

SENIOR INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

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Choosing an Assisted Living Facility

Nursing Home Alternative

Boarding Homes, commonly known as Assisted Living facilities, can be a cost-effective alternative to nursing home placement. A resident may have a private apartment and can enjoy socializing with others at scheduled activities and mealtimes.

Licensing / Credentials

The State of Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) licenses boarding homes. Each facility can sign a contract agreeing to provide various levels of care. Most commonly, boarding homes sign contracts with the state to provide "Assisted Living" level of care. Residential Care Services (RCS), a division of DSHS, inspects each facility every year for safety and cleanliness. Each facility is required to have inspection results posted.

Contracts/Certification

Assisted living facilities vary in the services provided. Ask what level of care the facility provides. Ask what certification and experience the staff may have to provide various levels of care.

Finding the Right One

DSHS licenses all assisted living facilities as "Boarding Homes". A list is available at their website <http://adsaweb/afhbh/> or from Senior Information & Assistance (contact info above). You will need to consider which facilities can meet specific care needs, and which accept Medicaid. Visit each facility you are considering and take the time to interview the staff. Senior Information & Assistance has checklists you can use to evaluate which facility would be right for you or a loved one.

Points to Consider

Availability of Apartments

There are several Assisted Living facilities in Skagit County. Determine if the facility has an apartment that will meet your needs. Tour several facilities before making your selection.

Staff

Determine how many staff are present during the day and night to meet the needs of residents. What is the ratio of staff to residents?

Food

Nutrition is crucial to maintaining health. Assisted living facilities can provide you with menus and/or meal plans. Ask about meal times, food handling procedures, and snacks. Ask about policies such as where meals are served, if food choices are offered, and if guests are welcome at mealtime. If possible, ask for a tour and eat lunch at the facility, before you decide.

Care Practices

Some facilities are not staffed to care for residents who have heavy care needs. Ask if the facility will provide all levels of care. Verify that care service plans are written, updated, and followed. Check on charges for any care apart from the monthly fee. Clarify what the facility means if they provide “hospice” care. Check the facility’s policy about “outside” caregivers attending to the needs of residents. Inquire about the provision of bathing, hair, and nail care services.

Setting/Impressions

It is important to find an assisted living facility that is well kept, clean, and safe. In addition, the focus of the search should be on quality of care and respect for the residents. As with any decision, trust your observations.

Rooms

Determine if residents have the freedom and privacy to attend to their personal needs, manage their financial affairs, and decorate their room. Check the size of the room and how much furniture you may need to provide. If method of payment should change from private pay to Medicaid, will the resident be asked to change rooms?

Visitation

Ask about visitation policies. Visitors should always be welcome at the facility. Will you be able to visit your family member at any time during the day? Does the facility have suggested visiting hours, and are they are flexible? Are visitors welcome at mealtime?

Conflict Resolution

Ask if conflicts have arisen in the past and how they were resolved. When conflicts occur, they should be handled with an attitude of openness and fairness. Ask the staff how they manage behavioral problems of residents. For questions or complaints regarding a resident’s rights, contact the NW Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program Coordinator at (360) 421-1080 or (360) 416-7585.

Contracts and Rates

Assisted living facilities are required to use contracts. **Read the contracts carefully**, particularly clauses that refer to bed-holding fees, paying for more than one month at a time, level of care charges, damage deposits, advance notification and any references to deposit forfeiture.

Clarify specifically the terms of payment. Determine how often and why rates are raised. Determine if services such as laundry, administration of medication, and hair and nail care are included in the rate. Do not sign contracts with any changes unless it has been initialed by you. Check the facility’s policy on refunds and have it included in the contract.

Get a copy of the contract. Check how the facility handles state-assisted residents and the process for transferring from private pay to Medicaid. If needed, you can contact Senior Information & Assistance or DSHS Home & Community Services to request an application for state assistance:

- Senior Information & Assistance
600 Lakeway Drive, Suite 100, Bellingham, WA 98225, (360) 738-2500
or 1650 Port Drive, Burlington, WA 98233, (360) 428-1301
- Department of Social and Health Services – Community Services Office (DSHS -CSO)
4101 Meridian Street, Bellingham, 1-877-501-2233
or 900 East College Way #210, Mt Vernon, 1-877-501-2233