



Senior Cohousing

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The baby boomer generation will increase through the next few decades, from 12.4 percent to 20 percent by 2030 (Durrett, 2009). These future older adults are redefining what it means to retire and live longer, especially when it comes to living independently (Freedman, 2002).

A significant shift in national demographics has expanded the need for housing designed for seniors, including continuing care retirement communities, assisted living, or nursing homes.

Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC): A facility where residents can live independently in cottages or apartments, then move to assisted living or nursing care within the same facility as their need for assistance increases.

Independent Living: Living in a house or apartment and caring for ones own needs without assistance. In the context of CCRCs, residents live in independent facilities but have an option to move to an on campus Assisted Living or Nursing Home as their needs arise.

Assisted Living Facility: A facility where residents are provided with minimal to moderate assistance with activities of daily living (ADL).

Nursing Home: A facility where residents are provided with extensive medical care and round the clock attention to activities of daily living.

A more recent option for older adults is **senior cohousing**, which offers community support not found in other types of senior housing.

What is Senior Cohousing?

The objective of cohousing is to develop a strong sense of community through the design of living arrangements that promote physical, social and emotional well being, avoiding loneliness and isolation. Senior cohousing promotes connectedness between people (Cannuscio, Block, & Kawachi, 2003).

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<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

Senior cohousing specifically focuses on adults age 55 and older and accommodates varying levels of physical abilities and financial status (Durrett, 2009; Oakcreek Cohousing Community, 2009). Senior cohousing is designed for independent living in homes owned by the residents. However, a senior cohousing community provides more than just shelter to older adults. It is also designed to promote social interaction. For example, residents engage in daily activities in the common house, located in the center of the community. The common house is a key factor in senior cohousing. It is designed to accommodate group activities essential to daily life. Here, residents may share meals, work on crafts, play games, or just engage in conversation. The common house is designed by residents to suit their specific needs and interests.

Charles Durrett, author of *The Senior Cohousing Handbook: A Community Approach to Independent Living* developed six essentials parameters associated with co-housing (See Figure 1).

- Participatory Process:** Residents are involved from the beginning in planning and designing their community.
- Deliberate Neighborhood Design:** The design of the physical layout encourages community interaction.

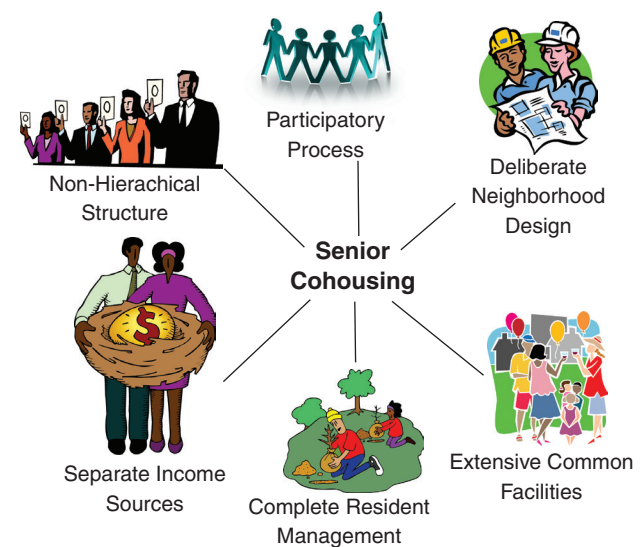


Figure 1. Durrett's Six Components for Successful Senior Cohousing.

3. **Extensive Common Facilities:** Supplements the private living areas and promotes community and social interactions.
4. **Complete Resident Management:** All residents of the community are responsible for decision making of common concerns.
5. **Non-Hierarchical Structure:** The decision making responsibilities are shared among all adults of the community.
6. **Separate Income Sources:** Residents maintain their independent incomes.

Why is Cohousing Relevant to Seniors?

Affordability, social support, and continuance of life offered in senior cohousing communities are more in-line with contemporary lifestyles. Utilizing the resources within the community provides a neighborhood in which all residents can sustain their own way of life while aging.

In a senior cohousing community, residents care for and assist each other by sharing individual strengths while living independently (McCamant & Durrett Architects, 2009).

For instance, one resident may enjoy cooking while another resident may enjoy gardening. Using these strengths, the residents may trade cooking for gardening and vice-versa.

Residents may choose to participate in community meals several times per week. Residents may attend every meal or none at all. It is their choice.

Instead of twenty lawnmowers for twenty households, the community as a whole might share a few. By decreasing the needs of multiple items like lawnmowers, the entire community is promoting sustainability and sharing the cost of lawn-care among many other resources.

These examples reinforce that senior cohousing means living independently without loneliness and isolation.

So Now What? How do You Get Started with Senior Cohousing?

Senior cohousing has been popular in Europe. It is gaining momentum in the United States with communities located in California, Colorado, and Virginia. A group of Oklahoma residents has built a senior cohousing community.

“In the U.S., a cohousing community typically begins when a small group of people, a single family, a group of friends, or even an individual, decides that cohousing might just be for them” (Durrett, 2009). The Cohousing Association of the United States and Cohousing Partners both offer online resources for developing a senior cohousing community from scratch, or finding an existing cohousing community to join.

Contacts can be established through local entities such as churches, senior centers, College of Older Adults or community centers. These resources can be used to network with others about senior cohousing developments that are planned or already underway locally.

Suggested Websites

- The Cohousing Association of the United States: www.cohousing.org
- Cohousing Partners: www.cohousingpartners.com
- Cyber Parent: <http://cyberparent.com/senior-cohousing/index.html>
- Senior Cohousing: <http://seniorcohousing.com>

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