



Healthcare

# ALERTBULLETIN®

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## Next-generation Settings: Satisfying the Needs of Active Seniors

A report issued by the [Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University](#) estimated that the number of Americans 80 years of age and older would increase from 12.1 million in 2015 to 15.7 million in 2025, and would double by 2035. With large numbers of baby boomers entering or fast approaching retirement, many industry experts assumed that senior housing communities would continue to grow in popularity over the next few decades. However, [the senior housing occupancy rate fell to a seven-year low in 2018](#).

What is behind this unexpected slowdown in demand? Some observers believe it may be due in part to the perception that aging services facilities foster a dependent, isolated lifestyle, one that emphasizes residents' limitations and frailties rather than their capabilities and preferences.

In an effort to attract the next generation of independent-minded residents, many senior living communities are moving toward a more appealing brand identity, balancing resident well-being with autonomy, sociability and a strong connection to the outside world. Successful facilities are adopting aging-in-place principles, adjusting care and service offerings to meet residents' changing needs. However, transforming any organization creates liability risks, and leaders pursuing such a next-generational shift need to focus on defining the facility clearly, managing resident and family expectations, and maintaining an abiding commitment to resident safety and quality care.

This edition of *AlertBulletin*® offers strategies to help aging services operators differentiate and reinvent themselves in areas such as housing unit design, communications, technology access and wellness, without compromising resident safety, regulatory compliance or risk posture.

### Provide Smaller, Homier Residences

As part of a national trend toward "micro housing," some aging services providers are including more compact and affordable residential spaces in their portfolios. These newly designed models often include an array of environmental enhancements, such as improved indoor air quality, advanced lighting fixtures and controls, high-efficiency appliances and scenic views. Examples include the [Green House Project](#) and [Eden Alternative](#), as well as [multi-ability/multi-generational inclusive communities](#), known as MAGIC communities.

Offering an alternative to sterile, institutional facilities, these neighborhood settings provide homelike living arrangements, while retaining many of the resident-directed services and amenities of their more traditional counterparts. Some of these next-generation communities are freestanding, while others are situated within residential wings of existing complexes, which have been remodeled into smaller living quarters equipped with a common area, kitchen and laundry room. A growing number of these settings are based in urban areas, rather than traditional suburban or exurban locations.

The movement toward a more flexible, active-lifestyle arrangement integrated into the larger community offers residents many advantages, including easier access to healthcare providers, shopping, and cultural and recreational activities. However, this model presents certain safety issues not found in conventional self-contained communities, where residents live, socialize, and obtain care and services within a controlled and secure perimeter.

As aging services facilities evolve toward greater openness and independence, they should consider implementing the following measures, among others, in order to enhance resident safety and minimize liability exposure:

- **Discuss care expectations, service offerings and limitations with prospective residents and family members**, and request that the resident and/or healthcare proxy sign or initial documentation of the discussion. (See CNA *CareFully Speaking*® 2018–Issue 3: [“Strengthening Facility-Family Relationships: Transparency Is Key.”](#))
- **Hire staff members who possess the requisite experience, skills, training and education** to conduct assessments and provide support/care in a nontraditional senior living setting.
- **Be cognizant of current standards in the aging services industry**, and evaluate the organization’s assessment, care planning and care giving processes in relation to these ever-changing expectations.
- **Consider environmental safety factors when making interior design decisions**, opting for furnishings, accessories and finishes that afford protection against falls, fire, microbes and collisions, irrespective of residents’ level of independence.
- **Review and enhance security measures** – including video monitoring capabilities, presence of trained and certified guards, and photo ID checks of visitors – as next-generation settings are more vulnerable to intruders than closed, campus-like facilities.

### Revisit Marketing Materials

Recruitment messages that focus more on lifestyle and less on aging are more apt to attract next-generation residents. As new models of care develop, organizations increasingly refer to themselves in marketing materials as “life plan” or “life care” communities rather than “retirement” or “aging care” facilities, and emphasize the variety of available social, recreational and cultural opportunities.

Amenities that appeal to active seniors should be featured prominently in marketing campaigns. The following offerings, if available, can serve as effective selling points for next-generation communities:

- **All-inclusive housing units available by the month or as timeshares** to accommodate dual-residence “snowbirds.”
- **Concierge and maintenance services**, as well as home-meal delivery options and other enhanced hospitality concepts.
- **Wide-ranging dining options** catering to special diets and dietary preferences, such as vegan/vegetarian, low-glycemic, gluten-free, farm-to-table and organic, as well as popular carry-out choices such as sushi, pizza and other ethnic foods.

- **Bistro-like eateries and gourmet markets** offering house-branded wine, coffee and signature sauces for purchase.
- **Access to public transportation**, as well as taxicabs and ride-hailing services, such as Lyft and Uber.
- **Intergenerational programs** that bring residents and younger people together to share recreational interests, skills, knowledge and experiences.
- **Educational opportunities** offered in collaboration with community colleges and adult extension programs, as well as part-time paid or volunteer positions at local organizations.

Next-generation settings targeting active, independent seniors should ensure that brochures, advertisements, websites, social media platforms and on-site promotional activities accurately represent the nature, capabilities and limitations of the organization. Consider these risk-mitigating measures when preparing marketing materials:

- **Emphasize that each resident and family situation is unique**, rather than making general statements about the residential experience.
- **Specify care capabilities**, including staffing levels, support services, types of living arrangements and special programs.
- **Avoid making exaggerated representations** that could lead to later misunderstanding, dissatisfaction or even litigation. (For example, “staff members are on duty 24 hours a day” is a more reasonable and legally defensible assertion than “24-hour supervision” or “around-the-clock assistance.”)
- **Utilize social media to publicize positive developments**, such as expansion projects, staff awards and favorable resident/family testimonials, as well as to proactively address unfavorable comments and reviews.
- **Include current and accurate pictures of the setting and its population in marketing materials**, so that active seniors are not surprised to find themselves living among residents who are non-ambulatory or have other physical and/or cognitive challenges.
- **State clearly in admission contracts that residents may be asked to relocate due to expanding healthcare needs**, which would help manage prospective residents’ and family members’ expectations and reduce the risk of lawsuits alleging abandonment or discrimination.
- **Be aware of Fair Housing Act provisions** and avoid making marketing representations that could potentially lead to allegations of discrimination, such as appealing explicitly to “active seniors” or requiring that residents “live independently.”

### Make Technology Part of Residents' Lives

According to the Pew Research Center, [two-thirds of seniors access the Internet, while 34 percent use social networking sites](#). The demand for electronic connectivity within next-generation communities extends beyond personal computers, smartphones and tablets to include a growing number of "smart" technologies, including wearable sensors, motion detectors, wireless emergency-response pendants and voice-activated virtual assistants, such as Alexa and Siri. These and other high-tech tools enable today's aging services residents to live in a less restrictive environment.

In order to accommodate the needs of tech-savvy seniors, aging services organizations should revisit their technology infrastructure and evaluate its ability to support the growing use of wireless devices by residents, staff and visitors. At a minimum, leaders should implement the following measures to secure Wi-Fi connections, protect resident safety and privacy, and minimize the risk of overloading networks or disrupting the functioning of vital electronic monitoring equipment:

- **Inventory the number of electronic devices** dependent upon network frequencies.
- **Create a guest network** enabling residents and visitors to access email, social media platforms, websites, video/music sources and other Internet offerings.
- **Institute privacy measures for voice-activated electronic assistants**, including muting devices when not in use to prevent continual recording of voices, regularly deleting old recordings from privacy dashboards, and periodically changing and strengthening passwords.
- **Offer residents a range of technology training sessions** on such topics as accessing the Internet, navigating search engines, using social media platforms, preventing hacking and identity theft, and creating blogs and websites.
- **Carve out computer rooms or Internet cafes** from larger library spaces or other common areas, and include an ample number of device-charging stations for residents.
- **Provide complimentary high-speed Internet capability**, as well as access to streaming services, such as Netflix and Hulu.
- **Develop community software applications** designed to facilitate everyday activities, including food delivery, transportation scheduling and work request orders.
- **Educate residents and visitors about the electromagnetic fields generated by wireless devices**, and how they can potentially interfere with medical monitoring equipment. (See *CNA AlertBulletin®* 2019–Issue 3: ["Clinical Use of Smartphones: Tips on Mitigating Ten Major Risks."](#))

### Initiate a Comprehensive Wellness Program

Next-generation settings are committed to helping residents maintain the highest practicable quality of life by addressing the six core dimensions of wellness, as pictured below:



Whole-person wellness programs should focus on physical issues – such as reduced mobility and flexibility, impaired balance, diminished strength, arthritis and post-rehabilitation recovery – and other concerns associated with aging, including memory loss, isolation and depression. The following recommendations can enhance the effectiveness and appeal of wellness programming, thus helping attract and retain active, fitness-oriented seniors:

- **Set reasonable, measurable wellness goals for all residents**, aligning activities and expectations with the memory, attention span, linguistic functioning, reasoning ability and physical condition of individual residents.
- **Appoint a life enrichment coordinator** to integrate wellness programs with other aspects of resident life, as well as to forge partnerships with external entities and the larger community.
- **Schedule ongoing classes, activities and retreats for residents**, addressing the six dimensions of wellness.
- **Invest in a state-of-the-art fitness center**, staffed with skilled, experienced and properly credentialed personal trainers.
- **Provide a variety of fun and engaging physical activities** – such as dancing, senior circuits, chair yoga, Pilates and aquatics programs – that go beyond routine stretching exercises and calisthenics.
- **Create dedicated quiet spaces** both indoors and outdoors for purposes of reading, reflection, meditation and prayer.
- **Offer a menu of spa services and beauty salon/barber shop amenities**, such as light-touch massage therapy, gentle facials and nail treatments.

### Bring Healthcare Services to Residents

A growing number of aging services organizations are making healthcare delivery more convenient to residents through alliances with primary care practitioners, as well as providers of rehabilitation, home health, pharmacy and laboratory services. These affiliations can aid organizations in managing rising acuity levels, supporting aging-in-place arrangements and ensuring that residents receive the full range of care they need.

To minimize potential liability, residents should be informed in writing that visiting healthcare providers are independent contractors rather than employees or partners of the organization.

### Monitor Outcomes

Next-generation facilities are adopting a more data-driven operational philosophy, monitoring and reporting a variety of performance-related measures, including hospital readmission rates and prevalence of falls and pressure injuries. Such a quantitative and medical emphasis represents a seismic shift for many senior living communities. However, only by embracing such an approach can organizations significantly enhance quality and efficiency, thus gaining an edge in a competitive marketplace.

The senior living industry is in a state of flux, as organizations seek to adapt to evolving consumer preferences, while simultaneously rededicating themselves to optimizing resident safety and managing emerging risks. The suggestions presented in this publication can help facilities attract and accommodate active and engaged seniors seeking to age in place, assist residents in maintaining a decent quality of life, promote realistic expectations, and maximize resident and family satisfaction.

### Quick Links

- Belasco-Stone, J. "[Preparing for the Next Generation of Senior Living Customers.](#)" A PowerPoint presentation by Varsity Branding for the Leading Age® New York Retirement Housing Summit, October 16, 2018.
- Laxton, C. "[It's Time We Integrate Medical Care into Assisted Living.](#)" *McKnight's Senior Living*, February 25, 2019.
- Mullaney, T. "[Top Senior Housing Trends for 2019.](#)" *Senior Housing News*, January 6, 2019.
- Sudo, C. "[How Senior Living Dining Is Adapting for Next-generation Residents.](#)" *Senior Housing News*, March 8, 2019.

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