

SEVEN TIPS FOR FINDING QUALITY ASSISTED LIVING CARE

Advertising for assisted living paints a glorious picture for seniors: “Enjoy your golden years in bright, polished, independent communities while licensed medical professionals monitor your every need.” Reality can be a different story. As the baby boomer generation ages, assisted living has become a big business – and for too many residents and their families, a big problem. Some facilities are not properly equipped or staffed to care for an increasingly ill population.

Before you check in your loved one, check out these tips on how to find quality assisted living facilities. Here are seven tips from ProPublica to find quality care:

1. **Understand Your Needs.** Assisted living might look like a great option, especially when promoted as an alternative to nursing home care. But some facilities may not be capable of caring for people with complex medical conditions. Familiarize yourself with the basic services provided by different assisted-living facilities and compare one to another.
2. **Visit...Often.** Visit prospective facilities often, and at different times of the day. Take time to talk to the residents and staff. Ask the tough questions. For example: What is the ratio of caregivers to residents? What is the turnover rate? Checklists of what to ask or look for when visiting an assisted-living facility are available online from several organizations that serve the elderly.
3. **Know Whether the Facility is For-Profit or Nonprofit.** The pressure to earn profits can impact staffing, food and available activities. That doesn't mean you should dismiss nonprofits, as there are good and bad facilities in each category, but do your homework.
4. **Know the True Costs.** Assisted living can be expensive, averaging \$3,550 per month, according to a 2012 survey by MetLife. Also, note that the base price may not reflect fees for additional services, from meal delivery and laundry to bathing assistance and medication management. These costs can add up quickly.
5. **Watch that Admissions Agreement.** The devil is in the details when it comes to admissions agreements, which are often lengthy and complicated. Many assisted-living facilities and nursing homes now include forced arbitration clauses in admission contracts, thus protecting themselves from accountability in an open court of law. Do not agree to arbitration or any arbitration clause.
6. **Choose Quality Care Over Location.** Sure, it's easier to visit a loved one if the facility you choose is located near friends and family. But experts warn that your first criteria

should be quality care and a facility that is a good fit for the prospective resident.

7. **Check Public Records.** Check the property's regulatory history and complaint record for the past five years. The health department or long-term care ombudsman will have that information. Check the federal and state court civil records in the district/county where the facility is located. Warning signs are numerous personal injury or wrongful death lawsuits naming the facility and/or its management company.

Quality care in assisted living is available. According to a 2013 survey by the National Research Corporation, overall satisfaction was rated "good" or "excellent" by 91 percent of residents and 92 percent of families in the 1,500 facilities surveyed. A little due diligence on your part can give you and your family peace of mind about the quality of care your loved ones in assisted living will receive.

Nothing in this article should be construed as legal advice. You must consult with an attorney for the application of the law to your specific circumstances.

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