

Guide to Choosing an

# ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITY

CHOICE DIGNITY INDEPENDENCE  
QUALITY CARE QUALITY OF  
LIFE RESIDENT-CENTERED  
SUPPORT COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE  
CARE PRIVACY PEACE OF MIND  
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QUALITY OF LIFE RESIDENT-  
CENTERED SUPPORT  
COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE CARE  
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QUALITY CARE QUALITY OF  
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CHOICE DIGNITY INDEPENDENCE



# You Are Not Alone.

Today, almost a million residents enjoy the benefits of assisted living and other resident-centered care options. These residents chose senior living because—like you—they want to remain active and engaged. They value the lifestyle, full of choice, dignity, independence, and quality of life, that senior living residents live every day.

With 31,000 licensed assisted living communities across the country, you have a variety of options from which to choose: Where the community is located; the types of care and residential services offered; the type of property; the size of an apartment; the range of rents; and, most important, the “feel” you experience when you tour the community.

These differences are important. However, more important is what they all have in common.

Assisted living was founded on a resident-centered philosophy to enable **choice**, preserve **dignity**, encourage **independence**, and promote **quality of life**. Every day in assisted living communities, the staff lives and breathes this philosophy. It is reflected in the care and services they offer every day to each resident.

**This resource is a starting point.** Tour assisted living communities early, before they are needed and tour as many as possible. There are many resources available today to help you find the option that is right for you or your loved one.

## ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITIES

- ✓ ENABLE  
CHOICE.
- ✓ PRESERVE  
DIGNITY.
- ✓ ENCOURAGE  
INDEPENDENCE.
- ✓ PROMOTE  
QUALITY  
OF LIFE.

## **Who Benefits from Assisted Living Communities?**

Assisted living communities serve seniors who require assistance with everyday activities such as meal preparation, medication management, transportation and personal care (dressing, bathing, etc). They are also appropriate for seniors who require specialized assistance for Alzheimer's Disease or related dementia. Seniors who can no longer live alone or be cared for by an aging spouse or a family member frequently turn to assisted living communities.

## **What are Assisted Living Communities?**

Assisted living communities offer supportive amenities, services, and care in a residential setting with the comforts of home. Assisted living has staff available in the community 24/7 to assist with care, safety, and support. When you've seen one assisted living community, you've seen just one. They come in all different shapes and sizes, and offer a variety of features, amenities, and prices.

### **Typical Costs & Flexible Financial Options**

Prices vary with the community, apartment size, and types of services and level of care needed by residents. Typically, communities charge a monthly rent that includes all the residential services and amenities. And, they will charge a monthly care fee based on the level of care a resident requires each day. Some communities may bundle rent and care fees together.

Many assisted living communities charge market rates and are private pay as Medicare does not cover the usual services offered in assisted living. Some communities do participate in Medicaid waiver programs.

Assisted living communities offer the benefits of a social and residential model of care where privacy is still preserved.

### **What Amenities and Services are Available?**

The most common amenities and services offered in assisted living communities are:

- Dining services, usually including breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks
- Housekeeping
- Transportation
- Personal laundry services
- Wellness and fitness programs
- Social and recreational activities

### **What Types of Care are Offered**

Assistance with personal care such as dressing, bathing and grooming is very common in assisted living, as are services to assist with continence, medications, memory loss and mobility.

Also, residents may be able to bring in outside services specialized in physical therapy, hospice, and other services.

Options many residents and their families have used to pay for assisted living include:

- Income from social security and other pensions
- The sale of the family home and other investments
- Personal retirement savings
- Assistance from family
- Long-term care insurance
- The VA Aid and Attendance Program
- The settlement of a life insurance policy that is no longer needed
- Medicaid may be available on a limited basis to income-eligible seniors
- Choosing to share your apartment with a roommate

## **Who Oversees Quality and Standards of Assisted Living?**

Assisted living is regulated in all 50 states. The license should be easily available for you to see in the community. All state laws also provide for a Resident Bill of Rights, which is posted.

Assisted living communities are inspected by the state regulatory agency. You may request a copy of the most recent survey report from the community. Assisted living communities must also comply with local building codes, fire safety regulations, and other requirements.

Additionally, many operators of professionally managed assisted living communities for seniors have company quality review programs in place to review and continually improve services, as well as resident and family councils to address questions in a timely manner.

## **How Can I Find An Assisted Living Community?**

There are numerous resources online and in your community to help you research senior care options more thoroughly and locate options.

- National Eldercare Locator by the U.S. Administration on Aging | (800) 677-1116
- Local Area Agency/Council on Aging | [www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org)
- The ALFA Senior Living Community Directory powered by Caring.com offers a feature-rich web resource to seniors and their families who want to locate senior living options, including assisted living, in their area. Visit [www.alfa.org/seniorliving](http://www.alfa.org/seniorliving).

# Community Review Checklist

The best advice is to locate and visit assisted living communities before a crisis. Meeting the staff, residents and often family members is one of the best ways to learn about the community. Every assisted living community is unique, but there are common questions to ask yourself and the community before, during, and after a visit.

The checklist that follows will help you ask these questions and make an assessment for yourself and/or a loved one.

## Environment

- : As you arrive at the community, do you like its location and outward appearance?
- : As you enter the lobby and tour the community, is the décor attractive and homelike?
- : Do you receive a warm greeting from staff welcoming you to the community?
- : Does the executive director call residents by name and interact warmly with them as you tour the community?
- : Do residents socialize with each other and appear happy and comfortable?
- : Are you able to talk with residents about how they like the community and staff?
- : Do the residents seem to be appropriate housemates for you or your loved one?
- : Are staff members appropriately dressed, personable, and outgoing?
- : Do the staff members treat each other in a professional manner?
- : Are the staff members that you pass during your tour friendly to you?
- : Are visits with the resident welcome at any time?

# Community Review Checklist

## Physical Features

- Is the community well-designed for your needs?
- Is the floor plan easy to follow?
- Are doorways, hallways, and rooms accommodating to wheelchairs and walkers?
- Are elevators available for those unable to use stairways?
- Are handrails available to aid in walking?
- Are cupboards and shelves easy to reach?
- Are floors of a non-skid material and carpets firm to ease walking?
- Does the community have good natural and artificial lighting?
- Is the community clean, free of odors, and appropriately heated/cooled?
- Does the community have sprinklers, smoke detectors, and clearly marked exits?

## Needs Assessments, Residency Agreements, Costs & Finances

- Is a consumer disclosure form available that discloses personal care and supportive services, all fees, as well as move-in and move-out provisions? What are the policies for refunds and transfers?
- Is a residency agreement available for review before move-in?
- Is there a written plan of care for each resident? How frequently is it reviewed and updated?
- Does the community have a process for assessing a resident's need for services, and are those needs addressed periodically?
- Does this periodic assessment process include the resident, his or her family, and community staff, along with the resident's physician?
- Are there any government, private, or corporate programs available to help cover the cost of services to the resident?
- Are additional services available if the resident's needs change?



- Are there different costs for various levels or categories of personal care?
- Do billing, payment, and credit policies seem fair and reasonable?
- Are residents required to purchase renters' insurance for personal property in their apartments?
- Is there a complaints process for dissatisfied residents?
- Are the resident bill of rights posted or available for review?

## Medication & Health Care

- Does the community have specific policies regarding storage of medication, assistance with medications, training and supervision of staff, and record keeping?
- Is self-administration of medication allowed?
- Is there a staff person to coordinate home health-care visits from a nurse, physical therapist, occupational therapist, etc., if needed?
- Does the community have a clearly stated procedure for responding to a resident's medical emergency?
- To what extent are ancillary services such as hospice or physical therapy available, and how are these services provided? Ask if there is an additional charge for any of these services.

## Services & Amenities

- Can the community provide a list of care services available?
- Is there a nurse on staff?
- Is staff available to provide 24-hour assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) if needed? ADLs include dressing, eating, mobility, hygiene and grooming, bathing, and toileting.
- What are the training requirements for staff?
- Does the community provide housekeeping services in personal living spaces?

# Community Review Checklist

- Can residents arrange for transportation on fairly short notice?
- Are barber/beautician services offered on-site?
- Does the community provide scheduled transportation to doctors' offices, the hairdresser, shopping, and other activities desired by residents?

## Individual Apartment Features

- Are different sizes and types of apartments available?
- Are apartments for single and double occupancy available?
- Do residents have their own lockable doors?
- Is a 24-hour emergency response system accessible from the apartment?
- Are bathrooms private and designed to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers?
- Are residents able to bring their own furnishings for their apartment? What may they bring? What is provided?
- Do all apartments have a telephone, cable or satellite TV, and internet access? How is billing handled?
- Is a kitchen area provided with a refrigerator, sink, and cooking element?
- May residents keep food in their apartments?
- May residents smoke in their apartments? In public spaces?
- May residents decorate their own apartments?

## Social & Recreational Activities

- Is there evidence of organized activities, such as a posted daily schedule, events in progress, reading materials, visitors, etc.?
- Do residents participate in activities outside of the community in the neighboring community?
- Does the community have its own pets?
- Are residents' pets allowed in the community? Who is responsible for their care?

- Do volunteers, including family members, come into the community to help with or to conduct programs?
- Does the community create a sense of inclusion by encouraging residents to participate in activities?

## Dining Services

- Do dining room menus vary from day to day and meal to meal?
- Does the community provide three nutritionally balanced meals a day, seven days a week?
- Are snacks available?
- May a resident request special foods, and can the community accommodate special dietary needs?
- Are common dining areas available?
- May residents eat meals in their apartment or suite?
- May meals be provided at a time a resident would like, or are there set times for meals?

## Additional Questions

- Does the community conduct criminal background checks on employees?
- Does the community train staff on elder abuse and neglect? Is there a policy for reporting suspected abuse?
- Does the community have a special wing or floor for residents with cognitive impairments such as Alzheimer's disease? If so, is it secured?
- Does the community allow hospice to come in and care for residents?
- Does the community accept long-term care insurance?
- Does the community allow a loved one, such as a grandchild, to spend the night? Is there a charge?
- Does the community accept Medicaid?
- What are the most common reasons why a resident may be asked to move out of the community?
- Is the state inspection report available for review?

## **This Brochure is Brought to You by ALFA**

The Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA) is the largest national association exclusively dedicated to professionally-managed, resident-centered senior living communities and the seniors and families they serve. ALFA's members provide independent, assisted and memory care communities for seniors.

**[www.alfa.org](http://www.alfa.org)**

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[www.alfa.org/albrochure](http://www.alfa.org/albrochure).