

5 Steps to Choosing a Retirement Community in 2020

You've prepared for retirement by saving. Now it's time to decide where you will actually live—at home, a senior living community, with family or another dreamed-of destination. So where do you begin? There are so many options, and it can be difficult narrowing it down to the ones that will match your needs and desires the best. According to psychologists the struggle is real. It becomes an actual cognitive impairment when there is too much to choose from. It's called "overchoice." Researchers at Columbia University even tell us that having six options is better than 24 because "too much choice can be demotivating."

We want to help you get re-motivated by sharing five steps on how to choose your retirement community. Keep in mind this guide is a basic tool to help you get started. We recommend you do thorough research, consult a financial expert, and speak with family members to help in your decision-making.



Vineyard in Dundee, Oregon

Step 1: Defining What Is Important to You.

Are we really going to make you go on a long philosophical journey about the meaning of life and what's most important? No, we'll go a little easier on you. We just want you to think about what is most important to you in your "freedom years."

Do you want to make sure the burden of deciding your future care doesn't land on your kids' shoulders? Is it your long desire to never do lawn work again? Or maybe you just want to be close to your grandchildren.

Whatever IT is, we recommend taking the time to figure it out. Take the time today to think about your retirement priorities. Talk with your family and friends. Explore what your "dreams" are for the future.

Here are some of the most common priorities we hear about:

- "I want my children to be my children, not my caregivers," Friendsview Residency Planning Director Frank Engle says is a frequent comment he hears when speaking with older adults researching Life Plan Communities.
- I need financial predictability and affordability.
- Faith is so vital to me. I want a community with opportunities to grow spiritually.
- If you tell me I never have to cook or mow the lawn again, show me where to sign up! Then I have the freedom to travel the world without worry about what's going on at home.
- I'm most concerned about making sure I don't have to move to a whole new community if my health needs change. I want several levels of care available when I need them.
- My biggest hope is to continue on with my lifelong learning goals and to discover new passions and interests.



Rank your retirement priorities from 1 to 10.



Rank the following priorities from 1 to 10, with #1 being your highest priority.

- Being close to family or location in general (keeping in mind the weather as well).
- Not being a burden to my children if I experience unexpected health events.
- The cost of a community.
- Social opportunities with my neighbors.
- Lifelong learning workshops, classes, community partnerships.
- Availability of assisted living, 24-hour nursing care and memory care so I don't have to choose another community all over again if I need a different level of care.
- A faith-based community.
- A strong specialized fitness program.
- Local adventures to take in the surrounding areas.
- Size matters in living space.
- Not-for-profit status instead of a for-profit conglomerate.
- Other

If you absolutely had to whittle your options down to just two, which ones would you pick and why?

Step 2: Considering Your Finances.

For some, the topic of finances causes them to cringe, while others can whip out several spreadsheets with graphics. The rest land somewhere in between. No matter where you land, it's a discussion you can't avoid.

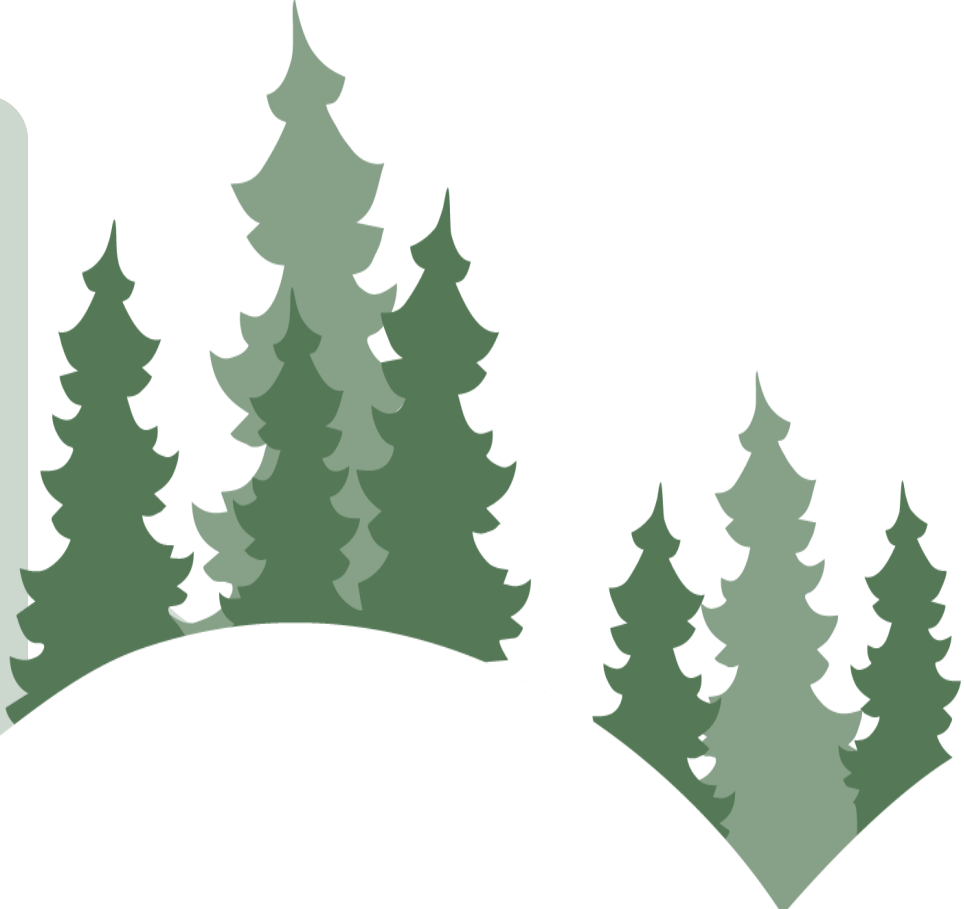
How much can you really afford for the next 20-30 years? Here are some statistics on what you can expect to spend on future health care needs and how much to save:



- The average 65-year-old couple can expect to need approximately **\$285,000** (after taxes) to cover their retirement health care expenses. The shocker? That does not include the cost of long-term care!
- A whopping 70% of adults 65 and older will need some type of long-term care.
- 68% of older adults have two or more chronic illnesses that may require extra medications and assistance.
- "A common guideline," [NerdWallet](#) states, "is that you should aim to replace 70% of your annual preretirement income."

If you are more likely to cringe than print out a spreadsheet of your savings, many communities provide a simple solution for getting you started: [Find Your Fit Calculators](#). These calculators ask questions about annual income, net worth and size of home you want to live in. This will give you a general idea of what you could possibly afford in their community.

No matter what, it is vital to know where you stand financially. Consider involving a financial planner or retirement coach. Then create a detailed report of your finances.



Here are some questions to help you navigate this step in choosing a retirement community:

1. What will your annual income and net worth be at age 65?
2. Will you need to consider a [bridge loan](#),* home equity loan or line of credit to pay for future health care needs based on the stats shared above?
3. What will your long-term care insurance really help cover?
4. Will you need to rely on family members to help subsidize your retirement dreams?

*A bridge loan is a short-term loan. It's meant to cover expenses until expected income is received. Generally the expected source of income is a pension or a home sale.

A common scenario for getting a bridge loan is having a pending home sale and wanting funds *now* for the next residence. Bridge loans can be risky though. If you aren't rushed to relocate, they probably aren't a good match for your needs. A financial pro can help you understand risks and benefits for your unique situation.

seniorliving.org

Step 3: Now It's Time to Settle on Locations and Your Favorite Type of Community!

You've learned a little bit about what is most important to you and what your finances look like. This is the perfect time to choose a few communities to research.

First, let's look at what your values reveal about location. If you made it a top priority to live near your family, then you can narrow it down to a couple of cities close to them. If residing near or in a big city is more important, then which part of the country fits your desires?

Keeping in mind your values, what cities do you want to begin looking into?

City #1 _____

City #2 _____

City #3 _____

Your values from Step 1 can also help you pinpoint what *type* of community best suits you. There are five basic types. Circle the ones that best fit your hopes for future care.

Age-Restricted Communities: offers some activities and events, socialization, no long-term care

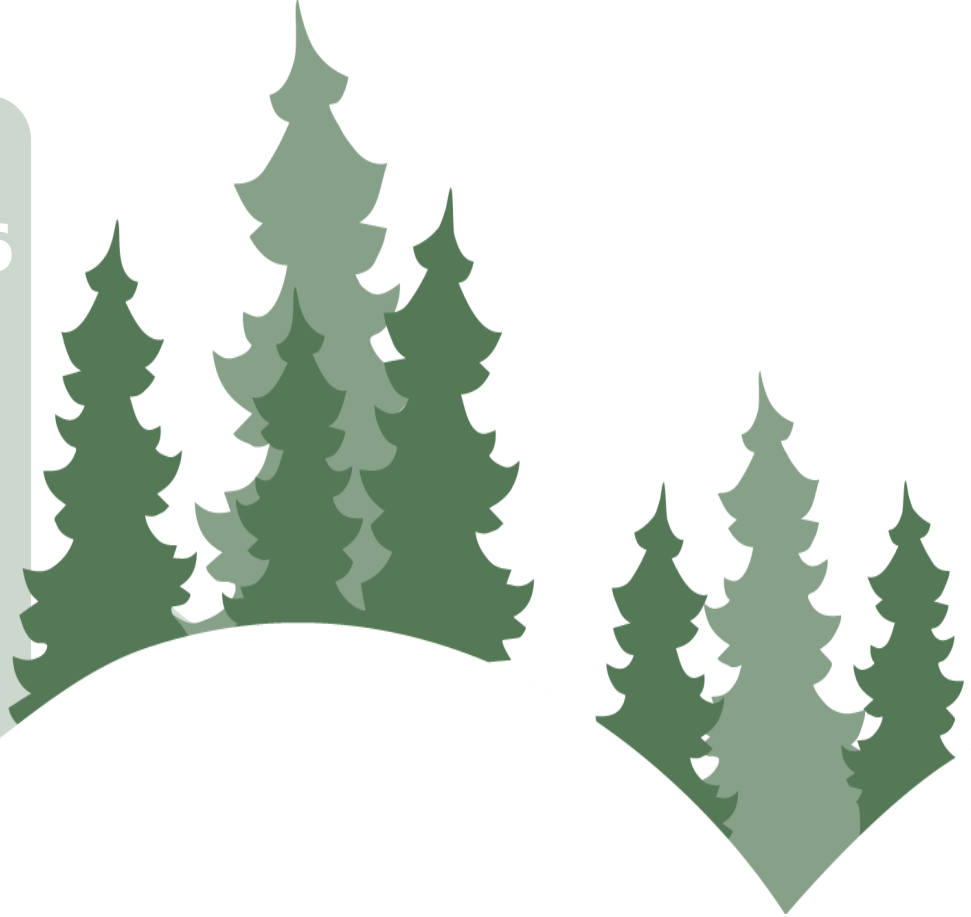
Independent Living: focuses on active aging with diverse programming, lifelong learning, no long-term care

Assisted Living: emphasis on various levels of assistance needed for daily living activities, specialized programming and events, often has memory care but not always

Nursing Homes: provide 24-hour nursing care, some rehabilitation, long-term care and some programming

Life-Plan (also known as Continuing Care Retirement Communities): offers everything that other independent living, assisted living and 24-hour nursing communities provide, with a focus on life-care for all levels of need

It's finally
time to pick 6
communities
for you to
research and
visit.



Do a simple internet search that fits both your location and type preferences. Jot down possible communities to learn more about:

Community #1 _____

Community #2 _____

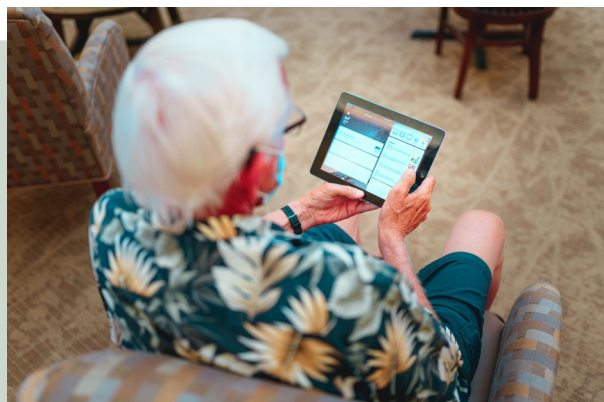
Community #3 _____

Community #4 _____

Community #5 _____

Community #6 _____

You did it! Now let the real research begin. Read all six websites thoroughly. Be sure to have pen and paper to write down questions that come to mind as you are reading.



Step 4: Visiting the 6, Even If It's Virtual.



After you've thoroughly read the websites of your top choices, you should have a few possible communities to speak with in person or virtually. One of them may even be your final pick. What's most important is that you schedule a visit, even if it's a virtual tour. Whether you can visit in person or not depends on the restrictions in each city you are considering. Here is where to start:

Call the community and see if they are giving tours. If so, schedule a minimum of one, hopefully more. Consider an unscheduled drop-in as well. Speak with residents and take plenty of notes! Be sure to follow all safety protocols to keep yourself and others safe.

If the community is restricting visitations ask for a virtual tour or a virtual meeting with staff. Request a phone conversation with one or two residents to get their thoughts on the community.

For virtual or in-person visits, keep these questions in mind:

- Do the community's mission and values match your own? And how are those values lived out by staff and residents?
- What is its reputation in the wider community?
- Are there various levels of care, including care-at-home or aging-in-place options?
- **What happens if you outlive your resources or run out of funds? Will you be evicted?**
- What happens if you experience a health situation? Will you need to move?
- Is there a waitlist, and is occupancy high?
- Are you able to meet and visit with current residents and get their insight?
- Is it a for-profit or not-for-profit?
- What is the staff turnover?
- **Is it a resident-led community with a strong resident association?**

- Are there ways to expand your life in the community and local town?
- Are there several generations of residents who have retired there (children of parents or even grandchildren who had grandparents who lived there at some point)?
- Are there a lot of floor plan options?
- What happens if a community acquires new owners? Will it change the status (not-for-profit or for-profit) or licenses and available levels of care?



Kathryn Saunders, Friendsview Community Life Director suggests that “It is important to be mindful of ways to connect in community. In what ways can you get involved? Also be open to finding out where to go when you have questions or need support. Do they have a Social Worker, spiritual care staff or other support roles on site?” Additional support roles can include resident services, counselors, or an active and engaged resident association and strong resident council.

After each visit or virtual tour ask, yourself this:

1. How did the visit/virtual tour make you feel?
2. If you had no other choice, could you see yourself living there?
 Yes No
3. What were some of the pros?
4. What were some cons?
5. What were your two favorites?

6. Should you research other communities instead?
 Yes No

Step 5: Get on the Waitlist or Intent List and Participate!



**To speak with a Friendsview
Residency Planning Counselor**

Contact us at:

503-538-3144

info@friendsview.org

You've thought about your desires for retirement. You've considered your finances. You've visited some communities as much as you are able. The next step may surprise you. Get on the waitlist of more than one. Even if you aren't completely sure you will move to a community, many have wait lists that can give you access to deeper connections in the community, and provide a little bit of security for the future.

The fee for joining the waitlist varies and can range from a nominal fee all the way to a sizable deposit. Some communities have a long list, and you could be waiting a couple of years to get your preferred floor plan. Joining allows for extra time to plan but still holds your place in line. At Friendsview, we call it the [intent list](#). Joining it doesn't mean you are making a major life decision to move into the community. It simply expresses an interest. It's another way of saying, "I like you and want to know more." It also allows for staff to reach out when your preferred home becomes available.

Choosing a retirement community takes work. We hope that this simple guide got you started. If you want more tools on planning your future care, we'd love to talk with you!