

Demystifying categories of senior living



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Seniors and Aging

The term “senior living” can take on many meanings. I often get asked to explain the differences between the various forms of living accommodations for older adults. Let’s explore the categories in the private and public sectors.

Private Options

In Quebec, retirement homes are known as résidences privée pour aînés, or RPAs. They will have features such as healthcare services; a dining room with meal services; recreational activities; housekeeping services; and an emergency call-for-help system in each apartment.

Amenities can vary greatly, with some senior living communities having very few features to those that have a full array of offerings, including a pool, fitness centre, hair salon, movie theatres, depanneur, pharmacy and even bowling alleys and golf simulators. RPAs can range from smaller, home-type environments with anywhere from four to 20 residents, up to large senior living communities with hundreds of apartments. RPAs can be categorized into Independent Living, Assisted Living, and Long-Term Care.

Independent Living senior communities are similar to regular apartments

or condominiums. Units will have a full kitchen. Rooms will range from studios to two-bedroom apartments. There are a few RPAs that will even have a three-bedroom option. However, they are very rare.

Independent Living RPAs are not to be mistaken for 55+ apartments, which are typically standard apartments with no healthcare services or dining rooms. The latter is ideal for older adults that are fully independent and can benefit from some of the common areas and occasional social activities.

Assisted Living is a helpful option for seniors who are active but need help with certain daily activities. Assisted Living communities typically include meals, housekeeping, laundry and medication management. They will also provide healthcare services such as assistance with bathing, dressing and toileting if required. Some care floors will also provide one-person transfers. Many Independent Living communities will have an Assisted Living care floor in the same building, which is a popular choice for individuals or couples that wish to minimize transitions as care needs evolve over time.

Long Term Care residences can offer high levels of care. The general rule of thumb is that Assisted Living communities can only offer up to a maximum of three hours of daily care. Once care levels exceed this threshold, then a long-term care residence would be more appropri-



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ate. There are an increasing number of RPA's that are offering long term care services since most of the private nursing homes (CHSLD's) have been converted to the public system.

Public Options

The only public options in Quebec are long-term care residences, more commonly referred to as nursing homes. There are several designations for public residences including:

- Centre d'hébergement et de soins de longue durée (CHSLD). This is the highest level of care homes in Quebec.
- Ressources Intermédiaires (RI). These are long term care seniors' residences for slightly more autonomous people not requiring a CHSLD.
- Maisons des aînés are the latest type of long-term care residences in the public

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sector. These are modern housing units offering a more personalized approach to long-term care. Credit goes to the government of Quebec for this leading initiative. However, these types of residences are few and far between, especially in Greater Montreal.

My last column in *The Suburban* (April 2 edition) provided details on how to get admitted into a public residence, which must be pursued through your local CLSC. The private sector and government funded residences are adapting to the needs of an aging population. We have seen nice progress from pre-pandemic levels. However, we must continue to raise the bar in responding to the ever-increasing requirements and care needs of our seniors.

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