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# Caring for Aging Parents



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## An Introduction to Senior Housing Options

Anne Osmer Reporting

Unless you and your parent have planned ahead, finding housing for an aging parent can be daunting, especially if you're thrown into a decision-making situation unexpectedly: Mom has a bad fall and can no longer take care of herself, or Dad's diagnosed with Alzheimer's and you're worried about his safety.

The first thing to do is determine what services your parent needs. Sit down in a quiet place, preferably with your parent, and make a list. Include medical needs, and whether services such as meals, housekeeping, personal services (help with grooming or bathing) and transportation are necessary.

Next, determine your budget. How much can your parent afford each month – and for how long? Is your parent a Medicaid or potential Medicaid recipient? Your parent's financial situation, coupled with service needs, will help you determine the type of housing he or she requires and will hone down housing options.

Armed with your parent's needs and financial information, you can research facilities by going online or looking in a local phonebook. The [Department of Health & Human Services Eldercare Locator](#) on the Web has lists of providers, mostly for community services and at-home care. Be sure to ask friends and family members if they recommend any providers. Try calling your local Area Agency on Aging to help you find housing and service resources.

Another option is to use a company such as [A Place for Mom](#), a free referral service that helps determine the type of housing or services needed, gets you in touch with appropriate housing facilities, and follows up to make sure you're happy with your choice. "We stay as a point of contact between the family and nursing home or other residence," said Sarah Bentz, marketing director for A Place for Mom. "We usher [the family] through the whole decision-making process."

Unlike many referral services, A Place for Mom has regional eldercare advisors that work directly with families and providers. The advisors assess each family's clinical, financial and geographic needs and then locates appropriate housing and service options. Eldercare advisors are employees of A Place for Mom and are required to complete training at the company's Seattle headquarters. Part of the job requires that they visit service providers in their assigned markets on a weekly basis.

"Most have a passion for working with seniors, a passion to help people," said Bentz of the eldercare advisors. "We train them, but they come with the interest."

A Place for Mom is a national company with 250 eldercare advisors, 14 of them in Michigan. Bentz said the company and its networks are constantly expanding. The company makes its money through reimbursements from A Place for Mom's network partners once a family decides to use the partner's services.

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### Elder News

#### Medicare Payments to Be Cut 10 Percent

Members of Congress heading home for the July Fourth recess can expect to hear from seniors curious about why Congress allowed a 10 percent cut in fees for doctors who treat Medicare patients.

#### Silver Alert System Proposed to Help Lost Seniors

Help is hopefully coming for those caring for people suffering from Alzheimer's and similar conditions. New legislation, H.R. 5898, the Silver Alert Grant Program Act, would provide funding for a system to help lost seniors.

#### 77-Year-Old Receives New Mitral Valve Procedure In Beaumont Study

Josephine Herndon, 77 was the first patient at Beaumont Hospital to receive the MitraClip system, a device under FDA-review that repairs the mitral valve of the heart without open-heart surgery.

#### Senior Citizen of the Year Nominations Sought

Know a Michigan senior who has made outstanding contributions this past year? Nominate him or her for Senior Citizen of the Year! Two adults age 60 or older will be recognized at the 2008 Michigan State Fair by the Michigan Office and Commission on Services to the Aging and the Michigan State Fair for their contributions to others in volunteer or unpaid capacities.

#### Is it Hard for You to Exercise? Health Alliance Plan Offers FREE Water Aerobics

Do you suffer from arthritis or another potentially painful condition? Or are you simply looking for a way to exercise that's fun and not too hard on your body? Water aerobics might be your answer.

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**Types of Housing**

The options for senior housing continue to grow as our population ages. Some of the options include:

**Independent living:** This is for people who don't need a lot of help with activities for daily living. Usually residents live in separate apartments. Often independent living communities provide communal dining opportunities with the option to cook at home. Coordinated social activities, housekeeping and transportation are typical amenities. Senior apartments or senior housing often have similar set-ups.

**Assisted living:** This is for people who cannot live on their own, but do not require the round-the-clock care that a nursing home provides. Medical care and personal care services are on-site. Meals are provided in a main dining room. Social activities and other amenities are usually included.

**Residential care homes:** Also called personal care homes or adult family homes. These are private residences for three to six adults with fairly minimal needs. Some offer basic assisted living services. Residential care homes usually cost less than assisted living facilities.

**Nursing homes:** For people who cannot live on their own and need a wide range of care. Skilled nursing care, medical care, meals, social interaction opportunities and other services are provided on-site.

Residences that provide a continuum of care, from independent living to assisted living to nursing home care, are becoming more popular. These facilities have all care types on site. If you don't want to have to move your parent from one type of housing to another, this is a good option, although it can be costly.

**Other options:** Aging in place is a trend that will continue to grow as the population ages. Home care and home health care are services that can help keep a parent at home, by providing basic help and medical services at their residence.

And if your parent has Alzheimer's, there are special facilities that focus on care for individuals with that and other conditions.

In general, all facility-types – whether independent living, assisted living or nursing homes – come in a range of settings, from very basic to resort-like luxury, all, of course, depending on your budget.

The best way to go about finding housing for an older parent is to plan ahead, before you're forced to make a decision – which can seem strange when your parent is healthy and doesn't need help. But discussing options for the future – whether they're ever used or not – can help you and your parent determine his or her preferences.

**You may be surprised:** Your independent mom might want a roommate, or your quiet dad might prefer to live in a large residence with lots of social activities. Talking about likes and dislikes and "what-if" scenarios before there's a need can make the conversation much easier than if you're in crisis-mode.

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