

The Caregiver's Memory Care Community Checklist

For families choosing a memory care community for a loved one living with a type of dementia.

When you reach the place in your caregiving journey where you think it's time to evaluate a memory care community, it brings a range of emotions, questions, and uncertainty. Every community has its strengths and gaps. Complicating this, there is no universal set of offerings all communities have, or a single way to compare them. While each family's needs and wants are different, the goal is universal: finding the community that best fits the needs of both your loved one and you.

This checklist brings eight areas to review and helps you gain clarity on the components important in support of your decision. Some of the items may not be relevant for your needs.

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Section 1: Know Your Goals

Before you tour a single community, get clear on what matters most, so you move forward with confidence.

☐	Stage of dementia: Identify the stage of dementia your loved one is currently in, so you begin with your focus on the level of care that fits their needs today.
☐	Eligibility windows: Confirm the physical and medical eligibility requirements for assisted living and memory care where you live, so you act while you still have the most options.
☐	Home vs. community: Weigh the goal of keeping your loved one home as long as possible, with what will keep both of you safe and well supported.
☐	Give yourself grace: Recognize feelings like guilt, even over promises made in the past, are a normal part of this process. It's healthy to let go of them so you can focus on what's best for you and your loved one today.
☐	Involve your loved one: When they're able, involve your loved one in the conversation about memory care. Honoring their voice in the decision, even in a small way, can support their sense of dignity and ease the transition.
☐	Spousal plan: If there is a spouse, decide together whether they will remain at home or move into independent or assisted living, within the same community or another community.

Section 2: Decide on Your Preferred Geographic Location

The right location makes it easier to stay closely connected. Choose the location that works best for what's important to you.

☐	Visiting frequency: Decide how often you plan to visit and choose the location that fits your needs.
☐	Your everyday "bubble": Map out the radius of your everyday life, including work, errands, and doctor visits. Look for communities within this footprint.
☐	Direction of travel: Identify which direction(s) you normally travel and prioritize communities along this path to make it easiest for you.
☐	Spouse's comfort and safety: If the spouse is going to continue living independently nearby, determine the distance that feels comfortable and safe for their drive.

Section 3: Decide on Your All-In Budget

Your all-in budget is more than the community itself. Communities are rarely priced in a way that's easy to compare. Build your guide to evaluate the variety of cost categories over time as the diagnosis progresses.

☐	All-in cost: Calculate the full cost of care today, plus what it could look like at the highest level of care your loved one may eventually need — for example, increased support with daily activities like bathing and dressing, mobility assistance, medication management, incontinence care, behavioral and cognitive support, or hospice care — so there are fewer surprises down the road.
☐	Cost-of-living increases: Ask whether the community caps its annual increases. Costs commonly rise 3 to 7 percent year over year, so read each community's contract carefully and build this into your long-term financial plan.
☐	Comparison worksheet: Create a written worksheet of questions to ask every community, covering cost, care, safety, and environment, so you can compare your options side by side. Leave space for items unique to different communities.
☐	All-inclusive rate: Ask whether the community offers an all-inclusive rate. Consider whether this is a good fit for your family, now or in the future.
☐	Set realistic expectations: Match your expectations for community 'finishes and amenities' to your budget. For example: a \$5,000-a-month community will look different than a \$10,000-a-month community. What's most important is the quality of care.
☐	Room configuration: Ask about private versus shared room options. A shared room often costs less and can offer more social stimulation, so weigh these benefits together with your loved one's needs and personality. Even if you start in a private room, as their diagnosis progresses, continue evaluating a private vs. a shared room.

Section 4: Understand the Care Components

Evaluate the team of people who will be caring for your loved one, day to day.

☐	Dementia-specific training: Learn the state minimum for training. Ask what ongoing dementia-specific training the staff receives to see how well-prepared the team is and will continue to be.
☐	Staff tenure: There is typically turnover in the staff members of care communities. Ask about staff tenure. Look for a stable team, including the executive director, wellness director, memory care director, and the caregivers who will come to know your loved one best.
☐	Meet the community team: Look beyond the tour guide to the people you'll build a lasting relationship with. These include but are not limited to the executive director, wellness director, memory care director, and direct caregiving staff. Whenever possible, schedule a few minutes to meet with one or more of them personally.
☐	Right-sized community: Consider your loved one's personality before diagnosis, including their comfort with groups and activities, to find the size of community and breadth of offerings where they're most likely to thrive.
☐	Engagement: Look for residents who appear engaged, even informally, beyond what's printed on the activities calendar. Look at the activities calendar to learn what types of activities are offered.
☐	Staffing ratios: These vary by state. Ask about the staff-to-resident ratio during the day and overnight — the two can differ significantly (e.g.: Georgia's minimum daytime guideline is one staff member per ten residents). Look for communities that go above their state minimums, day and night.
☐	Ratio flexibility: Ask how the community adjusts staffing as the residents' care needs change. This helps you know how they adapt and adjust with your loved one's needs over time.
☐	On-demand care model: Community care is 'on-demand' rather than the one-to-one model of home care. Understanding how your loved one's needs are prioritized within the caregiving team helps clarify this expectation.
☐	Medication and behavior management: Ask how the community manages medication and supports residents with adverse behaviors. Clarify if they follow a resident-centered approach to care that prioritizes individual needs, personal preferences, and daily autonomy over predetermined community routines.
☐	Medical response and clinical support: To know what kind of help is available for responding to a medical emergency, ask whether nurses are on-site or readily available.
☐	Nutrition and hydration support: Ask how the community supports nutrition and hydration, including meal options and reminders for residents who may forget to eat or drink, so this need is consistently met.

Section 5: Confirm the Details

A few extra steps of due diligence go a long way toward peace of mind.

☐	License and inspections: Confirm the community's license is current and posted. Review state inspection reports for extra peace of mind.
☐	Reference calls: Ask to speak with current or former families for a more complete picture of what to expect.
☐	Communication cadence: Ask how and how often the community updates families on your loved one's wellbeing, so you know what to expect and how any concerns will be addressed.
☐	Discharge and transfer policy: Ask what circumstances could require your loved one to move to a different level of care or leave the community, and how much notice you'd receive, so a change in their needs doesn't catch you off guard.

Section 6: Go on a Tour

Once you understand the care model on paper, visit the community to see and feel it for yourself.

☐	Resident wellbeing: During your visit, observe whether residents appear clean, cared for, and engaged.
☐	Staff warmth: Notice whether staff greet you and engage warmly with residents, including ones you weren't formally introduced to.
☐	Cleanliness: Check whether the space is clean, and notice if staff handle the unexpected with compassion and care.
☐	Physical safety and accessibility: Look for secured entrances and exits, a wander management system, handrails, non-slip flooring, an emergency call system, and features that support residents with mobility challenges, such as zero-threshold showers or sit-to-stand lifts.
☐	Memory-friendly design: Notice whether the layout is easy to navigate, living spaces allow for personal touches, and quiet areas are available for rest, so the space feels calming and easy to move through.
☐	Gut feeling: Pay attention to how the community makes you feel: warmth and a welcoming feeling are a great sign, alongside everything else you've learned.

Section 7: After You Move In

Your role shifts once your loved one moves in. Staying engaged as a care partner supports the best possible care.

☐	Care partner mindset: Embrace the shift from primary caregiver in all areas to care partner in many areas, knowing that community care is on-demand and that you remain an important part of the team.
☐	Evolving care plan: Treat the care plan as a two-way, living document, and stay actively involved in your loved one's care after they move in.

Section 8: Consider Using an Expert

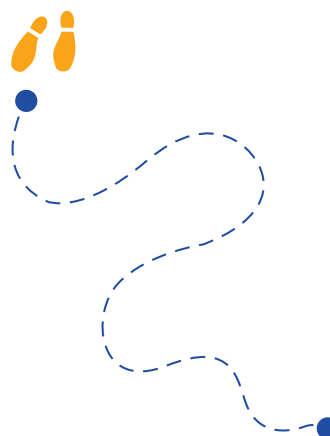
An expert's value doesn't end at move-in. A good one stays by your side before, during, and after the decision.

☐	Community knowledge: An expert who works closely with many communities can flag issues such as license standing and leadership stability before problems surface.
☐	Community comparison: An expert can help you build a thorough comparison of costs, services, staffing, and care models across communities. Since communities aren't set up to compare themselves to one another, and their terminology and offerings can vary widely. This comparison is hard to build on your own.
☐	Client network: An expert with an established client network can connect you with families across multiple communities, giving you a more complete picture beyond a single reference call.
☐	Ongoing support after move-in: Choose an expert whose support continues after move-in, checking in to help confirm the community is delivering on what was promised, and providing an additional set of eyes and ears on your loved one's care.

We're all on this journey together.



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