

# Dementia Care and Housing



## *What You Need to Know*

A resource designed to help caregivers facing difficult decisions concerning care and housing for a loved one with dementia.

**SNAP**  **for Seniors**™



## **When it comes to making decisions about dementia care...**

### *Knowledge is Everything*

This booklet will help you understand what to consider while assessing senior housing options and will direct you to a number of additional resources to aid you in your search.

The first step toward success is evaluating your loved one's care needs and personal preferences so that you know what to look for in a dementia housing provider. The Alzheimer's Association® ([www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)) can act as a helpful ally during this process, and consulting your loved one's

physician is also recommended. In order to get a list of the senior housing options in your desired area you may call the Alzheimer's Association or your local Area Agency on Aging ([www.n4a.org](http://www.n4a.org)). You can also log on to [seniorhousingfinder.org](http://seniorhousingfinder.org) to get a free comprehensive list of all licensed dementia housing providers, searchable by specific care and lifestyle criteria.

Once you have a list of potential options, visit each facility at least once and use this booklet as a guide during your search. It should be remembered that these are general guidelines and that some facilities may not meet all of the criteria outlined in this booklet.

## **Dementia Level Progression**

Through documentation of frequently observed patterns of symptom development in Alzheimer's disease patients, experts have been able to create a set of guidelines which help determine an individual's

stage of disease progression. The main purpose of “staging” is to assist in determining care needs and to help family members understand how the disease may progress so they are able to plan for the future. Although individual experiences with Alzheimer’s disease vary greatly, staging can function as a helpful indication of what to expect.



The Alzheimer’s Association provides a useful tool called the Alzheimer’s Association CareFinder™ which will walk you through a step-by-step process intended to assess care needs. The CareFinder can be found at [alz.org/carefinder](http://alz.org/carefinder).

# Stages of Alzheimer's Progression<sup>1</sup>:

- 1 No impairment**
- 2 Very mild cognitive decline**  
Individuals may forget familiar words and names.
- 3 Mild cognitive decline**  
Other people begin to notice deficiencies. Problems with memory are measurable in clinical testing.
- 4 Moderate cognitive decline (Early-stage)** A medical evaluation detects clear-cut deficiencies.
- 5 Moderately severe cognitive decline (Mid-stage)** Major gaps in memory and deficits in cognitive function. Assistance with daily activities is essential.
- 6 Severe cognitive decline (Mid-stage)** Memory difficulties worsen, personality changes emerge, and extensive help with ADLs needed.
- 7 Very severe cognitive decline (Late-stage)** Individuals lose the ability to respond to their environment, to speak and, ultimately, control movement.

<sup>1</sup>Reisberg B, Ferris SH, de Leon MJ, Crook, T. The global deterioration scale for assessment of primary degenerative dementia. American Journal of Psychiatry. 1982; 139: 1136-1139.

# Housing Options and Level of Care Provided

## SKILLED NURSING FACILITY

24 hour licensed nursing staff. Provides highest level of care.

## ASSISTED LIVING

Staff-monitored residence that provides personal and supportive services.

## RESIDENTIAL CARE

Home-like setting typically in residential areas with live-in caregivers.

## INDEPENDENT LIVING

Organized retirement community with no personal or medical care provided.

## CONTINUING CARE RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

Campus of living choices, from private homes to skilled nursing, providing all levels of care needs.



License types and housing categories vary from state to state, so the level of care may differ.

## Assessing Your Needs

**Activities:** It is important that a facility offer meaningful and engaging activities in order to help an individual preserve his or her functional abilities. Make sure residents' abilities and interests are evaluated so they may be matched with enjoyable activities appropriate for their cognitive and physical capacities.

This should include activities that promote brain health, and physical exercise when appropriate. Meaningful activities can have a profound impact on an individual's quality of life.

**Care Services:** A care plan may be developed by a nurse, master level social worker, or a care team in consultation with family members and the doctor; you should ask how often this plan will be updated. Make certain that the facility you choose is adequately equipped to handle all specific care needs and that you understand what conditions could cause a resident to be discharged. Facilities typically require a healthcare professional's evaluation before a resident is accepted. Read the admission and discharge agreements in advance and review the orientation booklet carefully so you understand the facility's policies.

**Caregiver Considerations:**

Ask what sort of training staff members are required

to complete. A low level of turnover in staff is preferred so that residents have a chance to become comfortable and familiar with them, and staff may get to know residents well enough to recognize when changes occur. Visit during all shifts of care and ask about the ratios between the number of on-hand staff and residents. Ask to speak with some of the caregivers, not just the individual giving you a tour.

**Facility Design:** Residents' rooms should be clearly marked and bathrooms easily recognizable. High color contrast between things like plates and tablecloths, or toilets and bathroom walls and floors make such things more easily distinguishable as cognitive faculties diminish. The facility's layout should be as simple and intuitive as possible. Some facilities have specialized areas designed to remind residents about elements from their past, creating opportunities for discussion and activities. Others provide them with a place to

display mementos which help them identify their room.

**Meals:** Dementia can cause a decrease in recognition of key sensations such as thirst or hunger that, when coupled with physical limitations such as difficulty swallowing and impaired movement, can lead to malnourishment or dehydration. Make sure that the facility has an adequate system in place to monitor resident nutrition and hydration, and provides a pleasant dining environment that is free of distraction. It is also necessary to consider preference (e.g., ethnic or kosher meals), and health considerations (e.g., low sodium or low sugar diets). Ask to have a meal in the facility.

**Payment Terms:** Obtain an itemized list of what is included and what requires additional fees. Also, make sure the facility accepts the payment form you're planning to use. If private funds are not available, you can determine if your loved one

is eligible for any government subsidies by contacting your local Area Agency on Aging. You may also want to speak with an estate attorney or financial planner to help you understand and organize your options.



**Personal Services:** The nature of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia makes assistance with activities of daily living an eventual necessity. Make sure help can be provided for bathing, dressing, toileting, mobility, eating, taking medications, etc., and that they take care of all the resident’s other personal needs.

## **Other Considerations**

**Behavioral Changes:** Ask how the facility manages challenges such as agitation, anxiety,

hallucinations, and resistance to care. Behavioral issues are among the most common reasons for a resident's discharge, so it is important to establish a facility's threshold for such problems.

### **Community Characteristics:**

It is important that residents feel welcome and comfortable in their new home. If your loved one with Alzheimer's disease has a spouse or significant other who also requires care, but does not have dementia, can the facility accommodate his or her individual needs as well? Will the community be tolerant and supportive of his or her cultural, lifestyle, and religious preferences? Does the staff speak his or her language?

**Facility Dynamics:** Do residents seem comfortable and engaged? Do all staff members wear name tags? Are residents treated with respect and dignity? Is the temperature kept at a comfortable level? Is the facility clean and relatively free of odor?

Are hallways well lit and clear of clutter? Are doors closed when residents are changed or bathed?

### **Family Decision Making:**

Decisions about a loved one's care often prove to be a divisive issue among family members. When problems are encountered reaching a mutually agreeable decision, it is often helpful to involve an objective mediator such as a social worker, clergy member or family friend. Your loved one should be included in the decision making process to the maximum extent his or her condition allows.







**Quality Evaluation:** Log on to [medicare.gov/nhcompare](http://medicare.gov/nhcompare) to check past performance of Medicare certified nursing homes. Your local long-term care ombudsman's office can provide information about facility performance, and can be located through [ltcombudsman.org](http://ltcombudsman.org). [Eldercare.gov](http://Eldercare.gov) is another helpful resource. Other methods include asking facilities to see

their most recent state survey (they must comply upon request), and attending a local support group in order to get word of mouth referrals.



**Security Issues:** Are staff member backgrounds checked? Are all entrances and windows secured? Is there an emergency evacuation plan? Are there smoke alarms and a sprinkler system? Also, it is important that the facility ensure wandering residents do not leave the premises without making them feel confined or restricting their freedom more than is necessary for safety.

## Summary

-  1 Determine care needs and individual preferences.
-  2 Log on to [snapforseniors.com](http://snapforseniors.com) to search for housing options in your desired area and use the advanced search tools to create a short list of facilities which best meet your criteria.
-  3 Visit each facility at least once, using this booklet as a guide to determine what issues to consider and questions to ask.
-  4 Look into the past performance of the facilities using the resources listed in the *quality evaluation* section on page 12.
-  5 When making a decision, compare the pros and cons of each facility, and include your loved one as much as possible.
-  6 Once your loved one moves into a new home, monitor regularly to ensure it is a successful match.



## Simplify your search for senior housing at: [snapforseniors.com](https://www.snapforseniors.com)

- ④ Free access to the most current database of all licensed senior housing in the U.S.
- ④ Many listings include photos and show current availability.
- ④ Screen facilities by level of Alzheimer's disease care provided.
- ④ Advanced search tools yield tailored results.

# SNAP<sup>for</sup>Seniors<sup>TM</sup>

SNAPforSeniors offers access to the most current and comprehensive senior housing database in the nation

This free online tool provides a quick and easy way to locate appropriate housing options based upon care needs and lifestyle preferences. Start a free search at [snapforseniors.com](http://snapforseniors.com).

