



CHOOSING AN ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY

Choosing an assisted living facility is an important decision. Keep in mind that there may be other long-term services and supports that might fit your needs, such as a nursing home or receiving care in your home. Refer to fact sheets on those topics to decide what option is best for you. Below are some points to consider when searching for an assisted living facility that meets your needs.

Find Out If the Assisted Living Facility is Licensed

- When a facility is licensed, you have more protections and a place to turn if you wish to file a complaint. Not all assisted living facilities are licensed.

Track Record of the Assisted Living Facility

- Check with family or friends who have had experience with the assisted living facility.
- Check with the state/local long-term care ombudsman program to see if they have had complaints against the assisted living facility you are considering. To locate the ombudsman in your state, go to http://theconsumervoice.org/get_help or call the Consumer Voice at (202) 332-2275.
- Review survey (inspection) reports about the assisted-living facility and compare it to other assisted-living facilities. To find this data, go to http://theconsumervoice.org/get_help, choose your state and look for “Licensure and Certifications,” or call the Consumer Voice at the number above.

NOTE:

Only state licensed facilities will have survey data available. In many states, facilities are surveyed only every 3 or 5 years, not every year.

Overview of Services

- Ask what services are included in the rate you will pay and the cost of additional services offered at the facility. Two items to review include:
 - ⇒ Disclosure forms: An increasing number of states require assisted living facilities to complete disclosure forms, which usually include details about the services provided. Request this form from the facility or go to your state licensing and certification agency’s website.
 - ⇒ Contracts: Ask for a copy of the contract or agreement. Review it carefully to see exactly what will be provided, the fees that you must pay (“community service” fees are often required), and under what circumstances you may be asked to leave the facility.
- Find out if the facility provides the type of special care you might need (for example, care for Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, etc.) If so, ask what makes this care “special” and different from other care.

- Ask what happens if your money runs out.
- Ask if the facility participates in the Medicaid program. Get answers in writing if the facility says you can stay and use Medicaid funds for the entire length of your stay.
- Ask if the facility offers opportunities to leave the facility, such as seeing movies in the community.
- Ask what services nurses provide and how many hours a day a registered nurse or a licensed practical/vocational nurse is on-site. Many facilities do not offer a nurse 'round the clock'.
- Ask if the same staff person will be assigned to help you with personal care. If so, this is ideal.

Visit the Assisted Living Facility

Meeting Your Needs, Preferences and Routines

- Discuss your needs, and any preferences or routines that are important to you, like taking a nap after lunch. Ask how staff will meet those needs, preferences and routines.
- Ask who determines when you need more services or when the services provided can no longer meet your needs – you or the facility.

- Take a formal tour of the facility.
- Go back unannounced several times, including mealtimes, evenings and weekends.
- If possible, speak with current residents and any family or friends who may be visiting.
- Eat a meal to check out the food.
- Determine how far the assisted living facility is from your family and friends and how easy it will be for them to visit you.

Staffing, Expertise, and Experience

- Ask assisted living facilities about their experience in providing the services you are requesting.
- Ask what education, training and experience the assisted living facility staff has. If the facility offers specialized care, ask what training staff receive to assist residents requiring this type of care.
- Ask the assisted living facility if they conduct national or state background checks on all employees.
- Ask what the staff-to-resident ratio is on each shift. The fewer residents per staff person, the better!

Additional Resources:

For a list of helpful resources, including checklists, organizations, and research on this topic, go to <http://theconsumervoice.org/issues/recipients/assisted-living/additional-resources>

For more in-depth information on these and other related topics, see the *Piecing Together Quality Long-Term Care Guide* produced by the Consumer Voice [http://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/long-term-care-recipient/piecing-together-quality-long-term-care_\(1\).pdf](http://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/long-term-care-recipient/piecing-together-quality-long-term-care_(1).pdf)

For more information and resources, go to www.theconsumervoice.org

National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (formerly NCCNHR) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1975 by Elma E. Holder to protect the rights, safety and dignity of American's long-term care residents.