

# Helping Your Parents Explore Their Retirement Options.

**A Resource Guide to the Benefits and Challenges.**



As our parents grow older, we see their lives changing—slowly at first, but sometimes suddenly and dramatically. Since we all face the prospect of growing older, it is crucial to discuss the future before a crisis forces you to make decisions under duress, limiting your options and spiking your costs. You want the security of knowing your parent will receive the best possible professional care, will be treated with compassion and respect and will be able to make the most of life.

We offer these perspectives to help you start a well-informed conversation about the future.

### **Looking at the cost of health care.**

How can you even begin to estimate what medical care will cost in the years to come? The National Institute on Aging followed older people in eight suburban towns as part of a study that began in 1995. Researchers found that most individuals can expect to live at least into their late 80s. For the great majority, health care challenges arise at the end of very long lives. Americans are living longer with chronic illnesses that place enormous demands on the health care system, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many older people live with non-life-threatening problems that require care, from cataracts to incontinence.

Sheer numbers are driving new ways to think about care and service delivery as the Baby Boomer generation ages:

- What can you do about legislative changes that may add to the cost of health care?
- What happens if your loved one becomes disabled?
- Will you be able to afford all the care your parents need, but may not be able to pay for?
- How will you find a qualified caregiver?
- What is the right setting for the specific needs you may face?

### **A 55+ Community.**

The typical age-restricted community offers an attractive package of amenities that seems appealing now. Your parents can surrender at least part of their home maintenance responsibilities. These communities offer a relaxed social atmosphere, often including a clubhouse and recreational facilities. They can also provide 24-hour security—all pluses.

But you need to ask questions and compare the projected costs:

- What do you get for your monthly rent or condo fees?
- What is included—and what is not?
- How much will your parents pay for utility, cable and other regular bills?
- Will they pay for a parking space, even if they hardly ever drive?
- What about membership dues for a fitness center or clubhouse?
- How will they deal with a health care challenge?

A 55+ community may be a good interim step for active, healthy parents. But it merely postpones another move, when the need for care takes a higher priority in their lives.

### **Home Care.**

Almost everyone's first choice is to stay at home as long as possible. If your parents make that choice, you may need to hire a personal care assistant to help with bathing, shopping or laundry. With more serious health issues, you may need people with special training. You may also have to coordinate with physical, occupational or speech therapists to help your loved one recover from surgery or a stroke.

You also need to consider the costs of outfitting the home with the necessary medical and assistive equipment to care for an aging person with a chronic disease, from bath bars, shower stools and adjustable beds to lifts, scooters, wheelchair-accessible ramps and elevator chairs.

Finding the right home care provider can be a problem if you are not familiar with the current situation: No training or certification is required to become a home care provider. People can simply call themselves "personal care assistants" or "companions." If you hire people to provide transportation services, you usually have no way to check their driving records. The law sets no standards for training or experience. Employees can be sent to a home without knowing the

proper way to bathe or lift a patient—not to mention how to deal with a fall or other emergency.

Language barriers, coupled with hearing difficulties, often make communication challenging.

If you rely on an outside agency, you will be at the mercy of weather delays and scheduling conflicts. What will you do if no one arrives to care for your parent? What will happen if medications are missed or duplicated? While the cost savings may seem like a bargain, what about the personal costs of worry and stress?

### **Caring for a Family Member at Your Home.**

If you are the one who needs care, will you worry about the strain on your spouse, child, or other family members?

If you are the caregiver, are you prepared to help your parent with bathing or an incontinence problem—and do they want their child performing those tasks?

Unless you are a health care provider yourself, how do you know which medical supplies you need or how to spot a problem before it becomes a crisis? For example, will you be able to tell the difference between the symptoms of a urinary tract infection and the early stages of dementia? (Both conditions may present symptoms such as confused speech and disorientation.)

Who will help your loved one navigate trips to doctors? Will you check your cell phone a hundred times a day? How many times will you miss work to care for your loved one? Will you worry about falls or a midnight trip to the emergency room?

Do you know how to operate at-home monitoring devices? You may have to adapt your home with the same modifications. If you have children in the house, everyone's life becomes more complicated and stressful.

### **Adult Day Care.**

According to the National Institutes of Health, up to five million Americans age 65 and older suffer from Alzheimer's disease. The cost of care is estimated to exceed \$100 billion annually. Because age is the biggest risk factor, health officials say the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease could triple by 2050 if current trends continue.

Day care programs are often designed especially for individuals with health care needs, especially dementia. There are "social" models that offer engagement and supervised care in a safe setting during the day, and "medical" models, which also include a health care component. Adult Day programs also provide support for the caregiver.

But over time you may need more help. Day care programs will not help with restlessness or agitation—called "sundowning" by health professionals—that tends to strike Alzheimer's or dementia patients as darkness falls.

Adult day care allows your loved one to stay in his or her home for as long as possible. But is staying in the home really the best choice? Caregivers often feel isolated or trapped in the house. Most homes are not equipped to keep a patient with dementia from wandering off. Aging spouses may also be managing health challenges of their own. What happens if a health crisis occurs at night? According to the CDC, more than 60 percent of all adult emergency room visits take place after business hours.

### **Senior Living Communities**

Community life has a major advantage: providing maintenance-free living, nourishing dining, transportation, and social engagement opportunities. Your parents are surrounded with people who look after them 24/7. The ten-year MacArthur Foundation Study of Aging has proven that people continue to grow stronger physically, intellectually and even spiritually in a setting that encourages friendship and personal enrichment. It also showed that isolation is one of the key risk factors that accelerates decline.

There are several types of senior communities. Some are strictly Independent Living, and may have a personal care component but not licensed assisted living or skilled nursing.

## **A Continuing Care Retirement**

**Community (CCRC)** offers the benefits of Independent Living with an on-site continuum of health care services—usually a clinic for day-to-day needs, personal care, assisted living, skilled nursing and sometimes memory care. The immediate advantage is to have all these services on one campus, with 24-hour supervision, so that many forms of help are available immediately. This takes the burden of worry and responsibility off the family.

Some senior living communities have rental options and may require a one-time community fee; others have a one-time entrance fee with monthly fees to cover ongoing services. The one-time fees can seem substantial at first; however, many communities offer entrance fees that are up to 90% refundable to the resident's estate, preserving significant assets for their family.

In looking at senior living communities, it is important to ask these questions:

- What services and amenities are included in the total package?
- What health services do they offer and how highly are they rated by independent authorities?
- What is their staff-to-resident ratio?
- How stable are they financially?
- Are they for-profit or not-for-profit?

When people look at the cost of living at home versus the packages offered by a CCRC, they often find that the expenses compare favorably and that the value and peace of mind are a deciding factor.

## **Helping your family make the right decision is part of our mission.**

No matter what your family decides about the future, our people and our resources are here to guide you. Look to us for solid answers to your questions, with no sales pressure. If you decide upon our community, we want it to be one of the happiest and smartest decisions of a lifetime.

This chart compares the services available in a continuing care retirement community with traditional senior living options, including home-based services, age-restricted apartments, family caregivers, and adult day care.

|                                    | <b>Continuing Care Community</b> | <b>Home Based Services</b> | <b>Age-Restricted Apartments</b> | <b>Family Caregiver</b> | <b>Elder Day Care</b> |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Healthcare where you live          | ✓                                | ✓                          |                                  | ✓                       |                       |
| Flexible Financial Options         | ✓                                |                            |                                  |                         |                       |
| Coordinated Daily Care             | ✓                                | ✓                          |                                  | ✓                       | ✓                     |
| Personal Safety and Security       | ✓                                | ✓                          | ✓                                | ✓                       | ✓                     |
| Health Care Benefits and Discounts | ✓                                |                            |                                  |                         |                       |
| Socialization                      | ✓                                | ✓                          | ✓                                | ✓                       | ✓                     |
| Maintenance-Free Lifestyle         | ✓                                |                            | ✓                                |                         |                       |
| Stay Together as a Couple          | ✓                                | ✓                          |                                  | ✓                       |                       |
| Activities and Amenities           | ✓                                |                            | ✓                                |                         | ✓                     |

