



## Exploring housing options for older adults

**Madison** - The housing needs of older adults are unique and so are the solutions. "Where an older adult lives will affect his or her independence and well-being, as well as the role of family caregivers now or in the future," says Mary Brintnall-Peterson, UW-Extension program specialist in aging. "As an adult grows older, physical limitations may require choosing from a range of housing options."

These options include: staying in place by adapting the home and bringing in services; apartments; living with a relative; home sharing; Community Based Residential Facilities (CBRFs); continuing care retirement communities; and nursing homes.

The Bureau of Quality Assurance (BQA) in the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) has launched a new Web site, "Searching for Wisconsin Residential Options." This is meant to be a "one-stop shopping" place for persons looking for nursing homes or assisted living or interested in care options for remaining in their own home, such as hospice or home health, Family Care and similar programs.

The BQA Web site at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/bqaconsumer/ResidOpts/seek.htm> is organized by Wisconsin counties to help you research options for assistance with care in the home (home health or hospice agencies) and alternatives to living in the home (nursing homes, facilities serving people with developmental disabilities, assisted living, and adult family homes). Materials for each county include: directories, provider quality profiles, state contacts for questions, county-specific links and quality indicators (such as Nursing Home Compare and Consumer Information Reports).

Many older people prefer to remain at home as long as possible. In addition to the memories associated with a house, there are some practical reasons for staying.

"The home is familiar and easy to navigate," Brintnall-Peterson says. "Friends and family may be nearby, and the network of daily services and activities brings comfort and security. Fortunately, an existing home can be adapted to make it more functional and pleasant. Combining physical adaptations to the home with services such as home-delivered meals and home chore help may enable an older person to remain at home."

An independent older person may choose to live in an apartment or housing unit, either a facility designed for older adults, or a natural retirement community where most of the residents are over 60.

Home sharing arrangements range from family-like arrangements to tenant-landlord arrangement, to an employer-employee arrangement. Home sharing might involve a non-relative, a younger person, or a community professional. When considering the option of having an older adult relative live with you, ask yourself: "Would I want this person to live with me if we were not related?" Your answer is a good guide in determining whether to pursue the option of living together. Advantages might include financial savings and opportunities to share family history and companionship. Disadvantages might include a lack of privacy, conflict over money, and differences in priorities and values.

"Deciding to have an older person move in because of guilt or pressure from others may end up badly for both of you," says Brintnall-Peterson. "Consider a trial run before the older person gives up her or his own place."

Other options include Community Based Residential Facilities, which are group homes for five or

more unrelated adults, providing services beyond just room and board, such as assistance with medications, personal care and supervision. Continuing Care Retirement Communities offer a combination of housing options in one location, usually a campus where residents can move from one type of housing to another as their needs change. And, nursing home care is really a medical rather than a housing option, designed to address medical--not just personal--needs.

A series of UW-Extension publications on housing choices for older adults is available from Cooperative Extension Publications by calling 877- 947-7827; by Fax: 414-389-9130; or online at <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>.

Information is also available locally. Check telephone listings for your local County or Tribal Office on Aging, a unit of county or tribal government. Or contact the Wisconsin Home Health Hotline toll-free at 800-642-6552. Other potential sources of information are your local Housing Authority, medical center or community hospital, public health nurse, social services or Health and Human Services Department, Veterans Service office, AARP, or UW-Extension county office.

Provided by Mary Brintnall-Peterson, Ph.D., Program Specialist in Aging at the University of Wisconsin-Extension. For more information or questions, please contact Mary by phone, (608) 262-8083, or by email, [mary.brintnall-peterson@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:mary.brintnall-peterson@ces.uwex.edu) This publication is distributed through the Wisconsin Alliance for Family Caregiving web site, <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/caregiving>