

# *Choosing a good assisted living residence*



## **Consumer Checklist**

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## *A consumer's checklist*



✓ Call the Denver Regional Council of Governments' (DRCOG) Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program at 303-455-1000. An ombudsman is an advocate for assisted living residents and a resource for consumers. This person will provide free information on assisted living residences in the metro area. This may include the results of the most recent state inspections, strengths and/or weaknesses of the facility, special services provided, special populations served and patterns of complaints received by the ombudsman office.

✓ Obtain a list of assisted living residences from the DRCOG Ombudsman Program. From that list, select three or four facilities that are in your desired location. It is important to choose a residence that is close to those who will regularly visit the resident.

✓ Assisted living residences range in size from three beds to 245 beds. Consider which environment would be most preferred by the future resident.

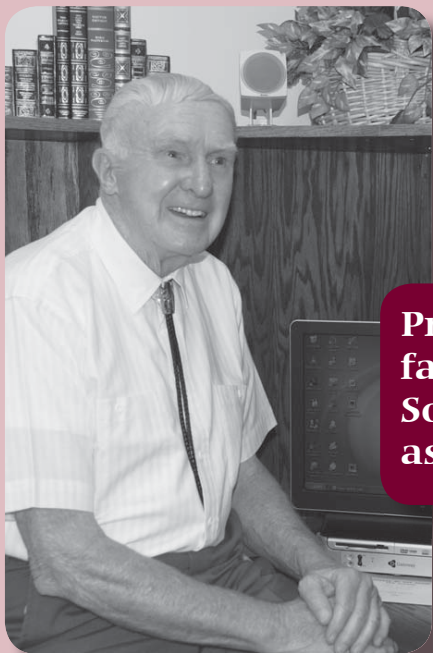
✓ Call the residences you are most interested in first. Find out if they have any openings, if they have an age requirement, if they serve a special population and whether or not they offer the level of care required by the future resident. (Care levels vary greatly from residence to residence, so it is important to ask.) Also, if necessary, find out if they are handicap accessible and/or accept Medicaid. Don't wear yourself out visiting facilities that do not have openings, don't offer the services that you need or are out of your price range.

✓ Make an appointment to visit one or more of the assisted living residences that will meet your requirements. The facility should be willing to show you around any time, but we suggest you make an appointment the first time. If you are interested in it, make a second unannounced visit, preferably at a different time of day -- on a weekend or an evening or during a meal.

## Understand the payment system at the facility

✓ Prices will vary from facility to facility. Some accept Medicaid as a payment option (for eligibility contact the department of human services in your county). For those that are strictly private pay, on average, the cost is approximately \$2800/month.

✓ If the facility accepts Medicaid and the prospective resident qualifies for Medicaid, the resident will pay the residence a fixed amount each month. If the residence is strictly private pay, ask about their billing procedures and payment system. Residences often offer a “menu” of services that detail costs associated with each service offered. Other residences assess residents and assign them a “rating” and base the cost of services on where they fall in a spectrum.



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## Become informed about the facility's management and administration

- ✓ First and foremost, find out if the facility is licensed by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Any facility providing care to three or more unrelated adults should be licensed by the state.
- ✓ If they are licensed, read the results of the most recent survey conducted by the state. This report provides details of any deficient practice found during the annual licensing inspection conducted by the state's Department of Public Health and Environment.
- ✓ Find out who owns the assisted living residence and if there is a management company that is involved. Ask if there are other residences this person/company operates in the region. You may want to review the health department surveys for these residences as well to see if the person/company consistently provides good care. Surveys and complaints against assisted living residences are available for public viewing at [HealthFacilities.info](http://HealthFacilities.info). For more information contact the Health Facilities and Emergency Medical Services Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at (303) 692-2800.
- ✓ Meet the administrator/ executive director and, if applicable, the social worker, RN or LPN. Assisted living residences are not required to have nurses on staff, so if this is important to you, make sure you ask and meet them. If there is no nurse or administrator on site, meet the primary care giver (this is common in smaller assisted living residences). Of any or all of these individuals, ask how long they have worked at the residence. These are the people who will ultimately be responsible for resident care and for correcting any concerns or complaints that you or the resident may have.
- ✓ Ask how complaints are addressed and how problems are resolved. Find out which staff person has been designated to handle grievances.

**For more information,  
call the Health  
Facilities Division of  
the Colorado Department of Public Health  
and Environment at  
303-692-2800**

# What to look for

✓ Is the residence clean? Use your senses – does it look clean? Is there an odor (odors should not be persistent or pervasive)?

✓ Ask to be shown a resident room (with resident permission). Is the room clean, comfortable and home-like?

✓ Get permission to also view a resident bathroom (either in the room or a common bathroom). Is it clean and organized? Is there space for toiletries and personal items? Are they stored appropriately? Does it have grab bars and an easily accessible shower? Are clean towels and washcloths available?

✓ Do residents have easy access to a private telephone in a quiet place?

✓ Can you easily find posted instructions on how to contact the ombudsman, the state health department, the adult protection division of the county department of social services and the county Medicaid office (if applicable)?

✓ Are areas available for private visits with friends and/or family? Is there an area for private dining?

**Long-Term Care  
Ombudsman Program  
303-455-1000**



# Pay attention to the staff and the service provided

✓ Are the residents clean and well groomed?

✓ Are the residents up and active during the day? Are they engaged in activities or interacting with people in common areas? Does the posted activities calendar reflect what they are doing?

✓ Visit with the residents. Ask them how they like the residence, if they like the food, if they feel well cared for and if they have enough to do. Tell them that you are thinking of bringing someone to live there and ask if they would recommend the residence for others.

✓ Try to visit during a meal and look in the dining area. Are residents served their meals promptly? Are residents who need help being assisted in eating? Are adaptive devices, such as special utensils and dishes used when appropriate? Does the posted menu reflect what the residents are eating?



**Are the residents clean, well-groomed and positioned comfortably**

# Observe and talk with the residents

✓ Observe the interaction between the residents and the staff. Does staff seem to respect and enjoy the residents? Do residents seem to respond well to the staff?

✓ Do staff members address the residents by name? It is usually not appropriate to address adults as “honey” or “sweetie.” Some residents like to be called by their first name; others prefer the formality of Mr. or Mrs. Staff should know their residents and how they prefer to be addressed.

✓ Do staff members respect the residents’ privacy? Do they knock on the resident’s door and wait for a response before entering?

✓ Are requests for assistance responded to within a few minutes? Not all facilities have a call light system, but regardless of whether or not there is a formal system, requests for assistance should be addressed within a few minutes.

✓ Do staff members look calm, well-organized and attentive to the residents?

✓ Ask about staff training. What training requirements does the residence have? How much training do they receive? Who does the training?

✓ Do staff members acknowledge your presence? If you are visiting without a tour guide, someone should tactfully inquire about your presence at the facility.

**Observe the  
interaction between  
the residents and  
the staff**

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When you are considering an assisted living residence for yourself or a loved one, you want to find a bright, comfortable, inviting place to live. You want a residence that provides a variety of stimulating activities and has a history of providing good care to residents. It should be a place where friends and family members are invited to participate in activities and meals. Most assisted living residences work with third party providers to provide additional services such as hospice, home health and therapy services. Some allow for short-term respite stays and offer adult day care. Many provide specialized care for those suffering from Alzheimer's Disease and dementia, and others also have nursing home care within the same campus.

These criteria, along with others mentioned in this brochure, will help you choose an assisted living residence that will meet your needs. However, if a problem develops, you can contact a **DRCOG ombudsman** for assistance at **303-455-1000**. This person will listen to your concerns and work with you and the assisted living residence to resolve them. The ombudsman service is free for residents. Ombudsmen help ensure the health, safety, welfare and rights of residents living in long-term care facilities, and all complaints are kept confidential.

**Tax-deductible donations to the  
Ombudsman program are  
appreciated and can be mailed to:**



Area Agency on Aging  
1290 Broadway, Suite 700  
Denver CO 80203-5606

