

The Next Chapter

What is the Value of Continuum of Care?

Retirement communities cater to today's active adults.

Thanks largely to the collective power and sheer numbers of baby boomers and the generations preceding them, senior communities have undergone a revitalization in the past few years to cater to the desires of the expanding 55-plus population.

In the past, people didn't have many choices when it was time to move out of their family home. Fortunately, retirement communities have made great strides since then. If you have never visited one of today's active adult retirement communities, you're in for a pleasant surprise.

Long gone are the sterile, rigid, "institutional" environments associated with nursing homes and communities of the past. Communities now promote active living and offer a variety of lifestyle options to fit people's needs, allowing them to age in place.

As populations in these communities are rapidly growing, so is the sense of community and accompanying benefits within them.

What do people today want their retirement to look like?

Surveys have revealed a detailed wish list of key desires:

- Easy, casual social interaction
- Expanded opportunities and activities
- A homelike environment
- Central, convenient location
- Integration with the greater community
- Ability to age in place
- Affordability
- Personal autonomy
- Privacy
- Personal safety and security
- A positive, meaningful life

Senior living has changed dramatically.

When more than 100 million consumers have a common wish list, the market finds a way to fulfill those desires. The result? The concept of a retirement community that is resident-centric. This approach offers a "one-stop" continuum of services and amenities to satisfy older adults with a wide range of interests and health needs.

Referred to as a continuum of care, or sometimes as a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC), these communities focus on encouraging

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and enhancing the strengths of its residents, rather than trying to remediate their disabilities and impairments. ⁽¹⁾

What exactly is a CCRC?

While the CCRC designation varies by state, they all essentially operate as continuum of care retirement communities. The CCRC term is used broadly to describe most intentional senior communities providing housing and varying levels of service—independent, assisted living, and memory care—all on one campus.

Varying service levels allow for customization of care for each resident, adjusting as needs change over time to help each individual age in place.

Recent studies have shown that aging in place provides numerous benefits to seniors and the community as a whole. Residents of retirement communities have reported improved personal health and well-being, while the economic and environmental health of the overall community is cultivated as well. Those who choose to move to a continuum of care community also cite lifelong learning opportunities, healthy eating options, and staying fit as additional benefits over staying in a single-family home ⁽²⁾.

What a typical active adult community offers.

- **Community.** Ready access to social opportunities and a network of friends who share similar history, experience, and who become so important that they are often described as family.
- **Modern, comfortable, convenient homes.** Maintenance-free, single-level cottages or bungalows, and apartment homes.
- **A continuum of on-site medical and professional health care options.** Services expand and contract with people's needs; often, people never need to move again.
- **A broad choice of support services.** Housekeeping, home and yard

maintenance, meals, transportation, etc. are available.

- **A broad choice of life-enriching amenities.** Resident-initiated, provider-supported programs and activities, health and fitness clubs, walking trails, common areas, etc. offer a wide range of activities for people's different interests.
- **Respect.** Personal privacy and autonomy are highly valued.
- **Support.** Encouragement for the lives people choose to live.
- **Peace of mind.** Residents and family members alike appreciate the benefits of a retirement community.

You're in for a pleasant surprise ...

Many seniors stay in their own home far longer than is practical or even safe. Some remain in their homes because they have a picture in their mind of what a retirement community used to be like.

The best way to dispel that misconception is to find a retirement community (or two) in your area and go visit it. Communities love to give tours and may even offer a complimentary lunch or host other events so you can visit with the residents.

Fortunately, people today—and tomorrow—have many choices in how and where they choose to live. And a continuum of care retirement community can be a very good option.

(1) "Insights and Innovations: The State of Senior Housing" was published by the American Institute of Architects in 2012.

(2) "Housing an Aging Population: Are We Prepared?" was published by the Center for Housing Policy in 2012. The data were compiled by Barbara Lipman, Jeffrey Lubell, and Emily Salomon.