

## Assisted living facilities

# What they are and how to find one

### Why choose assisted living?

Assisted living is a long-term care alternative for relatively independent older adults who require more assistance than is available in a retirement community, but who do not require the medical or skilled nursing care provided in a nursing facility. Assisted living residents live in home-like pri-

vate residences where they receive assistance, supervision, and limited healthcare services as well as access to activities programs and central dining facilities that serve three meals every day. Assisted living emphasizes that individuals have the right to choose a setting for care and services.

### Where are assisted living facilities located?

Assisted living residences can be located in freestanding facilities, on a campus with skilled nursing facilities or hospitals, as components of continuing care retirement communities, or at independent housing complexes.

### Costs

Overall monthly charges in 1999 averaged \$1,875 for rent and additional fees. Approximately two-thirds of assisted living facilities charge between \$1,001 and \$2,500 per month. Another 15% charge more than \$2,500, whereas 19% charge less than \$1,000.

### Medication issues

One study showed that 86% of residents have been found to need or accept help with daily medications. In general, facilities staff may supervise, assist, or administer medication as prescribed by state rules and regulations.

### Funding

Medicare does not provide coverage for assisted living, but certain services are paid under Supplementary Security Income (SSI) and Social Services Block Grant programs. The management staff should be able to answer specific questions about available assistance programs.

### What to look for when selecting a residence

- What does the basic monthly fee include?
- What does the move-in process entail?
- Is your room held if you need hospital or nursing home care?
- Are resident rooms furnished?
- What is the policy for bringing personal belongings?
- Observe staff and resident interactions. Are staff members positive and courteous?
- Does the facility employ nurses or certified nurse assistants who can assist with medications and other medical needs?
- Does the facility have consulting arrangements with specific physicians who are on-call in case of emergency?
- At what point does the staff check on a resident if the resident has not been seen for a period of time?
- Are there special programs for memory-impaired residents or residents with disabilities?
- Does the residence provide security?
- Does staff provide assistance with activities of daily living, such as bathing or dressing? If so, what kind of staff?
- Does food service accommodate special diets?
- How often does the menu rotate?
- Does the residence provide linens, towels, or laundry services?
- Is transportation provided for medical appointments or recreation?
- Can residents have automobiles?
- Can residents have pets?

### Additional information

For more information about assisted living, access the National Center for Assisted Living's web site at [www.ncal.org](http://www.ncal.org). The site provides specific information about assisted living services as well as cost calculators and checklists for prospective residents.

The national Eldercare Locator service can also help older adults find local services. The toll-free Eldercare Locator service operates Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 8:00 pm Eastern time, and can be reached at 1-800-677-1116. Information can be accessed on the Web at [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov).