

The Next Chapter



“You’ll never find me in one of those ‘old folks’ homes!”

Retirement communities cater to today’s active adults. Thanks largely to the collective power of the Greatest Generation, baby boomers, and people born between those two eras, senior communities have come a long way over the past decade.

More than 30 years ago, people didn’t have many choices. When it was time to move out of their longtime home, their options were limited. Fortunately, senior 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.

Unfortunately, many people now approaching retirement age do not have a positive mental image of retirement communities. They still picture a sterile, rigid, “institutional” environment with a reputation for taking away people’s independence and individualism. It’s an unpleasant image that understandably keeps some people from even wanting to explore their options.

Good news! Lifestyle choices have come a long way.

Lifestyle choices for those 55-plus have made a dramatic shift in the last 30 years—thanks to forward-thinking active adults, who are driving the new retirement model.

Studies reveal that living in a retirement community promotes greater health and happiness.

Now we’re discovering that resident-driven communities not only meet but exceed expectations:

CCRC stands for Continuing Care Retirement Community. One study, conducted between 2002 and 2003, found that seniors who live in full-service retirement communities, such as CCRCs, are generally more satisfied with their daily lives and are more likely to be happy than their contemporaries who remain in their own homes. This study also found that these residents were more likely to report that their current health status was better than it had been in the previous two years, as compared with seniors who remained in their own homes. (1)

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A previous landmark study showed that “only 30 percent of physical aging can be attributed to genes (hereditary) and that lifestyle choices are the dominant factor in aging.” This means we can largely determine how we age. We can make choices to improve our physical and mental health, such as moving from a less-supportive environment into one that offers greater access to health care, social interaction, personal growth, and a greater sense of security. (2)

What do people today want their retirement to look like?

The senior housing and health care industries have spent a lot of time and money trying to find out what seniors want. Surveys have revealed a detailed “wish list” of key desires:

- Easy, casual social interaction;
- Expanded opportunities and activities;
- A homelike environment;
- Central, convenient location;
- Ability to age in place;
- Fewer chores;
- Personal autonomy;
- Privacy;
- Choice;
- Respect;
- 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 seniors with a wide range of interests and health needs.

What exactly is a CCRC?

The CCRC designation actually is reserved for communities that fit very specific guidelines, but the term often is used more broadly now. If people say CCRC, they probably mean any intentional senior community that provides housing and varying levels of services (continuum of care) for a range of lifestyles—independent, assisted living, and memory care—all on one campus. Services are customized to each resident and can change as needs change, allowing individuals to “age in place.”

What a typical active adult community offers.

- Community ... in the broadest sense of the word; 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;”

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- 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.;
- A broad choice of life-enriching amenities ... resident-initiated, provider-supported programs and activities, health and fitness clubs, walking trails, common areas, etc.;
- Respect ... for personal privacy and autonomy;
- Support ... and encouragement for the lives people choose to live;
- Peace of mind.

You’re in for a pleasant surprise ...

Many seniors stay in their own homes far longer than is practical or even safe. Some remain in their homes because they have a picture in their minds 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 so you can visit with the residents.

Fortunately, people today—and tomorrow—have choices in how and where they choose to live. And CCRCs can be a very good option.

Cited Sources:

(1) “The Study of Independent Living Residents and the Communities in Which They Reside” was published by the American Seniors Housing Association. The study was conducted between 2002 and 2003 by Dr. Margaret A. Wylde’s ProMatura Group.

(2) “The MacArthur Foundation Study of Successful Aging,” conducted by John Rowe, MD, and Robert Kahn, PhD, sponsored by Chicago-based John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; published 1998.

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