

# HOW TO CHOOSE A *Memory Care* *Community* – GO BEYOND THE BASICS



by Agemark Senior Living



Searching for memory care for your loved one can be an overwhelming and emotional experience. If you've taken the step to look for memory care, it's usually because you've decided that it's no longer working for your loved one to remain in their own home and you are unable to provide the type of care they need yourself.

This revelation generally comes with a powerful feeling – guilt. Take comfort in knowing that sometimes providing care on your own simply isn't realistic. Perhaps you have a full-time job, other family members that need your attention, you cannot create a safe environment or maybe your loved one has special circumstances that require expert care that you are not qualified to provide.

Any memory care community should offer the basic necessities such as safety and security, access to medical care as needed, comfortable accommodations and caring, 24-hour staff. Be sure to tour the facility and meet with building leadership to get more detailed information and develop a "feel" for the community.

But in order to find a community that's the perfect fit for your loved one, a place where they can live their best and most meaningful life, we suggest looking beyond the basics towards a few areas that we feel are particularly important to ensure a good experience. Some, you may not have considered.



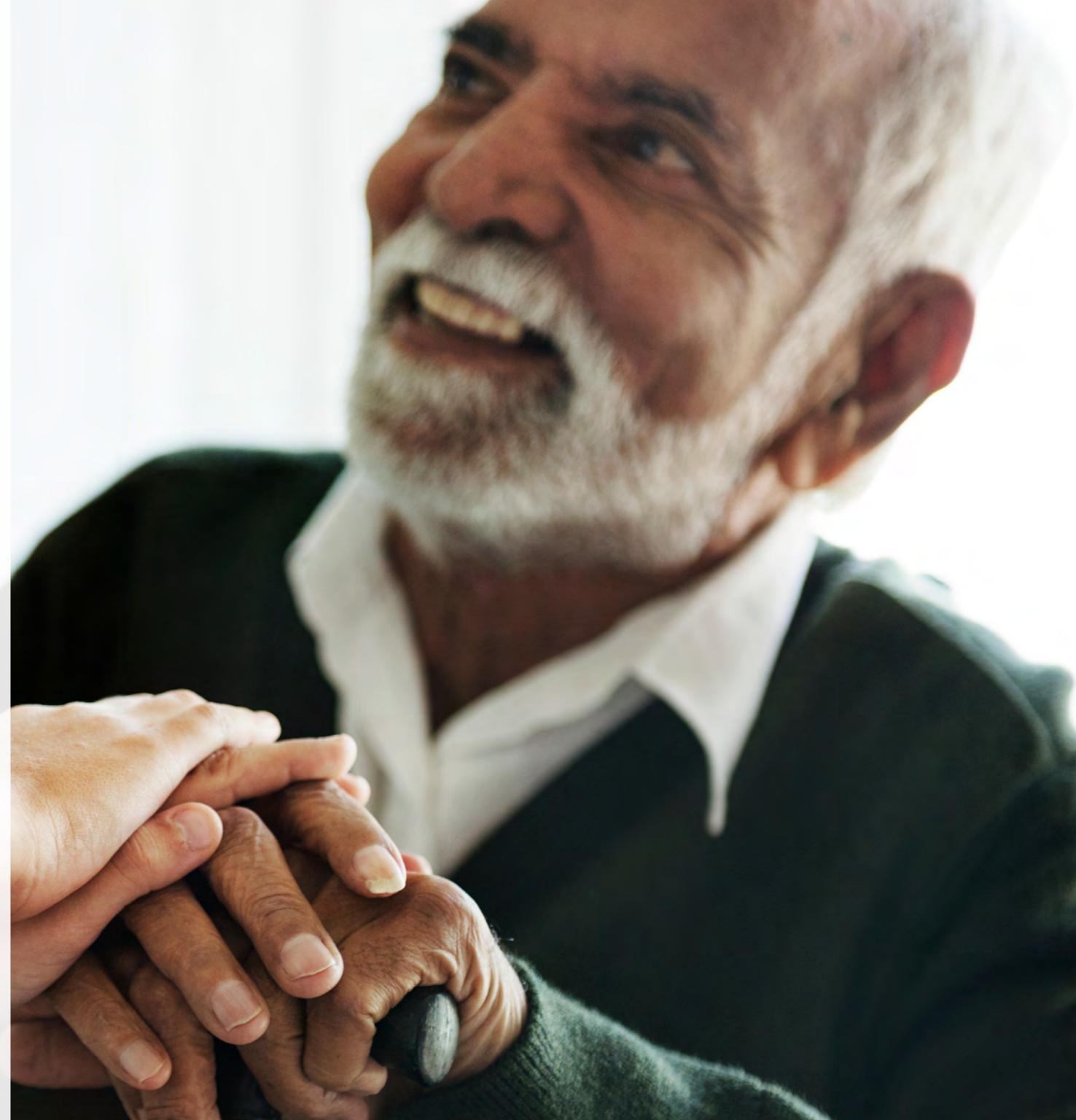
## TYPE OF COMMUNITY

Many assisted living communities – or even skilled nursing facilities – offer a separate area of the building (usually a secured floor or “wing”) that is devoted to memory care. Others specialize in memory care and offer this service exclusively. Whichever option you choose, because specialized dementia care requires a higher staff-to-resident ratio, it will generally cost more.

If you require memory care for a single individual, it would be worth looking into a community that specializes in memory care exclusively. Often, these types of communities are smaller and offer a more home-like, intimate setting which is specifically designed for those with memory loss. Communities that are memory-care only usually have staff that are specially trained to assist people with dementia or impaired cognition and are experienced in providing activities that are both appropriate and life enriching. Most often, staff receive extra certifications in dementia-care – which include training for how to provide redirection or handle sundowning and other dementia related behaviors. There's also something to be said for concentrating on one type of care – by focusing only on memory care, you get really good at it! CountryHouse Residence is an example of a community that exclusively serves those with memory care needs. With 13 locations in five states, CountryHouse has provided exceptional care for individuals with Alzheimer's or other types of dementia for more than 20 years.



If the person needing memory care has a spouse or partner who would like to live with them, but does not require memory care, we suggest you consider a community that offers multiple services under one roof – perhaps independent and assisted living as well as memory care. This allows a couple to live in the same building – even if not in the same room – so they can still be together on a daily basis.



## TRANSPARENT PRICING INFORMATION

When exploring the rates for a senior living community, it's often hard to nail down an exact price. Why is this? It's simple, really – because all individuals have different needs, no two people are exactly alike. Perhaps your loved one needs no care other than medication management. Or maybe they need help with other activities of daily living (ADLs) such as bathing or dressing. When exploring pricing, an individual's care needs are communicated by you – their loved one – and are also determined through an assessment performed by a community's nurse or director. Until the community performs this assessment, it's difficult to nail down an exact figure.

Here's what they should be able to tell you. First, if their price structure is all-inclusive or is broken out separately (usually rent or a base rate, plus care fees). If additional costs are applied for care services, they should be able to tell you how many levels of care they offer and what the cost increase is according to each level. They should be able to tell you if any services are included or are free of charge, such as local transportation or a certain amount of care.



They should also be able to tell you whether they are private-pay only or accept other forms of payment such as state or federally provided funding. And finally, they should be able to direct you to resources for financial assistance, such as Long-Term Care Insurance or Aid & Attendance Benefits for Veterans.

Beware of communities that do not answer questions transparently or don't offer to help guide you through this process with great care and detail. Any community worth their salt should bend over backwards to help guide you through what is a very challenging and emotional experience. Another thing to note – if their community is not a good fit for your loved one, they should be able to direct you to another community that might better suit your needs.



## ACTIVITY PROGRAMS

Any good community should have a variety of activities in which residents can participate – from crafts to entertainment, and more. We suggest asking how the community will help your loved one in all dimensions of wellness – physical, social, spiritual and intellectual. Agemark's whole-person Wellness Program, LifeCycles, in place at all CountryHouse communities, is devoted to maximizing wellness in all four areas with a philosophy to help individuals with memory loss live as fully as possible. Look for a variety of group activities along with personal, one-on-one activities that are customized to your loved one's interests and abilities. If your loved one enjoyed cooking, gardening or music prior to entering memory care, you'll want to ask how these interests can continue to be cultivated in the memory care community.

Until there are more effective medications, a strong and well-rounded activity program is currently the most effective way to treat and manage dementia conditions such as Alzheimer's. And the very best programs are designed to engage residents all day, 7 days a week, and include frequent opportunities to go out for fresh air and visits to local attractions, time with children and pets, fulfilling activities and music therapy.



## SUPPORT FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

Again, the decision to seek memory care for a loved one is emotionally taxing. It can be fraught with feelings of guilt, fear and conflict with other family members. In fact, it may be the most difficult choice you'll ever make. Good memory care communities should walk with you, hand in hand, throughout the decision-making process. They should patiently answer any questions and concerns, give multiple tours, and provide transparent information. They may even offer a short-term visit or trial stay, which our Agemark communities do, as a way to gauge how well your loved one might acclimate to a congregate living environment.

After your loved one moves in, the support and communication should not stop! At least one family member should be made aware of your loved one's daily schedule and given frequent updates. You should also have the opportunity to participate in regular care plan meetings.

A good community should also keep families informed through social media or communication applications such as LifeLoop, FaceTime or Skype. These tools help families feel more informed and reassured that their loved one is safe, happy and healthy. Most communities have regular open forums for families in addition to personal updates. Often held over coffee and usually outside of the community, a director or other community representative can answer questions, give updates and more. It's also a good way for families to find social support through connections with others who are going through the same experience. Ask if the community you are considering has these options available.



## FEELS LIKE HOME

What may be most important, though, is finding a place where your loved one will feel at home and be treated with the dignity that they deserve. Both are things that all Agemark Senior Living Communities take to heart. We strive to create an environment that truly feels like home and ask all employees to treat residents (and each other) as if they were a member of their own family.

Once you have narrowed your options, it's important to visit each one. When touring a community or speaking to a representative such as a Senior Living Consultant, observe and ask good questions (see suggested questions below). If you see caregivers interacting with residents – playing games, visiting with them, sharing hugs and smiles – these are all great indications that the environment is warm and loving.

Most importantly, trust your instincts. Ask yourself:

- Does the community have a home-like feel and is it easy to navigate?
- Does their philosophy of care resonate with me and my family?
- Would I feel comfortable and at peace if my loved one lived here?



## REACH OUT FOR HELP

If you're considering memory care, we'd love to help guide you through the process – just reach out to the team at CountryHouse. We can help determine if it's time to seek a specialized care environment for your loved one and if so, we'll help you find a community that's just right for your family!

*Editor's Note: this book was written prior to COVID-19. Some restrictions regarding visiting hours, touring in person and more may be temporary measures designed to protect residents from COVID-19 and are not typical of most senior living communities. Please keep this in mind.*





For more information and advice, please contact a Senior Living Consultant at [CountryHouse](#).

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Council Bluffs, IA  
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