

RESOURCES

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN ASSISTED LIVING

Maybe you or a loved one have encountered a health crisis, maybe you just see 'the handwriting on the wall' and realize that your loved one can no longer continue living on their own safely. Whatever the reason, you need to start researching Assisted Living communities and what to look for...here is some help.

You start by asking your friends, your neighbors, physicians or nurses. You start by doing your homework; what kinds of care needs does your loved one really have, do they need help with showers, do they need help with personal cares? What are their finances going to afford them, what is important to them, do they want to be busy and social in their new home or are they just concerned with having a good view and three squares a day?

You tour facilities, talk to the folks living there, talk to the staff working there; do they seem happy, have they worked there long, is there a lot of turnover in management and staff? Is there a wellness program, a wide-variety of activities, both in and out of the building?

You stay for lunch! How is the food prepared and served, are there different choices, do they offer specialized diets? How does the staff treat the tenants they are waiting on? How are YOU waited on and treated?

You meet with the nurse that's going to be in charge of your loved one's needs. How does their staff handle emergency and non-emergency problems? What kinds of care can your loved one receive? How are they charged for their health care needs? Do they receive regularly scheduled nursing visits? Is there transportation to medical appointments? If so, is this included in the rent or is this an extra cost?

So really, the questions are endless and important. But at the end of the tour, how did they make you feel, how interested in your loved one were they? Is this someplace that you, yourself, would want to live?

CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITIES

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?
- ✓ Did you receive a warm greeting from staff welcoming you to the community?
- ✓ Does staff call tenants by name and interact warmly with them as you tour the community?
- ✓ Do the tenants socialize with each other and appear happy and comfortable?
- ✓ Are you able to talk with the tenants about how they like the community and staff?
- ✓ 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?

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CHECKLIST, CONT.

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? 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 or rental agreement available for review before move-in?
- ✓ Is there a written plan of care for each tenant? How frequently is it reviewed and updated?
- ✓ Does the community have a process for assessing a tenant's need for services, and are those needs addressed periodically?
- ✓ Does this periodic assessment process include the tenant and his or her family?
- ✓ Are there any government, private, or corporate programs available to help cover the cost of services?
- ✓ Are additional services available if the tenant'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?
- ✓ How are complaints handled?

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 an outside nurse, physical therapist, occupational therapist, etc., if needed?
- ✓ Does the community have a clearly stated procedure for responding to a tenant'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.
- ✓ 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?

ADDITIONAL AMENITIES AND SERVICES

- ✓ Does the community provide housekeeping services in personal living spaces?
- ✓ Are barber/beautician services offered on-site?
- ✓ Does the community provide scheduled transportation to doctors' offices, the hairdresser, shopping, and other activities desired by tenants? Can transportation be arranged on fairly short notice?

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CHECKLIST, CONT.

INDIVIDUAL APARTMENT FEATURES

- ✓ Are different sizes and types of apartments available?
- ✓ Can tenants lock their own doors?
- ✓ Is a 24-hour emergency response system accessible from the apartment?
- ✓ Are bathrooms private and designed to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers?
- ✓ Are tenants 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 for these services handled?
- ✓ Is a kitchen area provided with a refrigerator, sink, and cooking element?
- ✓ May tenants keep food in their apartments?
- ✓ May tenants or visitors smoke in their apartments? In public spaces?
- ✓ May tenants 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 tenants participate in activities outside of the community?
- ✓ Does the community have its own pets?
- ✓ Are tenants' pets allowed in the community? If so, 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 tenants 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 tenant request special foods? Can the community accommodate special dietary needs?
- ✓ Are private dining areas available?
- ✓ May tenants eat meals in their apartment?
- ✓ May meals be provided at any time a tenant 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 tenants with cognitive impairments such as Alzheimer's disease? If so, is it secured?
- ✓ Does the community allow hospice to come in and care for tenants?
- ✓ 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 tenant may be asked to move out of the community?