that regulation is struggling to keep pace with.

This essential debate focused — rightly — on supply, accessibility and financing. But it leaves out a dimension that our profession forces us to confront: **at what temperature will the people who live in these homes actually live?**

For if there is one population for whom thermal comfort is not a luxury but a matter of health, it is the elderly.

Heat Kills — and It Kills the Elderly First

This is not a figure of speech. During the 2003 heatwave, Switzerland recorded **excess mortality of nearly 7%**, concentrated overwhelmingly among the elderly. With every heatwave since, the same finding recurs: beyond a certain night-time indoor temperature threshold, the bodies of older people can no longer recover.

An older person's body regulates its temperature less effectively, feels thirst less keenly, and tolerates thermal swings less well. A home that overheats in summer is therefore not merely uncomfortable for an 80-year-old resident — it is potentially dangerous.

Yet a significant share of senior housing is found precisely in vulnerable buildings: existing constructions in need of renovation, sometimes modular structures with low thermal inertia, top floors beneath the roof. Exactly the configurations where summer overheating is most severe.

Beyond a certain indoor temperature threshold, the bodies of older people can no longer recover at night. Thermal comfort then becomes a vital matter, not a mere amenity.

The Impossible Equation: More Comfort, Less Energy

The challenge that REM SWISS highlighted is twofold, and its two terms seem contradictory.

On the one hand, one must **guarantee thermal comfort** for vulnerable residents — meaning avoiding summer overheating and maintaining sufficient warmth in winter.

On the other, one must **meet the energy targets** — MoPEC 2025, the Net Zero Building Standard — on buildings that are often old, where the speaker put it bluntly: even new builds struggle today to meet all the targets set.

How can one offer more comfort while consuming less energy? The classic answer — air conditioning — fails on both counts: it costs, it consumes, it emits, and it dries out the air of spaces inhabited by fragile people.

Treating the Envelope: the Answer That Reconciles Both Demands

It is precisely at this intersection that thermo-reflective coatings come in. Because they act on the envelope, not on machines, they answer both terms of the equation at once.

Outdoors, on exposed roofs and façades, they reflect up to 87% of solar radiation: summer overheating is broken at the source, without air conditioning, without consumption, without noise or dried-out air — no small matter for sensitive residents.

Indoors, formulations enriched with silica aerogels and ceramic flakes provide thermal regulation that limits winter heat loss and dampens variations all year round. A major asset for existing buildings renovated without heavy works — and therefore without rehousing elderly people for the duration of an endless site.

The result ticks both boxes: **more comfort for the resident, less energy for the operator.** Summer and winter alike.

On roofs and façades, the coating reflects up to 87% of solar radiation. Indoors, silica aerogels limit winter heat loss. An envelope thermally regulated all year round.

An Investment That Speaks the Managers' Language

For a developer, a foundation, a pension fund or a public authority carrying these projects, the argument goes beyond comfort:

- **Asset enhancement** — documented thermal comfort becomes a rental-quality criterion.
- **Reduced operating costs** — controlled consumption over the building's entire lifetime.
- **ESG and climate objectives** — a passive, durable intervention, increasingly required of real-estate investors.
- **Measurable gains** — via the IPMVP protocol — to justify the expense with figures drawn from the field.

In a Word

As the REM SWISS speakers recalled, housing is a fundamental need, enshrined in our Constitution. To house our elderly with dignity also means guaranteeing them a liveable interior when the thermometer soars — and guaranteeing it without sending the country's energy bill through the roof.

The 150,000 senior homes to be created by 2032 are a unique opportunity to get things right from the start. Treating their envelope means protecting those who will live in them — and easing the burden on those who will operate them. **Surface after surface.**

***Sources**: REM SWISS 2026 — GEFISWISS SA presentation · FOPH — Heatwaves and health, vulnerable populations · 2003 heatwave excess mortality (FOPH / MeteoSwiss) · MoPEC 2025 · 2025 Building Standard "Net Zero", SwissEnergy · SIA 180 standard*

Are you leading a senior-housing project — new build or renovation? Let's talk about the comfort of those who will live there, before the first summer.

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