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## **Understanding housing options for people aging**

As we get older, some of us start thinking about making a move out of our home and into something more structured. One reason for considering this option is that we can no longer live alone or we need extra assistance with daily tasks such as cooking, driving, and managing our medication routine. It is important to understand the different options available, whether a move is imminent or sometime in the future. I will describe the available options, ranging from the most independent and extending to facilities that offer the highest level of care or assistance. Let's start with an **active adult community**. This type of housing offers independence with limited services, such as housekeeping, maintenance and local transportation. (An example is Lasell Village in Newton.) A **CCRC** (Continuing Care Retirement Community such as North Hill, Needham) combines independent living, assisted living and a nursing home component on the same grounds. Normally requiring an entrance fee or 'buy-in' along with an in-depth interview and assessment, the resident is guaranteed continued care on an as-needed basis, including meals, health care all the way to the nursing home level. **Assisted Living** is the most common option in this area. This is a combination of housing, personalized supportive care such as medication management, a nurse in the building 5 or 7 days a week, daytime hours, and on-call at night. Meals are included, programs, laundry, transportation and help with activities of daily living. **Supportive housing** offers services and amenities of a market rate community, but with financial assistance. **Alzheimer's** or 'specialty units' can be found within traditional assisted living communities (Goddard House, Brookline) or freestanding facilities (Rogerson House, JP) or in nursing homes (Epoch, Chestnut Hill). These programs are geared towards individuals with numerous forms of dementia and brain injuries and focus on the specific medical, psychological and social needs of the residents. **Nursing homes and rehabilitation centers** provide short term rehab care for individuals whose goal is to return home after a short term stay or offer long term care for those with more medically complicated conditions and who need this environment for other reasons, such as financial.

There are **acute rehabilitation** (such as Spaulding Rehab or Youville) facilities for those who qualify for a more vigorous rehabilitation that falls between hospital and nursing home rehab; **adult day health programs** (Hebrew Senior Life) for those living in the community that provide a range of services, including social, nutritional, nursing and rehabilitation.

## **When is it time to move out of the house?**

**And how can I do it?** Many elders living alone who become too frail to remain in the house they've lived in for many years begin thinking about moving. Questions such as 'who will help me with the monumental task? who will help me sort through years of accumulation? who will help me find the right place? Even after a new home has been selected, inevitably follow comments such as "I can't move right now; what will I do with my dining room table?" This may sound unimportant to family or friends, but is a very serious impediment for many older people deciding whether to change.

Family or a geriatric care manager can help find the right environment. Equally challenging is the actual move.

According to the Director of Marketing at a popular assisted living facility in Brookline, "many elders tour my building and are ready to sign a contract but hesitate because of the overwhelming feeling they experience of making the move itself." She can now make a referral to an elder move specialist, known as a transition or elder move coordinator, an increasingly popular business in the area that can address this issue. And today, there are a number of companies and services available to make this task easier. Companies are popping up that specialize in moves to elder communities or downsizing. Regardless of the complexities of the actual move, these companies make it manageable for everyone involved. And for an older person, just as daunting is the move from an 2-story home or apartment when it comes time to move into a nursing home.

One local organizational specialist and an elder move coordinator, Nina Arnfeld, has assisted dozens of people in making such an important move. She assists clients going through such items such as old manuscripts, photographs, clothing, family heirlooms, and china in the basement from parents long-gone. Sorting through years of 'things' as one can imagine, is not an easy task. She usually begins with recommending that children help their parents sort through what they'd like; sell what nobody wants; then

give items to a local charity; and finally, throw out what is trash. She has helped with doing any or all of these chores and in addition, hired the mover, helped pack, and mapped the new space, and arranged everything in the new home. Professionals can also take the client out to buy a new bed and new furniture, pick out window treatments; arrange new closet space. This usually turns into an exciting experience instead of a dreaded one.

We all have memories of sitting around that dining room table on Passover and Rosh Hashanah, but giving the dining room table to the younger generation to enjoy will ensure that it will continue to bring others warm memories while the elder can start making new friends and new memories in their new home.

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