

# Where do I go? Senior Living Options

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For many aging adults, a primary goal is to “age in place”. While this phrase can be interpreted in many ways, the usual thought is to remain in our homes as we grow old. However, for many, staying at home is sometimes not practical, whether involuntary (a result of medical needs or finances), or voluntary (I just want to get the heck out of my house and try a new lifestyle!).

Unfortunately, many people generically use the term “nursing home” to describe just about any building containing multiple beds that is neither a hotel nor a hospital. While nursing homes are one option for elderly people needing a significant amount of daily medical care, there are a variety of other options available that vary in the type of care (or no care) provided, price and lifestyle. In fact, nursing homes are usually reserved for chronically ill people nearing the end of their lives. There is much more to living before we get to that point!

**Independent Living (IL):** IL offers seniors the freedom of living in an apartment style setting. The type of IL unit can vary greatly from one community to another, such as a studio, one or two bedroom living unit. Many of these communities host a wide variety of amenities. The “feel” for each community is very different, ranging from apartment building to country club. The lifestyles of residents vary as well, with many IL residents being able to still stay active while living in their new community. IL can be a very sensible option that is affordable compared to the cost of maintaining one’s home.

**Personal Care Home (PC):** This type of community was previously referred to as “assisted living”. And, as the name suggests, residents in this type of community are able to receive assistance with their activities of daily living (ADL’s) while still maintaining an independent lifestyle in an apartment- type setting (similar to IL units). The physical setting of the PC home can vary greatly from a small home style setting to a large apartment structure with dozens of units.

**Nursing Homes (NH):** Contrary to popular belief, most people who live in a community other than their home do not reside in a nursing home. The usefulness and popularity of IL and PC communities has increased greatly and NH care is reserved for people with significant physical, emotional or mental conditions that require 24 hour/day care. Nursing homes (also known as skilled nursing facilities) have registered nurses and a licensed physician to supervise each patient’s care. NH care is frequently used on a short term basis for patients rehabilitating from medical procedures such as knee or hip replacement. This short term setting is usually the first introduction that a person will encounter with a nursing home.

There are a variety of funding sources and planning options for people at all of the levels of care mentioned herein, and there are other options available beyond those discussed here. However, the important thing to remember in considering a move out of your home is that there are options for a variety of lifestyles and budgets. If you have not ever toured a community recently, you might be surprised at the “near home” feel of these communities and the great lengths the designers and staff have gone to in making the living experience one to look forward to, rather than avoid. Consider that many people end up in nursing homes as a last resort because they have not planned in advance to maintain a healthy lifestyle (and not just from a purely medical perspective) and by the time they (or their family members) realize that they truly need help, the options are much more limited.