

# Assisted Living in Massachusetts

Assisted living emphasizes aging with dignity and choice, while offering a high-quality lifestyle in a supportive, non-clinical environment. Residents transitioning from living independently choose assisted living for a variety of reasons, often needing help with certain activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, grooming, or mobility. Some of these individuals live in special memory care units that support those living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.

For older adults who could use a helping hand but don't need the intensive, medically focused care of a skilled nursing facility, assisted living residences offer community, connection, and fulfillment. With loneliness on the rise among older adults and with an increasingly aging population, assisted living supports residents in staying active, participating in wellness activities, developing new hobbies, as well as making new friends and building community.

Aging presents challenges that evolve over time, but assisted living is rooted in the value that older adults – even in very old age or with severe memory impairment – shouldn't be defined by their medical needs. Assisted living promotes independence and wellness, supporting residents with daily hygiene, managing medications, eating healthy and regularly, keeping a consistent sleep schedule, and staying physically active. Some assisted living residences also provide basic health services. Staff develop an individualized assessment and service plan for each resident, revised over time as needs change.

## Assisted Living Fast Facts

- **273:** Number of assisted living residences across the Commonwealth
- **17,000+:** Older adults in assisted living in Massachusetts
- **\$6 billion:** Assisted living annual contributions to the Massachusetts economy
- **Median Unit Fees:**
  - **Traditional Care:** \$4,228 – \$9,225
  - **Special Care:** \$7,218 – \$10,886

## Policy

Following the passage of *An Act to Improve Quality and Oversight of Long-Term Care* in 2024, assisted living residences will soon be able to offer several basic health services, such as injections, application of drops and ointments, oxygen management, and simple wound care, directly from assisted living nurses. Previously, these could only be provided by a visiting nurse or family member, straining budgets and family resources. Mass-ALA advocated for this change to ease responsibilities for families and provide peace of mind. Currently, we are engaging stakeholders for the appropriate promulgation of the regulations that will formally allow for the expanded services to be provided to older adults living in assisted living residences in support of physical and mental health.

## Choosing Assisted Living

The cost of assisted living varies with each assisted living community and depends on amenities and services provided. On average, an assisted living apartment is half the cost of a private nursing home room.

While approximately 90% of assisted living residents in Massachusetts pay privately, certain long-term care insurance policies may cover some of the cost. Some assisted living communities also offer financial assistance programs and other creative pricing structures, and limited public funds cover a portion of assisted living fees for eligible individuals through programs such as Program for All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), Senior Care Options (SCO), and Group Adult Foster Care (GAFC).

Mass-ALA advocates for state-level policy changes, such as a Frail Elder Waiver expansion to cover assisted living, that would provide more options and affordability to put assisted living within reach of a greater number of older adults.

## About Mass-ALA

The Massachusetts Assisted Living Association (Mass-ALA) is a not-for-profit association dedicated to professionally operated assisted living residences in Massachusetts that provide housing and services for individuals with varied needs and income levels. Mass-ALA serves as the voice of assisted living in Massachusetts, providing information and education, and advocating on behalf of our members and the older adults they serve. Mass-ALA promotes a model of care which treats all residents with dignity, provides privacy, and encourages independence and freedom of choice.