

A photograph of a group of seniors in a community setting. In the foreground, a woman with short grey hair, wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt, is looking towards the right. To her left, the profile of another woman with blonde hair wearing a blue shirt is visible. In the background, other seniors are blurred, including a man with a white beard and a woman in a pink shirt. The image has a white border and a semi-transparent blue geometric overlay on the right side.

How to evaluate a
**senior living
community**



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Introduction

Americans are almost spoiled for choice when it comes to senior living, as more communities are being built and updated across the nation.

However, sometimes a wealth of options can be overwhelming. (Decisions, decisions!) Evaluating a senior living community is no easy task. There are lots of factors to take into account—from location to amenities, from food to recreation—finding the right retirement community boils down assessing the options based on a few core criteria.

Here are some things to look for in your senior living search.



Levels of care

When it comes to senior living, care ALWAYS comes first. That's why the first thing you should consider in your evaluation is the levels of care a community offers. The most popular options are **Independent Living, Assisted Living** (sometimes also known as **Personal Care**), **Memory Care**, and **Respite**, or short-term care. Any community you visit should be able to explain what their care levels mean, how they're different from each other and what's included in each.

Even if you're not looking for a community that offers extra help with things like dressing, bathing, or medication management right now, care is still something that you should consider in your search. Evaluating levels of care also means looking beyond the present. Future needs may require advanced services, so finding a community that offers multiple levels of care, or customizable plans, can help you age in place.

Ask:

"Is medication management **included in the care plan**? Or is it an added **extra**?"

"What healthcare services—like a pharmacy—are **available on-site**?"

"What if care needs change? Can this community accommodate that, or would it be **time to move**?"



Location

The cardinal rule of real estate is location, location, location! The importance of location also holds true when looking for a senior living option.

“How close is the nearest hospital? The nearest bank? The nearest grocery store?”

Being close to family—when possible—is another crucial factor for seniors when it comes to location. Finding a community close to in-state relatives can seem like a huge break, but be sure it checks all the boxes for care and amenities.

But being close to family has to be balanced with other day-to-day perks, like proximity to physicians and other health services. Whether or not a community is near daily necessities (like grocery stores) or fun daytrips (like parks or movie theaters) is also something to consider.

Staff & other residents

It's often said that the people make the place. Residents and staff have a big impact on the suitability of a retirement community, making them an important variable.

While seniors aren't necessarily evaluating their neighbors according to a checklist, getting a feeling for the overall vibe and atmosphere of a community is highly important. Outgoing and receptive residents can be a sure sign of a happy community. Talking to residents one-on-one is always a good idea.

“Do other residents seem friendly and welcoming?”



Interviewing staff can also help you better form an opinion of a community. Employees fill critical administrative and care-based roles. They should be knowledgeable and eager to help, which is an attitude to look for in potential communities.

“Is staff professional, approachable and easy to talk to?”

Cleanliness

Cleanliness is a major point to evaluate in any senior living community. Aside from the obvious appeal (no one wants to live in a dirty home), a clean community also shows that the staff is highly committed and management is invested in caring for residents.

“How often does the community clean its **common areas?”**

What about **resident rooms?”**

The only real way to gauge cleanliness is first-hand: take a tour of the community by yourself or with a family member. Don't feel too bad about inspecting areas, either. This is a huge decision and if a community doesn't have anything to hide, then all the better.

Another related point is how well staff look after a resident's room. Moving to a retirement community means lifting the burden of having to clean a house alone, so room-cleaning services should be more than up to par.

Activities (onsite and offsite)

The best retirement communities are lively and full of daily activities and events for residents to take part in. The trick in finding a quality option is looking at how robust a community's activity schedule is and how often residents participate.

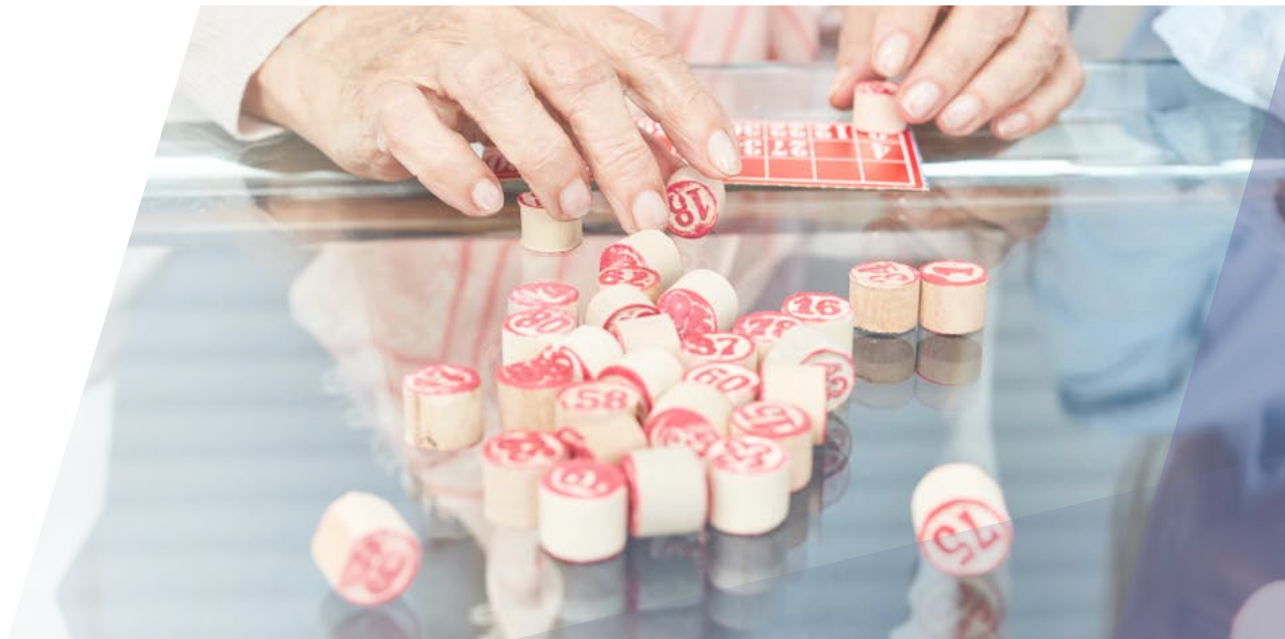
“Is there a rolling calendar of events?”

A diverse and consistent calendar of events can be indicative of a high-quality community. Some examples of an onsite activity include water aerobics classes, book or gardening clubs, and guest visits from outside experts, like music or painting lessons.

“What kind of **resident committees or clubs** do you offer?”

“How often do residents go on **outside trips**?”

Getting out and about is also important in retirement, and you'll want to make sure your chosen community arranges day trips to nearby attractions or events. Outings to a daytime ball game, volunteer opportunities, or local tourist attractions are all sure to up the ante on socialization and fun.





Amenities

A community should feel as much like home as possible because it *is* home. Having all the comforts of home available helps narrow the decision, so look for amenities that are useful without being intrusive.

For example, some great things to look for are medication and pharmacy services, emergency alert systems, residence cleaning and laundry, meal options, and scheduled transportation.

**“Are clothes and linens washed regularly?
How often?”**

“Are pets allowed?”

And the list doesn't have to end there, some other things you might want to look for are:

- ✓ On-site theater.
- ✓ Fitness room or physical therapists.
- ✓ Snack shops or cafes.
- ✓ Salons or barber shops.
- ✓ Resident gardens or outdoor seating areas

Apartment

Finding an apartment that meets expectations for comfort and care is an absolute must. Here are some questions to ask and things to look for:

“What safety features are installed in each apartment?”

“What amenities does the apartment come with?”

“How many floor plan options do you offer?”

Just like any apartment hunt, personal style plays a big factor, so make sure the apartment layout works with any visions for furniture or decorations. A bathroom close to the bedroom is another thing to look for, too.



Menu

Last, but certainly not least, have a peek at the dining services menu during your visit. Nutrition is highly important as we age, but you also likely don't want to eat the same food every day. A range of cuisines and dishes points to a community that likes to keep things fresh and delicious.

“Can food service accommodate dietary restrictions?”

“May I see a sample menu?”

“Are guests welcome during meal times?”

Make sure the community's kitchen has got all the basic food groups covered. If you have a particular dietary restriction or food allergy, make sure the staff can accommodate your needs. Also, inquire whether vegetarian or vegan options are provided.

Another thing about dining services to think about is Sunday brunch or guest meals. Having family or friends over for a meal is always a recipe for a good time.



Conclusion

Shopping for the right senior living community can seem daunting, but there are ways to make the decision simpler.

Visiting the community in-person, talking to administrators and residents, and having a list of must-haves when it comes to amenities are all crucial.

Asking the right questions is hugely valuable. Questions are your best way to determine the fit of each community.

If you need guidance or advice throughout the process, talk to Milestone Retirement today.





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