

Relocation–Housing Alternatives for Later Years

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Introduction

Housing is an especially difficult problem as we age. Although we usually want to continue living in our present community, there are many reasons to think about giving up the house that served our needs in earlier years.

- The house and yard are more than we want to maintain.
- The house is hard to get around in and to manage.
- The house is just too quiet.
- Living alone in the old neighborhood is isolating and inconvenient.
- Health problems make independent living a struggle.
- Finances have grown tight.

Sometimes it is hard to “wake up” to the need to relocate. Before deciding anything, ask yourself those important questions that will help you determine if and when you are no longer able to live independently. Honestly assess if you are eating right, have help nearby when you need it, feel safe, are able to take proper care of yourself and your home, are lonesome, are able to get banking, groceries, and medicine as you need them, and/or are afraid of falling. It is best to make changes when we can make decisions for ourselves with the help of supportive family and friends.

Age in place

Sometimes all that is needed to stay in one’s own home is to make some changes, such as widening a hallway, improving the lighting, lowering the switches, modifying showers, or adding ramps. Replacing doorknobs with door handles or faucet knobs with faucet levers can greatly help arthritic

hands and wrists. Removing scatter rugs, increasing the wattage of bulbs, and installing grab bars all help reduce the risk of falls. Remodeling a bathroom and rounding counter edges can help those with mobility difficulties.

Explore your options

If aging in place is not a good option, do explore the many choices open to you before deciding to relocate. Although we can’t know the future, we can consider the various types of moves we may need to make as we age and make decisions that will minimize the stress and strain of relocation.

Older adults generally are involved in three types of moves. Right after retirement, if a person is still independent, the moves are usually to enjoy a new location or to maximize time with friends or family. Being closer to health care is an important factor to consider.

If one moves to an independent living retirement community, this is usually referred to as a Level 1 move. The people living in independent apartments or houses may share one or more meals and/or activities and obtain better access to health care at the same time.

The second move is often referred to as “assisted” living or Level 2. This move provides all Level 1 options plus the assistance for special needs that do not require full-time health care. Help is available for dealing with a chronic disability, for example.

The third move is usually a result of a severe illness or disability that generally requires more care than can be provided in the home by family members, homemaker service, nursing care service, or adult day care. This third level of care almost always involves assisted living (Level 2) and full-time medical care.

Relocation planning and adjustment

Preparing for relocation is essential. It is a big change. Looking at all of the options as realistically as possible helps with decision-making and adjusting. Some questions to consider are:

- What will day-to-day life be like with the various relocation options I'm considering?
- Who will take care of the legal affairs?
- What regrets will I have and how can I minimize them?
- What "bottom line" items make a difference to me?
- How can I maximize my sense of control?
- Are there any security and/or safety issues to consider?

Write down the questions you have and keep them foremost in your search and planning. Write down the pros and cons of each option and keep them where you can add to or delete them during your search. Consider the importance of each item.

Being prepared for relocation usually means being prepared for a major change in lifestyle. Usually, one experiences a sense of loss in the best of circumstances so thinking this through and maximizing your choices and sense of control will help tremendously.

Housing options to consider

Senior retirement communities

Sometimes called "senior apartments," these buildings are for residents who are mobile and can take care of themselves in their own apartments.

Homesharing

At any age, two or more people can share a home or apartment.

Accessory apartments

These are constructed by making a separate apartment within a private home.

Elderly cottage housing opportunities (ECHO)

ECHO homes are small, portable "cottages" that can be placed in the back or side yard of a single-family home—usually the home of an adult child.

Continuing care retirement communities (CCRC)

These facilities offer several housing options and services depending upon the needs of residents.

Assisted-living

Assisted-living facilities generally provide housing, group meals, personal care and support services, and social activities in a residential setting.

Board-and-care homes

Board-and-care homes are smaller in scale than assisted-living facilities. They provide a room, meals, and help with daily activities.

Foster care

Some families will take an older person into their homes when the person needs some help with daily living.

Nursing homes

For those who need skilled nursing care and/or substantial long-term assistance, nursing homes are an option.

2002: 10M

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ES02-21