



## The Future of Senior Housing: Independence, Choice and Support

**W**e've all seen the numbers: Seniors aged 65+ currently account for about 13% of the U.S. population (or about 40.23 million), and by 2030, that percentage is projected to increase to 23% (or about 72.09 million). *U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012*. As the leading wave of baby boomers approach 70, much has been written about how this generation's attitudes and preferences will shape the types of communities and services needed to house and care for them. These preferences are dominated by a need for independence and choice in all aspects of their lives, yet are heavily influenced by the desire to stay socially connected. Despite the fact that 84% of boomers recently studied said they planned to remain in their current homes (*MetLife Mature Market Institute Survey of Long-Term Care Costs, 2011*), occupancy levels in independent living and assisted living communities rose consistently over the last two years and the current annual rate of absorption now exceeds annual inventory growth. *National Investment Center for the Seniors Housing and Care Industry, 2012*. Senior housing owners, developers and operators are well-positioned to meet the increased inventory demands of boomers, but the challenge is determining what types of communities and services will attract this generation. Universal design concepts, home and community based services, and resident-governed communities address the boomers' desire for independence, choice and social support, and each will have a significant impact on future senior housing.

■ **Universal Design.** New multigenerational and senior



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communities can take advantage of the boomers' desire to remain in their homes by fully embracing, employing and marketing more universal design concepts. Universal design is simply designing products and residential environments that are useable and accessible by all so that the environments adapt to changing needs. It is characterized by no steps or thresholds at entry points, single-floor living, wide doorways and halls, reachable controls on appliances, light switches and electrical outlets, grab bars (or hidden supports to accommodate future grab bar installation) and higher toilets, among others. Well-integrated universal design features blend seamlessly into the living environment and are typically not apparent or noticeable unless specifically mentioned.

Universal design concepts also preserve flexibility in independent living units by

allowing owners to convert independent units to assisted units as residents move along the care continuum. It may also provide a cost-effective means to license all units in a community for assisted living, even though a number of them may be marketed as independent living. Employing universal design concepts reduces the need to move residents as their care needs increase and allows couples with differing needs to remain together in the same unit, all while potentially reducing costs for owners and providing choice for seniors.

■ **Home- and Community-Based Services.** For those seniors who choose not to move into a senior community but who require assistance with daily living tasks, HCBS providers are stepping up to fill the gap. Correctly marketed, these services appeal to seniors and their family members by allowing Mom and Dad to age in place safely, while reducing the care often provided by family members. HCBS providers include private home health care companies and PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) providers, and other models are quickly emerging. They can assist with cleaning, shopping, transportation, bathing, meals, and medications. Some hospitals have even begun providing medical care at home through hospital-at-home programs.

In addition to traditional HCBS providers, more and more operators of senior communities are exploring ways to provide services beyond their walls and are offering some of their services, as well as use of their amenities, to home-based seniors. These programs not only provide a vital social connection for the senior, but also generate additional

revenue for the operator, as well as an opportunity to establish relationships with these seniors and their family members in case their care needs change.

■ **Resident-Governed Communities.** These communities vary by name and legal structure and include co-housing and co-operative communities. Their essence (and appeal) is that they are governed solely by the residents, whether through consensus or majority vote. These communities tend to have between 20 and 60 units and are often situated near or as part of a larger mixed-use, multigenerational development. They often contain common areas and amenities that include gardens, trails, pools, and clubhouses. A common kitchen and dining area where residents frequently gather is typically at the heart of the community. The residents are responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the community, and for this reason, they tend to attract younger and more active seniors. Any desired services that aren't provided through the community can be obtained through a service referral network, such as the Village to Village Network. These communities also tend to attract seniors with common interests or backgrounds, and this sense of commonality enhances the commitment to care for one another.

Communities that allow boomers to maintain control over their lifestyles, activities and care will benefit as more and more active seniors look to downsize and spend time with others who share similar passions and pursuits. Universal design concepts, HCBS and resident-governed communities provide this control and will allow boomers the independence, choice and support they desire as they age.