

Senior Living Housing Design Trends

Senior living and housing design as my grandparents and parents knew it has changed dramatically and must continue to adapt and grow to be successful. With more than 10,000 baby boomers turning 65 every day and an estimated 5% to 8% of the population opting for some form of senior housing, the demand will continue to grow. As I deal with aging parents in that demographic and talk to them about their needs and desires for their future living arrangements, I found that their desires and concerns echo a lot of the same desires and concerns that I see being utilized with in today's successful senior developments.

First and foremost they wish to remain in the family house as long as possible. Over the past 10 years, they have adopted their existing 1950s, two-story home to accommodate single-level living. This is not always feasible or affordable. For example, they remodeled the kitchen, living room and laundry room to accommodate their senior years, but their bathroom could not feasibly accommodate wheelchair accessibility. Some senior housing developments provide "at-home" services so that individuals can remain in their



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homes longer. These service providers have the in-house services and are finding that they can expand to accommodate seniors with in their own environments.

The new designs must be flexible and customizable. These seniors are coming from a time during which they have had many options and choices from which to select in their current built environments. These options are not limited to the physical spaces but also include psychological conditions and lifestyles, from independent living to memory and health care services. The successful development will offer a diversity of service that can accommodate these new

discriminating seniors.

The old cookie-cutter retirement home is obsolete. Today's seniors will want their spaces to have their own identity. Having access to amenities such as workshops, exercise, yoga and craft rooms, will be an important part of extended living lifestyle.

Today's seniors are more active and social than past generations, and they want to be a part of a larger community, not left out on the "island." The newer developments are being built closer to the urban centers and are being integrated with in these communities. The majority of these seniors are looking to maintain a healthy and vibrant lifestyle, and being active not only within their housing community, but the larger community as well. The new developments will promote social gathering and sharing of amenities.

The new design will need to provide unique or distinctive amenities in order to stand above the competition. Today's seniors want a connection to the outdoors, natural features are a big plus; therefore, the site location itself can be a unique amenity. A good development will offer a range of green spaces, walking and biking trails, community gardens and other outdoor activities. These seniors are

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environmentally conscience and would like for their built environment to utilize sustainable building materials and minimize energy impacts. Incorporate light and airy exercise and communal spaces that are inviting and promote healthy activities and socialization.

Today's seniors are very much engaged in technology and "plugged in." Not only will technology be a big part of the social fabric of the community, but also it will be utilized for health and

wellness, connection to family and health care professionals, and security monitoring. The leading edge developments will incorporate tech centers for its residence to access.

Today's senior developments will provide an abundance of health and wellness care facilities. These care programs will need to be available but as discrete as feasible. The new developments can incorporate every facet of continuing care, from senior housing, independent living, short-term rehabilitation and memory care, along with the more traditional assisted living and hospice care or services. These services can be bundled or offered a la carte, but will provide today's seniors with an expectation of what their retirement dollars can provide.

The successful development will overcome the negativity of the traditional "nursing home" reputation. The new design philosophy should embrace a departure from the stark institutional nursing home and make the residence feel at home. Spaces can be tailored for individual taste, and to accommodate the residence physical and mental status, while allowing for future reassessments. The development that can provide its future residence the best options will be more desirable to today's active seniors.



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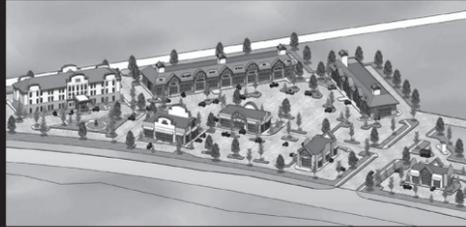




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Continued from Page 9AA

opportunities for group socialization and activities.

Design and Operations

The architecture is just one component in the total response system and no amount of architectural talent or knowledge can compensate for a poor service program. A responsive environment should be coupled with a resident centered service plan that celebrates familiar life activities and experiences along with personal choice.

The design of the environment should create opportunities that support activities that can be altered or changed to meet the unique needs of the resident. Flexibility and "flex-space" should be a prime objective of the design. Other ideas include:

- Work closely with operators and staff to create spaces that allow programs designed to create a sense of purpose achievement and accomplishment.
- Provide spaces that support the role of the staff and caregiver and the increasing staffing needs of "aging in place."
- Create spaces and features that reinforce independence and familiar living patterns such as participation kitchen areas, participation laundry areas, gardening areas and other functions and activities of daily domestic life.

Safety and Security

Safety and security are primary objectives in the environment. Those

with Alzheimer's and the cognitive impairments that accompany this dementing illness are physically vulnerable. Providing safe and secure walking areas, eliminating ability of residents to wander off and eliminating places where residents to are likely to fall are important goals. The physical environment should allow observation of residents. The use of hardware such as visual monitors and lockouts prevent residents from entering unsafe places.

Family Participation

Family involvement and intervention in the daily lives of the Alzheimer's resident is a major objective in creating a normal lifestyle. Regular visits and participation can be encouraged by a physical environment that makes family and friends feel welcome. This gives the setting a residential, no institutional persona and enables family members to feel more comfortable. Private dwelling units and small private niches in the public areas, for example, can provide opportunities for visitation and create feelings of home.

There is no specific design that works for all residents or for all projects. The challenge for meeting the needs of the burgeoning senior population afflicted with this disease will be to use evidence base data, carefully understand the needs of the individuals and provide innovative new approaches to how we "design" these environments.