

Staying in Your House: The Solution or the Problem?

How to compare the Real Cost of Aging in Place

Emotionally, your home is rich with memories. As people age, however, it can pose mounting problems—and expenses. People often assume that staying in their house is the money-saving alternative. But that can be a fallacy when you compare actual costs to everything included in the services and amenities package offered by a senior living community.

Use this process to organize your planning. We've included a chart for each step.

Step 1:

Monthly and Annual Expenses

Total up the bills you pay regularly. You need to look at the house and factor in any major expenses you anticipate in the years to come, such as the roof, driveway or furnace replacement or repairs. (If at some point you need to sell the home, the buyer may insist on these repairs.)

Step 2:

Adapting the House

If one or both people have a mobility problem, you will need to retrofit the house for safety. That can mean everything from installing grab bars in the shower to buying a customized lift chair for a staircase. No one wants to think about a worst-case scenario, but planning requires a realistic look at the “what ifs.”

Step 3:

Home Health Aides

Will you need someone to assist with light housekeeping? Will you need someone who can handle incontinence care? Will you need a trained CNA who knows how to deal with a fall or other health emergency? Prices vary, and you'll need to get estimates from agencies in your specific area.

Even with the most reliable agencies, you're dealing with the human factor: Schedules get mixed up, emergencies happen, certain caregivers just aren't a good fit—someone in the family will end up coordinating with the agency, sometimes at the very last minute.

Important: *In most states, there are no licensing or training requirements for “companions” or “home aides.” Before you bring a helper into your home, you need to vet the agencies carefully, making sure you know what each aide can and can't do. You also need to know if they've been through a criminal background check.*

Step 4:

Health Care Costs

Medicare and Social Security provide a foundation for care. If you've planned ahead, you may have long-term care insurance. Depending upon individual health challenges, you may need supplemental care.

If one partner remains healthy and the other declines more rapidly, they may require separate settings. At that point, costs can change dramatically. One continues to stay in the house, paying its expenses, while the other moves to a higher level of care. Even with insurance, there are ancillary costs to consider.

Another crucial question: Are you increasingly isolated at home?

Research from Harvard, Tufts and other universities has proven that isolation and inactivity accelerate decline.

Step 5:

Time

Time is the intangible quantity, but you have to plan for it. If people with mobility problems stay at home, they need transportation to medical appointments at minimum. Will their children be responsible for driving? Shopping? How much time will they have to take off work to drive? How much will gasoline cost? How much of your family life will become consumed with sheer logistics—not quality time?

Get a closer look at your actual and potential expenses. Then compare them to a senior living setting. You may find that the costs are about the same—even less—and that the benefits are enormous plusses:

1. The Value of an Inclusive Package of Services and Amenities

Look at everything included in a residence package: the apartment or cottage itself, housekeeping, yard care and maintenance, utilities, a dining plan and more. Instead of writing all those monthly bills, you have predictable expenses. Packages vary at different communities. Compare them—especially with current costs at home.

Senior living residences are already designed for people who may face future mobility challenges.

2. Asset Protection/Financial Security

Living in the house, you spend down your assets. There's no way around it.

Some senior living communities are rentals, which give you flexibility, with no long-term commitment. Communities based on an entrance fee/monthly fee contract usually offer asset protection: Up to 90% of the entrance fee is refunded to their estate. Most parents are concerned about providing for their children. These contracts ensure that the bulk of their initial investment returns to the family.

Also: As you compare costs, you may discover that health care expenses in a continuing care retirement community are usually significantly lower than with pay-as-you-go care at prevailing market rates.

3. Health Care Security

In a community setting, care is all around: clinical care for everyday needs, personal care, assisted living, skilled nursing and sometimes memory care. Help is moments away, especially in an emergency. Couples can stay close, even if they need different levels of care.

Increasingly, communities provide a wider array of health services in the residence itself.

Communities screen their staff carefully and train them to meet exacting standards—both from licensing agencies and the community itself.

Just as important, in a community, staff, friends and neighbors look after one another—not only inviting them to take part in fitness classes and learning opportunities, but noticing when they miss a meal, seem unwell or change behavior. These extra eyes and ears make an enormous difference in peace of mind and wellbeing—especially when the family lives far away.

The social, physical fitness and intellectual benefits of community life are another real advantage, and they also come included in the resident package, including a majority of entertainment and educational events.

4. Aging in Place

Often, people want to remain in their home not only for the emotional attachment, but because the idea of change is daunting. Sorting through possessions, selling a house in today's market, managing the actual move itself—all these factors seem enormous.

Most senior living communities provide downsizing, home sales and moving assistance—often free—to plan and execute a smooth transition.

Making one move to senior living enables them to age in place in an environment specifically designed to help them do it successfully: with comfort, convenience and security.

Use the accompanying chart to get a sharper focus on your real expenses:

Cost Comparison Planning Guide

Ongoing Expenses

	Your Home	Senior Living
Rent/Mortgage	_____	Included
Home Insurance	_____	Included
Electric	_____	Included
Water	_____	Included
Natural Gas	_____	Included
Security	_____	Included
Lawn Maintenance	_____	Included
Home Maintenance	_____	Included
Groceries	_____	Included
Transportation	_____	Scheduled Rides Included
Cable	_____	Often Included
Telephone	_____	Often Included
Internet Service	_____	Often Included
Entertainment	_____	Included
Gym Membership	_____	Included
Total Monthly Costs:	_____	



Cost Comparison Planning Guide *(continued)*

Adapting the House*

		Your costs
Adjustable Bed	\$1,548 - \$3,398	_____
Bath Lift	\$499 - \$999	_____
Walk-in Bath	\$1,199 - \$4,149	_____
Lift Chair	\$469 - \$1,428	_____
Mobility Scooter	\$789 - \$2,550	_____
Ramp	\$110 - \$285	_____
Stair Lift	\$1,348 - \$1,749	_____
Toilet Lift	\$231 - \$1,249	_____
Platform Lift	\$3,439 - \$5,499	_____
Wheelchair	\$104 - \$1,619	_____
Medical Alert System: Prices vary, depending upon installation/monthly fee		_____
Removing Adaptations to Sell House		_____
Medical Supplies		_____
Transportation to Medical Appointments		_____
Home Health Aide		_____
Total Costs:		_____

**Cost range based on reputable companies sold on the Internet. Actual costs may vary.*

We're here to help.

Our community has helped families with all kinds of health concerns and budget goals to plan for their future. Please let us help you with this process, no matter what you ultimately decide. You'll come away with a sharper focus on your planning options—and you may discover new ones that open up a world of better possibilities.