

## Plan Ahead to Age Successfully In Your Home



**Jodie Malamas, MSW**  
Administrator of Arizona OnCall

**N**umerous studies show that the majority of Senior Adults would prefer to live independently in their family home rather than move in with a relative or to an Assisted Living Community. Although maintaining independence is valued by most, few take the action steps necessary to be successful. In fact, many, without knowing, work against their own goals and end up sabotaging their independence. Seniors are often reluctant to consider recommendations or resources available to support their efforts toward independence. They tend to “put off” thinking about the issue altogether until they experience a medical event that compromises their abilities. All too often, seniors find themselves making hasty and costly decisions about very important matters, including where they will live to get the care and assistance they need after experiencing a change in condition or physical decline. Equally troubling, family members often find themselves challenged with and ill-prepared for finding the

appropriate “placement” for their elderly loved one. All this typically occurs while simultaneously struggling with the real emotions that accompany medical events and related decline.

The truth is that as we age we are more likely to experience both physical and mental decline. Accepting that there are real challenges to living alone or independently as you grow older, is the first step in planning and preparing for success. It is my hope that after reading this article, Senior Adults, with the support of their family and friends, will learn tips and make changes that increase their chances of remaining independent so they can successfully age in their home.

“Independent living” does not mean that an individual must do everything on their own without any assistance or help. In fact, my message would be quite the contrary. To increase the likelihood of remaining independent, it is recommended that seniors seek assistance with the things that have become increasingly difficult for them to do safely alone. Recognizing limits and risks and getting appropriate assistance may be what keeps seniors from becoming run down or ending up in a hospital emergency room. Assistance with daily living activities, known as “non-medical care”, can include anything from companionship and errand running

to light housekeeping and meal preparation. Personal care, such as showering and dressing, can also be provided to help maintain safety while maintaining independence. Although non-medical care is typically not covered by Medicare or other insurances, having ones needs met in this manner may be the one thing that allows an elderly individual to successfully age at home. It may also be key to avoiding the physical, financial and emotional strains associated with a medical event that could have been avoided if the appropriate assistance was in place. (If financing this type of assistance is a concern, there are local and state programs that may be available to assist. Talk with your medical provider, staff at your local Senior Center, or a geriatric care manager to learn more about what type of programs are available.)

Among older adults, falls are the number one cause of fractures, hospital admissions for trauma, loss of independence and injury death.” (NIHSeniorHealth) Whether a senior lives in a private home or an independent living community, making some changes to the surroundings can help in reducing risks and increasing the chances of remaining both healthy and independent longer. Some changes may be simple, like adding equipment, such as walkers, life alert devices, grab bars and shower

*cont'd on page 10*

## Plan Ahead to Age Successfully In Your Home

*cont'd from page 8*

chairs, while others may require a contractor and home renovations. Regardless, prevention is an imperative part of being successful at maintaining independence. Start outside of the home and work your way in to identify safety risks so that you can plan for and make the needed changes that optimize your chances of successfully remaining at home.

Regardless of age, I recommend that people prioritize their health and well-being. This message is uniquely important for seniors attempting to maintain independent living. The realities of aging, coupled with living alone, often presents real challenges to social, physical and emotional well-being. Proper nutrition and rest, age appropriate exercise, socialization and regular medical care becomes increasingly important as we age. Get to know what is available to assist right in your own community. Many senior centers have a full schedule of activities as well as health screenings, nutrition classes and counseling options. Many grocery stores have delivery programs that enable seniors to continue to eat a healthy diet of fresh fruits and vegetables rather than eating out of cans. Discounted transportation services can assist in getting seniors to important medical appointments. Learn about these and the various other types of resources available to seniors who continue to live independently.

An important message to share

with all seniors is that they can, and should, take an active role in their own medical care. Develop relationships with your physicians and see them regularly. Keep a daily journal of physical conditions, any changes and all medical events so that you can keep your physicians accurately informed and work collaboratively with them in developing optimal health care plans. Understand your care plan, including your medications. An understanding of what each medication is for and how it contributes to your health and wellbeing improves the likelihood that you will make it a priority. If you find that it is a struggle to take medications properly, look into getting an organization or dispensing system that is right for your unique needs. There are numerous kinds available that can help with both remembering to take medications and ensuring that they are taken as prescribed.

As with any challenge that you may face, do not be afraid to recognize the need for support or assistance and seek out the people and services that can set you up for success. Talk with family and friends that are supportive. Openly discuss your goals of remaining at home. Either alone or with the assistance of a legal representative, physician or geriatric social worker, complete the "Advanced Planning" paperwork that identifies representatives for both your medical and financial matters in the event that you cannot represent

yourself. I also encourage seniors to share their thoughts and plans for "end of life" medical care. Know that you have the right to make decisions for yourself and can plan ahead for situations where you may be unable to make your thoughts or desires known.

Remember, lack of planning does not mean that there is nothing to plan ahead for. Consider aging at home a goal to be achieved rather than merely a hope or a wish. If you find that assisted living may be right for you, be active in planning for that, too. People are more likely to have fulfilling, healthy, and successful senior years if they plan ahead, share their plans and obtain the support of family, friends and physicians.

For more tips and information on "Successfully Aging in Your Home" or to talk with a geriatric care consultant, contact Centrix Health Resources at 480-268-2690. ■