

MEMORANDUM

To: Gaius Nelson
Tom Jung

From: Lyn Bentley, National Center for Assisted Living
Anne McDermott, Assisted Living Federation of America
Doug Pace, American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
Ken Preede, American Seniors Housing Association

Re: Comments regarding the development of building and design guidelines for assisted living

Date: August 12, 2003

Background

An assisted living residence should be designed, operated, and maintained in a manner appropriate to the special needs of the population served. The residence should be located, constructed, and equipped in compliance with all applicable local codes and state and federal regulations. An assisted living setting should be designed in a way that maximizes the quality of life, independence, autonomy, safety, dignity, choice and privacy of residents. Settings should also be designed in a manner that promotes family and community involvement. The design should allow residents to interact freely with others living in the assisted living residence and with others living in the larger community.

It is a mistake to place assisted living design on a parallel track with nursing home design. Adopting a traditional institutional health care model stifles the very spirit that led to the creation of assisted living. Assisted living is a residential model and the appropriate guidelines to reference are those designed for residences (e.g., multi-family housing, bed and breakfast, or hotel/motel). Assisted living residences should be designed and modeled to recognize the individual preferences of the consumer.

Suggested focus

For this discussion, the three most important issues related to building design for assisted living are: accessibility, life safety, and a design that takes into consideration the services that are provided. ADA accessibility guidelines should be followed when developing an assisted living residence. Also, the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards present clear guidance for

developing accessible residences. It is equally important that all current life safety regulations are followed to ensure the safety of the residents.

Issues to keep in mind

There are a number of areas about which AIA must be sensitive in the development of the guidelines for assisted living:

1. Assisted living can be very different from one state to another and within each state. There are small homes that have been converted to assisted living and offer housing and services to as few as 3 or 4 individuals. Alternatively, there are large, purpose-built assisted living residences that provide housing and services for hundreds of individuals.
2. In some states, the building itself is not licensed. The entity that provides services is the licensed entity.
3. The design of assisted living residences varies, taking into consideration cultural, geographic, socio-economic and ethnic differences.
4. Laws related to the type of services that can be provided to residents of assisted living vary considerably. For example, some states allow (and one state requires) skilled nursing care to be provided; others allow only minimal medical-related services to be provided (for example, reminding that it is time for a resident to take medication). This is only one example of the variations that occur. These variations have a direct impact on design of assisted living because they suggest the variety of individuals who will live in assisted living.
5. There are purpose-designed secured units for individuals with dementia. Additionally, in some assisted living residences there are a high percentage of individuals with dementia who are not in a purpose-designed secured unit. This has a direct impact on appropriate design to facilitate easiest functioning for these residents.
6. Requirements related to the following also have significant variation based on state requirements:
 - a. Kitchenettes
 - b. Private, semi-private or multiple occupancy units
 - c. Square footage for resident rooms
 - d. Number of bathrooms and showers required
 - e. Emergency generators

- f. Heating and cooling requirements
- g. Facility size

In Summary

As the AIA develops guidelines for building design of assisted living, there is a unique opportunity to move beyond the traditional institutional health care model. One of the ways to ensure this is to focus on the resident of assisted living. As noted earlier, assisted living has become popular in part because of the residential design and the focus on individual preferences. The AIA can embrace this by providing flexibility in its guidelines to allow for the differences in assisted living residences among and within states. The focus of the AIA guidelines for assisted living should be on life safety, accessibility, and a design that takes into consideration the services that are provided.