

CONCERNS AND  
CONSIDERATIONS IN THE  
**SENIOR LIVING  
LANDSCAPE**

A CLOSER LOOK'S INDEPENDENT RESEARCH

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# INTRODUCTION

**The senior living landscape is undergoing a significant transformation as the aging baby boomer generation continues to shape the demographic landscape. With the demand for senior living options on the rise, it is crucial for senior living communities to understand the concerns and considerations of potential residents and their families.**

This whitepaper presents findings from independent research conducted by A Closer Look, a customer experience research firm, shedding light on the key concerns raised by individuals evaluating senior living options. This objective analysis aims to provide valuable insights and best practices to encourage senior living communities to conduct similar research to assess their communities' abilities to meet and exceed prospective resident expectations.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 10,000 individuals turn 65 every day, projecting that seniors will account for over 20% of the population by 2030. Alongside this trend, occupancy rates in senior living communities have been rebounding since their decline below 80% in Q4 of 2020 due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, while staffing challenges persist throughout the industry. As the demand for senior living options continues to grow, it is crucial to understand the concerns and considerations of potential residents and their families.

While more than 55% of survey respondents expressed a likelihood of needing the services offered by assisted living communities, a staggering 88% had reservations about moving into such establishments, despite recognizing their potential benefits. The primary concerns voiced by participants revolved around care, cost, and facility quality.

# CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS

## 1. CAREGIVER SUPPORT

One significant concern expressed by survey respondents was the perceived lack of supportive caregivers within assisted living communities. Many expressed concerns about high turnover rates among caregivers, as well as caregivers being unsupportive or indifferent towards residents' needs. Instances of slow response times for essential tasks, such as changing diapers or bed linens, were reported, causing discomfort and inconvenience to residents.

One respondent shared their experience, stating,

**“When my mother's physical needs became too much for us to handle, we had to put her in assisted living. The care there was so poor that we had to hire full-time aides to be in the apartment with her since she didn't get any response most of the time when she needed help.”**

## 2. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Participants also expressed concerns about the qualifications and expertise of staff members in assisted living communities. There was a prevailing perception among those surveyed that caregivers often lacked the necessary skills and training required to provide adequate care to residents. Many respondents felt that staff members were underpaid, leading to a higher prevalence of individuals working multiple jobs to make ends meet. The perceived lack of respect for the caregiver position resulted in less qualified individuals applying for available openings. As one respondent summarized, "Assisted living can be a lifesaver or a life ender depending on the staff."

**88%**  
**HAD RESERVATIONS**  
**ABOUT SENIOR LIVING**  
**CARE, COST AND**  
**QUALITY**

# CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS

## 3. NEGLECT OR ABUSE

Disturbingly, some survey respondents reported instances of neglect, abuse, and property theft by caregivers within assisted living facilities. These accounts raised significant concerns about the safety and well-being of residents under their care. One participant shared an alarming incident, stating, "A family member was left on a toilet for over an hour until they got up themselves and fell." Survey participants believed that there was insufficient monitoring and supervision of caregivers, potentially leading to subpar care or misconduct.

## 4. QUALITY

The overall quality of services, facilities, and living conditions emerged as another major concern among survey respondents. Issues raised included cleanliness and hygiene standards, lack of amenities, and unmet expectations. Surprisingly, over 300 of those surveyed specifically commented on bland, tasteless food or poor-quality meals. A recurring theme was the presence of a urine or bleach odor throughout the communities.

*"I have experience with several assisted living communities. The pay is not good and staff retention and continuity is a problem.*

*Also, it seems like the residents sit unattended for long periods of time without engagement, stimulation, or involvement in activities."*

# CONCERNS AND CONSIDERATIONS

## 5. PROFIT-DRIVEN OPERATORS

Respondents expressed skepticism regarding the motivations of some assisted living operators, perceiving them as primarily driven by financial gain rather than genuinely caring about residents' well-being. This perception created doubts about the operators' commitment to providing quality care and raised concerns that they might only meet minimum requirements.

One respondent stated, "Though residents pay a premium price to live there, the vast majority of facilities pay very low wages to the caregivers and often only have one licensed nurse (LPN or RN) on staff."

*"The atmosphere in these communities isn't always clean, fresh, or inviting. The food is not freshly prepared with clean ingredients; it resembles food from a box or can or frozen."*

*"When we placed my mother in assisted living, the care was so poor that we had to hire full-time help to be in the apartment with her. She didn't get any response most of the time when she needed help."*

# EXEMPLARY COMMUNITIES + RESIDENT PREFERENCES

Despite the concerns raised, a significant number of survey respondents acknowledged that certain senior living communities stand out by providing exceptional service and care. These communities offer attractive features such as:

- restaurant-style dining
- wide range of amenities
- extra safety features
- high staff-to-resident ratio

Respondents appreciated the socialization opportunities that living in a community brings for themselves or their loved ones, recognizing the importance of maintaining independence while having assistance readily available when needed. It can be challenging to discern which communities truly excel, however, until one has already moved in. One respondent aptly pointed out,

*"It starts out great, but they don't seem as wonderful when you actually live there. They put their best face forward to get you in the door."*

THIS HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED FOR  
SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES TO CONDUCT  
**THOROUGH RESEARCH  
AND EVALUATION**

SO THEY CAN OFFER THE FEATURES AND BENEFITS THAT  
**MEET PROSPECTIVE RESIDENT  
NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS.**

# COST AS A DETERRANT

Cost emerged as a significant deterrent for potential residents, with over 91% of survey participants identifying it as a major concern. Respondents generally expected assisted living communities to cost between \$2,500 and \$7,000 per month. Higher-quality communities were perceived as cost-prohibitive without financial assistance, while more affordable options were associated with potential compromises in care quality, amenities, and staff qualifications. One respondent noted that,

**"The cost is out of reach for middle-class citizens to live in a well-managed community. The cheaper alternative shows up in older communities, poor food preparation, smelly halls, and unqualified or uncaring staff."**

Another simply said,

**"The quality of care is based on what you can afford to pay."**

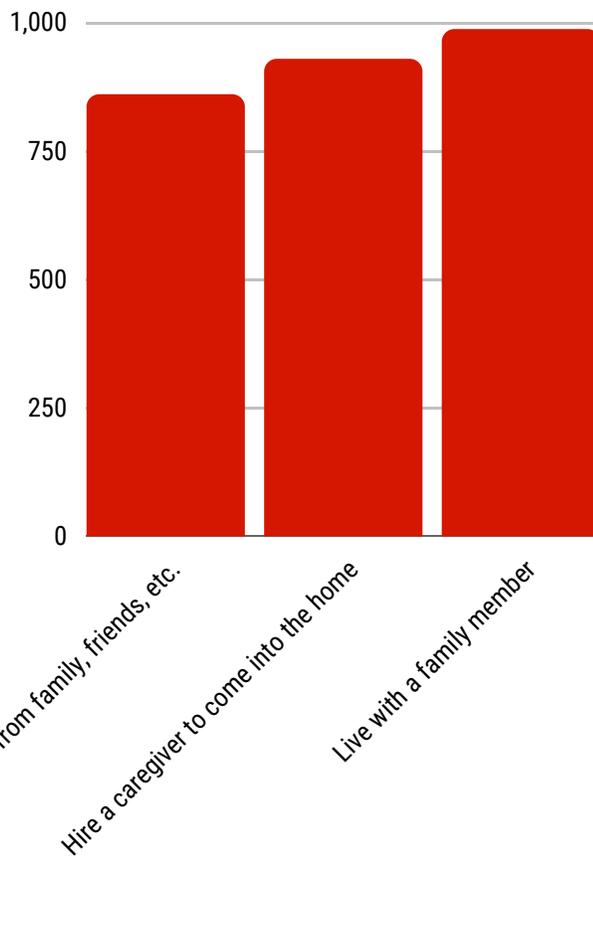
Furthermore, approximately 33% of respondents anticipated their primary health insurance to cover the expenses, highlighting the need for greater education or potential changes in healthcare offerings to accommodate the aging population.

**33%**  
ANTICIPATED HEALTH INSURANCE  
TO COVER EXPENSES  
HIGHLIGHTING THE NEED FOR  
BETTER ELDERLY  
EDUCATION

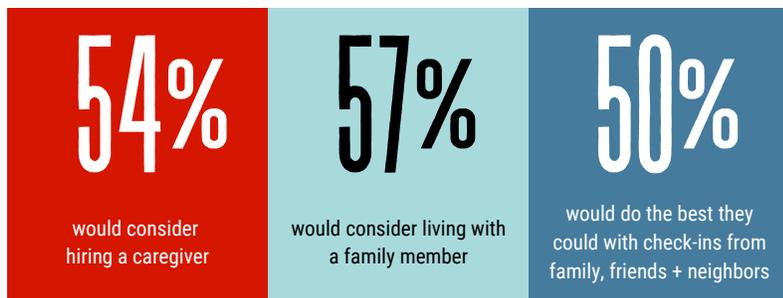
# ALTERNATIVES TO SENIOR LIVING

Considering the reservations surrounding assisted living communities, a considerable percentage of survey participants (over 62%) stated that they would consider living with a family member or relying on occasional check-ins from friends or relatives.

Additionally, almost 60% expressed openness to the idea of home care, as it allows for greater independence, comfort, and reduces the risk of potential elder abuse.



*"When my father could no longer live alone, we looked into assisted care communities for him. We felt the expense was a little out of reach at the time, however, so we moved into his home and cared for him around the clock."*



# BEST PRACTICES FOR SENIOR LIVING OPERATORS

By understanding and addressing the concerns of potential residents and their families, senior living operators can foster trust, alleviate worries, and meet resident expectations with these best practices:

1

## Improve Caregiver Support

Senior living communities must prioritize hiring and retaining well-trained caregivers who genuinely care about residents' well-being. This can be achieved by offering competitive wages, providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities, and implementing support programs for caregivers to prevent burnout.

2

## Enhance Staff Qualifications

It is essential for senior living communities to ensure that their staff members have the necessary qualifications, skills, and training to provide high-quality care. Regular assessments, performance evaluations, and educational opportunities can help maintain and improve staff competence.

# BEST PRACTICES FOR SENIOR LIVING OPERATORS

3

## Strengthen Oversight and Monitoring

Implementing robust oversight mechanisms, such as increased supervision, regular audits, and anonymous reporting systems, can help detect and prevent instances of neglect, abuse, or misconduct. Clear protocols should be in place to address complaints and take appropriate action when necessary.

4

## Prioritize Quality

Senior living communities should focus on providing excellent services, maintaining high cleanliness and hygiene standards, offering nutritious and appetizing food, and ensuring that residents have access to engaging activities and socialization opportunities. Regular feedback from residents and their families can help identify areas for improvement.

5

## Increase Transparency

Senior living communities should be transparent about their pricing, services, and quality standards. Providing clear and detailed information upfront can help potential residents make informed decisions and avoid surprises or disappointments after moving in.

6

## Advocate for Affordable Options

There is a need for greater advocacy to make senior living options more affordable and accessible, particularly for middle-class citizens. Collaborating with policymakers and healthcare providers to explore potential financial assistance programs or insurance coverage can help alleviate the cost burden for seniors and their families.

# RESEARCH STRATEGIES FOR SENIOR LIVING OPERATORS

By implementing best practices and using smart research strategies, senior living communities can identify and address the concerns and considerations raised by potential residents and their families.

Creating a supportive and high-quality environment will improve employee morale, attract more individuals to consider senior living options and also provide a better quality of life for seniors as they age.

## RESEARCH TACTICS

Independent, anonymous phone and/or web evaluations

In-person community visits and/or in-person tours

Unannounced assessments for quality of food + dining experiences

Evaluation of caregiver recruitment process to ensure responsiveness of HR teams

Comprehensive competitive analysis to understand industry benchmarks + best practices

Text surveys to gather data from post-tour prospects

Anonymous feedback collection + management from residents and family members

Surveys + focus groups targeting seniors and their adult children to gain valuable insights

# A CLOSER LOOK EXPERIENCE INSIGHTS FOR SENIOR LIVING

A Closer Look executes valuable first-party research to analyze customer behaviors and determine impactful trends that help drive client revenue through a first-in-class customer experience.

With a specialized senior living division, A Closer Look assists senior living operators in identifying and addressing concerns to improve the resident and prospective resident experience.

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