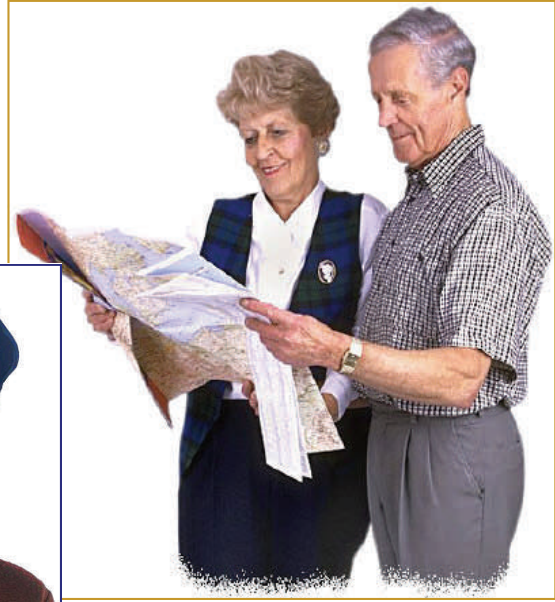


Alaska Department of Law
Health & Social Services Section

DAVID MÁRQUEZ, ALASKA ATTORNEY GENERAL

Making the Right Choice
On an Assisted Living Home

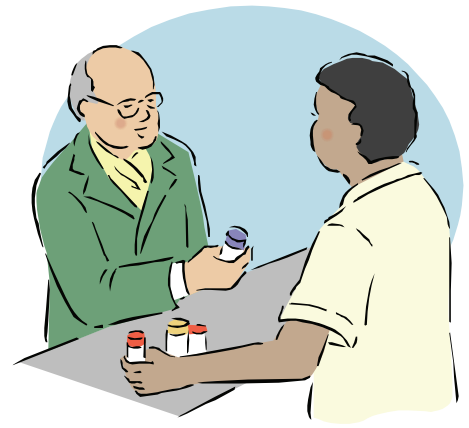


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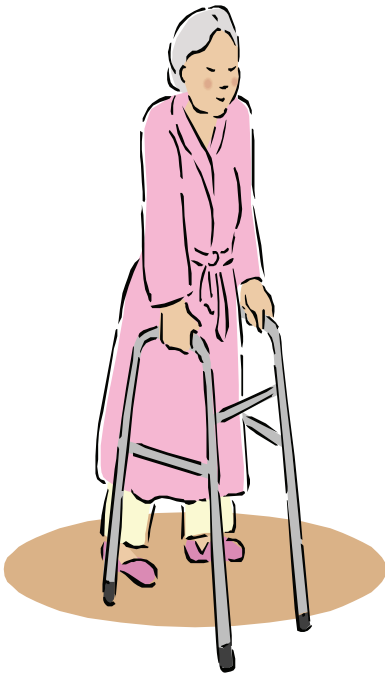
Introduction

The purpose of an assisted living home is to provide a homelike environment for elderly persons and persons with a mental or physical disability who need assistance with the activities of daily living. An assisted living home is not a medical or nursing facility. Approximately 33,000 assisted living homes exist in the U.S. today.



What is an Assisted Living Home?

An assisted living home is a residence for people who need help with the activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, grooming, eating, housekeeping, shopping, money management and the scheduling of appointments. Some assisted living homes provide transportation and/or escorts to appointments or community events. Some homes may also provide limited health-related services such as assisting residents with taking medication.



The Department of Health and Social Services, through the Division of Public Health, Assisted Living Licensing Unit, is the agency responsible for licensing assisted living homes in the State of Alaska. The duties of the assisted living licensing unit include licensing assisted living homes according to state guidelines, investigating complaints lodged against these homes and maintaining a current list of all licensed homes within the state.

For more information see: www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/CL/HFLC/.

Choosing an assisted living home

Choosing an assisted living home is one of the most important decisions to make for loved ones who may need assistance with the activities of daily living. Here are some important questions you should ask when choosing an assisted living facility:

1. **Is the facility licensed?** Never take someone's word that their home is licensed. Always ask to see a copy of the home's license. A valid license will state: whether the license is a probationary or standard license, the effective date of the license, the name of the licensee, the location and mailing address of the home to which the license applies, the number of residents the home is licensed to serve, the expiration date of the license and any special conditions that may apply. By law, every assisted living home is required to post the license in the home or otherwise make it readily available. If you encounter a home that is unable or is refusing to produce their license, contact the Assisted Living Licensing Unit immediately.



2. **How long has the home been operating?**
3. **Does the home currently have the desired type of accessibility available?**
4. **Is the home attractive and well-maintained?**
5. **Is the home near family and friends?**

6. Are other residents and their family members satisfied with the care being provided at the home?

7. How much does the home charge?

8. What forms of payment does the home accept?

- Under Alaska law, residents cannot be required to pay more than the current month's service cost plus one additional month.
- Assisted living residents or their families pay the cost of care out of their own funds.
- **Medicare:** does not pay for assisted-living services. Medicare pays the bills only for a limited number of days when a more intensive form of care, called skilled nursing care, is needed and provided in certified facilities.
- **Private Insurance:** Some private insurance companies offer assisted-living coverage as part of their insurance package, but services covered under these policies varies widely. Many seniors do not have long-term care insurance
- **Medicaid/Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** Most facilities accept only private payment. Some states offer limited assistance through Medicaid or SSI. Thirty-seven states reimburse or plan to reimburse for assisted-living services as a Medicaid service. Check with your state Medicaid office for more information.

9. What is an occupancy agreement?

- 10. Can we review the list of services provided, the service contract and the house rules in advance? (The answer should always be yes!)**
- 11. Is staff available to provide 24-hour assistance?**
- 12. How many staff work each shift?**
- 13. Are there organized social and recreational activities?**
- 14. Have complaints been lodged against the home and has the home received sanctions as a result of complaints lodged against the home?** - The Assisted Living Licensing Unit investigates complaints made against a home. Within 10 working days after completing an investigation, the Assisted Living Licensing Unit prepares a report of the results of their investigation. The report includes a description of any violation and any enforcement action taken against a home. This investigative report, any written response submitted by a home, and information regarding the imposition of any enforcement action are public information under Alaska law.
- 15. To verify whether a particular home is licensed by the State of Alaska and to determine whether any complaints have been lodge against the home or whether any enforcement actions have been taken against a home by the State, contact the Assisted Living Licensing Unit at: State of Alaska, Division of Public Health Certification and Licensing, 619 E. Ship Creek Ave., Suite 232, Anchorage, AK 99501, (907) 269-3640; fax: (907) 269-3646.**

Consumer's Guide to Assisted Living Facilities Checklist

(information provided by the American Health Care Association, National Center for Assisted Living, <http://www.longtermcareliving.com>.)

Moving In

- What are the paperwork requirements and timeframes involved?
- Who completes the initial assessment?
- How is the initial assessment managed?
- Is the residence affiliated with a hospital or nursing home in the event acute term care is necessary?
- If you need hospital or nursing home care, is your room held?
- Do you receive a discount for unused services?



Service Planning

- Are the family and the resident involved in the service planning process?
- How often and who completes the needs assessment?
- Are there special programs for residents with disabilities?
- How are emergencies handled?

Service Planning (Continued)

- What happens if the health care needs of the resident changes?
- How does the facility help residents maintain their ability to care for themselves, especially toileting, dressing and eating?
- How does the facility accommodate residents with changing needs?
- If residents develop confusion, how does the facility determine whether this is due to problems with medications or whether it is related to Alzheimer's or dementia?
- How often does a staff member check on a resident's whereabouts and well-being?
- If a resident's behavior changes and becomes verbally or physically abusive, what steps will the facility take?

Services and Activities

- Does staff assist residents in administering medications?
- Does the residence have a pharmacy? Must the resident use a residence pharmacy? Does the residence pharmacy provide for yearly review and consultation services?
- Are there professional nursing services on site?
- Are there physical, occupational or speech therapist services available?
- Does the residence provide bed linens and towels?

- Does the residence provide laundry service?
- What recreational and spiritual activities are available?
- Is transportation provided for medical appointments and recreational purposes?
- Is there a resident council? How often does it meet?
- What are the suggestion, complaint or grievance procedures?

Staff

- What are residence staffing practices and philosophy?
- What are the qualifications and training requirements for staff?
- Does the residence utilize volunteers? What functions do they perform?
- How long are staff shifts?
- How are staff trained to deal with aggressive residents?
- Do the staff know residents by name?
- How do residents and staff communicate? Are there language barriers?

Contract, Costs and Fees

- What is included in the basic monthly cost? (GET IT IN WRITING)
- Does the residence have a written schedule of fees for extra services?

Contract, Costs & Fees (continued)

- Under what conditions might the fees change? How much notice is provided?
- Is there a security deposit? What is the refund policy?
- Can service agreements and/or contracts be amended or modified?
- What are the eviction procedures?
- Does the facility maintain a separate insurance policy covering theft and damage to resident's property?

Dining and Food Services

- Does the residence accommodate special dietary needs?
- Does a dietician or nutritionist review the menus?
- How do menus rotate? Are residents and family involved in the planning?
- Are residents allowed to have guests for meals?
- Can residents eat in their rooms?

Living Space and Accommodations

- Are there adequate community areas for resident use?
- Are resident rooms furnished or unfurnished?
- What are the policies regarding personal items?
- What is the policy for overnight guests?
- Are guest rooms available?

Living Space and Accommodations (continued)

- Is there additional storage space? Is there an extra fee for this space?
- Does the residence comply with rules for peoples with disabilities?
- Can residents have cars? Is there assigned parking? Is there a fee?
- Are the patios and courtyards available for resident use?
- Does the residence provide security?
- Are pets allowed in the residence? If so, are there additional deposits? If no, can pets be allowed to visit?
- Are there recreational facilities available?
- Does the facility accept residents who:
 - Have Alzheimer's/dementia
 - Wander
 - Use a wheelchair
 - Use a walker
 - Smoke



Bedrooms

- Do residents have their own room or do they share?
- Are their emergency call buttons near each bed?
- Is the bedroom big enough?
- Is the bedroom well-lighted? Have a window? Is it clean?
- How often is the bedroom cleaned?

Bedrooms (continued)

- Can residents bring in their own furniture and personal belongings?
- Is there security to prevent personal property from being stolen?
- Is there a private bathroom?
- Are there grab bars in the shower and next to the toilet?
- Is the bathroom wheelchair accessible?
- If you have roommates, how many?
- How are roommates selected?
- What is the facility policy on changing roommates?

Licensure and Certification

- Is the residence licensed? Ask to review the last licensing/certification inspection record
- Does the staff participate in trade or professional associations?



Location

- Is the location of the residence convenient to shopping, medical services and entertainment areas?
- Can family members and visitors easily locate the residence for visits?

Medications

Assisted Living Home regulations limit staff to only supervising or prompting residents to take their medications. Unless the staff is trained by a nurse they may not administer (place in resident's mouth or into feeding device) any medication. Residents may keep their medications in their private room but generally medications are stored in a central location in a manner that provides for the safety of the residents and prevents unauthorized use of medications.

Questions to ask:

- Are there limitations on how staff will handle medications?
- What safeguards are in place to ensure that residents get the appropriate medications on time and in the correct dosage?
- How are prescriptions filled?
- Who gives out medications?
- Who reviews medication procedures and how frequently?

For more information about assisted living homes in Alaska please contact:

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619 Ship Creek Avenue, Suite 232
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 269-3640