

Assisted Living in California

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*The Voice of
Assisted
Living*

What is Assisted Living?

Assisted Living is an incredibly popular, growing model of senior care that boasts an impressive 93% resident satisfaction rating. It refers to a special combination of housing, personal supportive services, and health-related care designed to respond to individual needs. Primarily, services provided help seniors with activities of daily living—things like bathing, dressing, meals, medication management, and transportation. Assisted Living is not an institutional setting and Assisted Living communities do not have “patients.” Assisted Living *residents* enjoy doing many of the same things they did when they lived on their own.

What drives interest in Assisted Living?

Assisted Living emerged as a response to consumer demand for a long-term services and supports option that was less restrictive, residential rather than institutional, and would meet the everyday needs of seniors who can't or may prefer not to live alone. This consumer-driven preference was supported by the US Supreme Court in its 1999 *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision that states could not segregate persons with disabilities into institutions; instead, they must ensure that services are provided in the least restrictive setting possible. While *Olmstead* spoke specifically to public funding, it supports a broader interest in eliminating the institutional bias and empowering people to seek care and services in the setting of their choice—a sentiment that Assisted Living providers operationalize every day.

Due in large part to consumer demand, changing philosophy stemming from the *Olmstead* decision, advances in gerontology, and the innovations of Assisted Living providers, an entire generation of individuals with dementia, whose needs are primarily social and behavioral, are no longer limited to a skilled nursing setting. Many Assisted Living providers specialize in state-of-the-art, person-centered dementia care in a warm, residential environment. Many communities are also equipped to retain residents through the end of their lives with support from licensed hospice providers, meaning there is no need to move from what has become their home.

What are some other senior care options?

California offers a growing range of settings and programs to support individuals needing long-term services and supports and varying degrees of medical care: home care (unlicensed supportive services provided in the client's home), home health care (licensed health care provided in the client's home), adult day programs (offered in a community setting), community based adult programs (health care provided through a day program), Assisted Living (licensed 24-hour care, supervision, and housing), skilled nursing facilities (licensed setting providing 24-hour skilled nursing care), and hospice (licensed care at the end of life). Another popular choice is independent senior housing, where care is not provided, but where social activities and services designed to promote an active, independent lifestyle are offered.

What are the options within Assisted Living?

Just as consumers demand choices in types of care, residents continue to seek variety within the Assisted Living model. One of the most important elements of Assisted Living is the variety of

communities available. Variations in size, amenities, services, and pricing enable consumers to choose an environment that they consider attractive, a community that meets their needs, and pricing that works for them. Assisted Living includes family-owned-and-operated communities, providers who serve seniors in several **communities** within California, and providers who offer services in multiple states.

How is Assisted Living regulated?

Just because Assisted Living is flexible and promotes independence does not mean it is unregulated. Assisted Living communities are licensed as Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFEs) in California, and are governed by an increasingly robust set of laws and regulations. From the initial licensing process to inspections, the regulatory framework is designed to promote resident independence and self-direction to the greatest extent possible in a residential, non-medical setting.

Nearly every aspect of the Assisted Living experience is governed by state regulation or statute. Recent legislative actions further strengthen this model of care by significantly increasing training for caregivers and administrators and establishing additional systems and tools for state regulators. Collectively, these legislative efforts seek to support accountability for both the departmental enforcement of laws and regulations and providers to best meet the needs of today's residents.

While the RCFE regulatory framework is well-established and continues to be refined, California's ongoing budget cuts have reduced the frequency of inspections—these reductions have consistently been challenged by Assisted Living providers and consumer groups alike. The California Assisted Living Association (CALA) has long supported strong licensing and enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, our members support increasing licensing fees to support more frequent inspections. CALA will continue to address this important issue by [advocating for the increase of inspection frequency through legislation and budget measures](#).

Promoting Consumer Choice

Much has changed—and will continue to change—for seniors who are considering their care options. The Assisted Living model is one that has helped promote quality of life for hundreds of thousands of seniors and their families as it can be personalized to align with their needs and preferences. Understanding how and why Assisted Living works is critical to preserving it so that seniors will continue to have the ability to choose their own path.