

SENIOR INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

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Choosing an Adult Family Home

Nursing Home Alternative

Adult family homes are a popular and cost effective alternative to skilled nursing care. However, there are a few things to keep in mind before making this important decision.

Licensing / Credentials

Adult family homes are licensed by the State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The homes are inspected every 18 months for safety and cleanliness. Each home has an individual atmosphere and environment. Each operator/owner may vary in his or her experience and credentials.

Certification/Experience

Many adult family home operators have certifications of different kinds such as nursing assistant, practical nurse or registered nurse. CPR and First Aid certifications are required. Operators take in-service training to acquire qualifications to work with elderly, people with dementia, mental health issues, etc.

Finding the right one

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) maintains a listing of all licensed adult family homes on their website at <http://adsaweb/afhbh/>. DSHS can also give you more information about homes which can meet specific care needs. The list is also available from Senior Information & Assistance (contact info above). Visit each home you are considering. Take the time to interview the operator. Check references. The home operator is required to have inspection results on hand. You may want to contact the Ombudsman Program to research complaints or DSHS actions against the adult family home – the NW Regional Longterm Care Ombudsman Program Coordinator can be reached by calling (360) 421-1080 or (360) 416-7585.

Points to Consider

Availability of beds

There are many adult family homes in Whatcom and Skagit County. While there may be only a few homes which meet an individual's specific needs, there are usually private pay beds available. Visit several homes before you decide on a particular placement. If the state is paying for part of your longterm care, make sure that the adult family home you are interested in accepts Medicaid and has an opening.

Staff

State regulations require at least one staff member (in addition to the owner) working 40 hours a week if the home has five or more residents. Determine how many staff are present at night to meet the needs of residents. Find out about the care needs of the other residents. Residents with multiple needs obviously require more attention, so their numbers should be limited to what staff can handle safely.

Food

Nutrition is crucial to maintaining health. Adult family home operators may provide you with menus and/or meal plans. Ask about meal times, food handling procedures, and snack contents. Ask to see the pantry. Ask about meal-time policies such as where meals are served, ie. on a tray or at a dining table.

Care Practices

Facilities are required to obtain a thorough assessment of the resident's needs and preferences before admission. Usually this assessment is done by an RN at the resident's expense. Verify that care plans are written, updated and followed including who does what and how often. Does the operator expect family to provide transportation to medical appointments or to fill prescriptions? Check on charges for any care apart from the monthly fee. Clarify what the operator means if they provide "hospice" care. Check the operator's policy about "outside" caregivers (e.g. Visiting Nurse) attending to the needs of residents on a regular basis. Inquire about the provision of bathing, hair, and nail care services.

Setting

It is important to find an adult family home that is well-kept, clean, and safe. Is the facility accessible to someone using a wheelchair? Is it near a public transportation line? The focus of the search should be on quality care and on respect for residents. Talk to the operator for extended periods. Get to know the other residents and their families. As with any care situation (child care or elder care), trust your observations.

Rooms

Determine whether residents have the freedom and privacy to attend to their personal needs, to manage their financial affairs, and to decorate their rooms. Determine how residents are moved from room to room or how their space is rearranged to accommodate new residents.

Visitation

Ask about visitation policies. Visitors will always be welcome at a well-run adult family home. Visit your loved one early, late, or randomly. Find out whether the operator requires visitation be on a drop-in basis or by appointment.

Conflict Resolution

Ask the adult family home operator if conflicts have arisen in the past and how they were resolved. You will be looking for an attitude of openness and fairness. Before and after your elder is placed in the home, keep a written account of questions or concerns as well as their resolution (or lack thereof) for future reference. Ask the operator how they manage behavioral problems of residents. The NW Regional Long-term Care Ombudsman at (360) 421-1080 or (360) 416-7585 will answer questions and complaints regarding residents' rights.

Contracts and Rates

Adult family homes are required to use contracts. **Read the contracts carefully**, particularly any clauses which refer to deposits of any kind, including bed-holding fees, paying for more than one month at a time, damage deposits, advanced notification and any references to deposit forfeiture. Clarify specifically the terms of payment: whether you can negotiate the rate or if it based on a daily rate (the preferable method) or monthly. Determine how often, by how much, and for what reason the rates are raised. Determine if services such as laundry, administration of medication, or hair and nail care are included in the rate – or if there are extra charges. Do not sign a contract with any changes unless they have been initialed by you. Determine the home's policy on refunds and have it included in the contract. **Get a copy of the contract.**

Senior Information & Assistance has checklists you can use to evaluate which facility would be right for you or a loved one.

Whatcom: (360) 738-2500

Skagit: (360) 428-1301