

# The Differences Between Nursing Homes and Senior Living Communities

When you are ready to begin looking at senior living services for yourself or a family member, getting a grasp on the different senior living offerings can be (understandably!) confusing and stressful. You might be feeling lost when exploring care options and frustrated with unclear information.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that all senior living options, including nursing homes and senior living communities, are the same; rather, senior living communities and nursing homes are built for residents with different care needs.

For your loved one seeking the next step in their retirement journey, the term “nursing home” may represent a loss of independence and privacy. To ease concerns and choose the right care option for your family member, the best place to start is with understanding the similarities and differences between a nursing home and senior living community, as well as the residents who would benefit most from each.

**STORYPOINT** GROUP

At StoryPoint Group communities, we are here for you at every step of your family’s senior living journey. This guide is meant to help clarify what a nursing home is, and what a senior living community is, so that you can make the decision that is best for your family.

# What is a nursing home?

“Nursing home” is often used as a catch-all term to describe any manner of senior living, when really, a nursing home is only one type of living option for seniors.

Nursing homes (also referred to as skilled nursing facilities) are intended to provide the highest level of medical care and assistance outside of a hospital. Nursing homes are highly regulated by state and federal government bodies and must adhere to numerous regulatory restrictions.

## What care services are provided in a nursing home?

- 24-hour skilled medical care
- Care for complex and/or unstable medical conditions, especially chronic progressive conditions like Parkinson’s disease or multiple sclerosis (MS)
- A high level of hands-on assistance and monitoring of wellness needs
- Care for residents that are permanently incontinent or disabled
- Care for residents that need continuous tube feeding
- Constant respiratory care services
- Short-term assistance and intensive therapy for those who have just transferred out of a hospital stay and need extra care before returning to their house or residence at a senior living community

## Is a nursing home the right choice for your loved one?

There could be other medical reasons not mentioned on our list that could result in your family member needing the 24/7 skilled care and monitoring provided in nursing homes. Additionally, a loved one having one of the conditions mentioned above does not automatically mean a nursing home is the best fit.

However, for seniors who need constant skilled medical assistance, a nursing home can provide the high level of support needed outside of a hospital setting.



# What is a senior living community?

Nursing homes are excellent for a parent or loved one whose medical needs call for full-time skilled nursing and medical equipment that is more frequently found in a hospital, but they can be overwhelming and restrictive for residents who aren't in need of those types of services.

Senior living communities provide a spectrum of services based on the needs of your loved one. This can range from biweekly housekeeping services to daily assistance with medications, grooming and dressing, mobility support, meal service, and 24-hour oversight. Residents in a senior living community have a greater ability to choose the assistance programs that best fit their current lifestyle.

Like nursing homes, comprehensive services are also provided in senior living communities, including visiting professionals such as podiatrists, dentists, physicians, counselors and more. For residents who have a higher level of medical needs, senior living communities also have access to medical care, often through partnerships with hospice or home health services.



## What services are provided in a senior living community?

- Medication and health care assistance
- Assistance with daily chores and grooming
- Shuttle transportation services to and from appointments, outings, etc.
- Access to classes, group activities and life enrichment programs
- Dining assistance in the form of prepared meals so residents don't have to cook (or clean up afterward)
- Easy access to on-site amenities like a fitness center and beauty salon/barbershop
- Round-the-clock oversight, direction and supervision from specially trained care staff
- Memory care services
- Short-term assistance and therapy for those who have just transferred out of a hospital stay and need extra care before returning to their residence
- Access to and collaboration with therapy partners for physical, occupational and speech therapy



### Is a senior living community the right choice for your loved one?

Senior living communities have the benefit of personalized support, and are designed to provide a continuum of care ranging from independent living to assisted living and memory care.

Residents who enter the community might need help with basic home upkeep or medication reminders. Others could simply be feeling lonely and desire more social interaction, and others still could require 24/7 oversight for memory impairments like Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. As your family member's needs change over time, they will have access to increased help and assistance with daily tasks.

# Similarities Between Nursing Homes and Senior Living Communities

Nursing homes and senior living communities are intended for residents with different levels of need for medical and personal assistance, but there are a few major similarities: medication management and wellness, and day-to-day living assistance and round-the-clock care.

## Medication Management and Wellness

Nursing homes are built to support residents who need 24/7 skilled care, including extensive medication management and a staff predominately composed of registered nurses (RN), licensed practical nurses (LPN) and certified nursing assistants (CNA).

Senior living communities also have LPNs, RNs\* and a team of caregivers who can assist residents with daily medication and overall health, including any pre-existing or developing conditions. They also communicate with your loved one's physicians to ensure optimum health care. In addition, senior living communities provide on-site wellness checks, 24-hour emergency response plans, and mobility assistance and oxygen assistance, if needed.

*\*RN representation in senior living communities varies based on need and requirement.*

## Day-to-Day Living Assistance and Round-the-Clock Care

Assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) are available at both nursing homes and senior living communities.

ADL assistance includes items like grooming, dressing and showering, while IADL assistance includes items like household tasks, such as housekeeping, meal prep, laundry and transportation.

The range of these services differs, with senior living communities often focusing on finding the correct balance of ADL and IADL support for each resident's personal needs, including options for minimal assistance to more comprehensive assistance with continuous oversight, while nursing homes cater more directly to residents who require maximum ADL and IADL assistance.\*

*\*Round-the-clock oversight, available at senior living communities, differs from the 24/7 skilled medical care at nursing homes, which often involves continuous tube feeding, straight catheters, and/or additional medical necessities related to diagnosis or condition.*

# Major Differences Between Nursing Homes and Senior Living Communities



Both nursing homes and senior living communities are built to provide daily living and health care assistance for residents. While nursing homes are designed to care for those with the most medical needs, senior living communities have some distinguishing features that allow for customized lifestyles and enrichment.

## **Apartment Living vs. Single or Shared Rooms**

Because of the high nurse-to-resident ratio needed at a nursing home, residents often share rooms or live in a single bedroom. The layout of a nursing home will more closely resemble a hospital due to the level of medical equipment and access needed by the residents' caretakers. This allows caretakers and nurses to provide residents with the 24/7 care they need. In contrast, senior living communities are often built like an upscale apartment community with individual apartments or suites (some larger to allow couples to continue to live together) with kitchens, open floor plans, patios or balconies, and additional amenities. This offers increased independence and privacy within the community. When residents like those at StoryPoint Group communities wish to stay home and read next to the fireplace or host a game night with friends, they have the space to do so.

Both nursing homes and senior living communities are built with older loved ones in mind, and will include secure features like handrails, grab bars and emergency call systems. Senior living apartments are also built to accommodate additional mobility assistance devices, such as wheelchairs and walkers, yet promote higher levels of independence and decision making.

## Dining Services

Meals and dining experiences are often at the top of the list for residents considering senior care. Nursing homes handle meal preparation and offer specialized dietary accommodation and coordination. Senior living communities, while also overseeing meal preparation and catering to specific dietary needs, tend to offer a greater variety of foods prepared by a chef and culinary team.

At StoryPoint Group communities, an Executive Chef is kept on staff to create a five-star dining experience using only fresh ingredients that are free of additives and locally sourced whenever possible. StoryPoint Group also provides flexible, ever-changing menus, which allow residents to mix-and-match foods and have their order prepared specifically to their individual preference. In addition, StoryPoint Group communities have a full-time dietitian to assist with nutritional aspects of meal service and provide education and training.

## Social Activities and Life Enrichment

Residents of senior living communities can partake in an abundance of social opportunities and activities. While nursing homes may offer limited enrichment activities based on the abilities of their residents, senior living communities organize events, art programs, fitness programs and even have amenities like on-site salons, complimentary transportation, pet care, and more.

For example, StoryPoint Group communities all have life enrichment teams who plan daily activities, including evening and weekend events, that range from classes and happy hours to shopping outings, day trips, live entertainment, and more. The team works with residents to organize activities they enjoy while encouraging them to pick up a new hobby or try something new.



## Personalized Day-to-Day Living Assistance

Senior living communities are a unique solution for loved ones whose abilities range from mostly independent and still caring for themselves to those who require assistance with day-to-day living tasks. Senior living communities allow each resident to choose the living plan that works best for them.

# Choosing What's Best for Your Loved One

Both nursing homes and senior living communities provide personal and medical support for your loved one. In order to choose the best fit for your family member, it is important to pinpoint the services and care offerings that are most needed. Doing your research (like reading this guide, to begin!) will help answer initial questions about options for senior care. Next steps might include reaching out to nursing homes or senior living communities directly to speak with an expert and discuss their offerings.

## About StoryPoint Group

StoryPoint Group is a collection of senior living communities that provides seniors and families with the support, sense of community and absolute best experiences they deserve. With communities operating across the United States, StoryPoint Group serves over 6,000 seniors in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, Tennessee and Wisconsin.

Each community offers unique senior living options with select locations offering 55+ active adult living, independent living, enhanced living, assisted living, memory care and skilled nursing options. StoryPoint Group is here to guide seniors and families along their senior living journey and form deep connections with residents to help them make the most of each day.

**To learn more about StoryPoint Group, please visit [StoryPoint.com](https://www.storypointgroup.com).**

Information provided by StoryPoint Group in addition to the following sources:

<https://www.seniorliving.org/compare/assisted-living-vs-nursing-home/>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/residential-facilities-assisted-living-and-nursing-homes>

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/how-choose-nursing-home>

<https://www.aging.com/caregiving/>

<https://www.seniormatter.com/regulation-differences-between-assisted-living-facilities-and-nursing-homes/2492348>

<https://medlineplus.gov/nursinghomes.html>