



## Senior Cohousing: Creating Connections and Maintaining Autonomy

Mihyun Kang  
Associate Professor

Gina Peek  
Assistant Professor and Extension Housing and  
Consumer Specialist

Emily Roberts  
Assistant Professor

### Older Adults and Living at Home

#### Aging in Place

Aging in place is the ability to live at home without help for as long as possible. Modifications to the home may make aging in place feasible. Aging in place can also refer to relocating to housing that provides a supportive environment for aging.

#### From Loneliness to Connections

Many older adults age in place. Some live alone. At times, older adults living alone experience loneliness and isolation. Not being able to participate in activities with others can also increase loneliness. Without connections, loneliness can occur. Changing or ending relationships can increase loneliness.

- Emotional loneliness is lack of close attachment (example: loss of a spouse)
  - Social loneliness is lack of an adequate circle of friends
- Loneliness can affect quality of life. Living with others can create connections that lead to community. Community is important for older adults.

#### Autonomy

Autonomy is the state of being self-governing. Older adults that are autonomous are able to make their own decisions. Self-governance is important for independence. Older adults want choices. Choices lead to independence. Many older adults want to remain independent. Housing choice can support independence.

### A New Way of Living

Cohousing is a type of planned housing. In cohousing, older adults remain connected and independent. Aging in place in a cohousing community is an alternative to aging in place in a traditional single family home. Cohousing communities offer a place where residents can bond with each other. Cohousing can support social, emotional and physical well-being.

### Features of Cohousing

Communities feature private homes, common houses and shared outdoor spaces. The six elements of cohousing

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets  
are also available on our website at:  
<http://osufacts.okstate.edu>

are shown in Figure 1. (Durrett, 2009; SAGE Cohousing International, 2015; The Cohousing Association of the United States, 2014).

Shared beliefs may bring people together to form a community. Some communities may incorporate all or some cohousing elements. In the U.S., senior cohousing communities include those shown in Figure 1. For more information about these communities, visit their websites.

- Glacier Circle Community (Davis, CA)
- Wolf Creek Lodge (Grass Valley, CA)
- Silver Sage Village (Boulder, CO)
- Washington Village (Boulder, CO)
- Valverde Commons (Taos, NM)
- Oakcreek Community (Stillwater, OK)
- Elderspirit Community (Abingdon, VA)

#### Connections and autonomy

Cohousing communities encourage a sense of belonging. Residents are key players. Involvement with others adds value to later life.

### Conclusion

Quality of life is important to older adults. Quality of life can help older adults live longer, healthier lives. Cohousing can connect and support older adults. Living in a cohousing community can add value to these important years. Adults are able to successfully age in place in this new way of living. Consider senior cohousing as an option for aging in place.

#### Reviewers:

Llola Matthews, Oklahoma Home and Community Education, Inc.  
Brenda Miller, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Gale Mills, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service  
Lisa Wiebe, Integral Living Solutions, LLC

#### References

- Durrett, C. (2009). *The senior cohousing handbook: A community approach of independent living* (2nd ed.). Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New Society Publishers.
- SAGE Cohousing International. (2015). *Characteristics of cohousing*. Retrieved November, 2015, from <http://www.sagecohousingadvocates.org/what-is-senior-cohousing/cohousing-characteristics/>
- The Cohousing Association of the United States. (2014). *What is cohousing?* Retrieved November, 2015, from [http://www.cohousing.org/what\\_is\\_cohousing](http://www.cohousing.org/what_is_cohousing)



### Participatory design process

Residents help plan and design the community with the help of cohousing professionals.



### Neighborhood designed for interaction

The site plan is designed to promote communication and interaction among residents.



### Common facilities

Residents use a common house and other shared spaces that are separate from their own private homes for meals, gardening, and other activities.



### Resident management

Residents take care of the entire operation of their own community.



### Residents share decision making

Residents share equal power in decision making and operating the community.



### No shared economy

Residents keep separate incomes.

**Figure 1. Features of Cohousing.**

Oklahoma State University, in compliance with Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 as amended, and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Higher Education Act), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other federal and state laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, genetic information, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, or status as a veteran, in any of its policies, practices or procedures. This provision includes, but is not limited to admissions, employment, financial aid, and educational services. The Director of Equal Opportunity, 408 Whitehurst, OSU, Stillwater, OK 74078-1035; Phone 405-744-5371; email: eeo@okstate.edu has been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies; Director of Equal Opportunity. Any person (student, faculty, or staff) who believes that discriminatory practices have been engaged in based on gender may discuss his or her concerns and file informal or formal complaints of possible violations of Title IX with OSU's Title IX Coordinator 405-744-9154.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director of Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. This publication is printed and issued by Oklahoma State University as authorized by the Vice President, Dean, and Director of the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and has been prepared and distributed at a cost of 42 cents per copy. 1215 GH