

FEATURE

THE CHANGING FACE OF SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES

SENIOR LIVING HOUSING IS A HYBRID OF TRADITIONAL REAL ESTATE AND A FULL-SERVICE HOTEL, WITH THE ADDED COMPLEXITY OF HEALTHCARE.
By: Leandra Monteiro

The current Covid pandemic and health crisis has completely left the elderly at wit's end. Struggling for basics, managing without house help and fretting about handling any medical emergencies have intensified the need for safety, wellbeing, and companionship.

While several elderly care facilities in different shapes and forms exist in the country, it is at best a fragmented ecosystem. It is both urgent and imperative that we focus on the fundamentals of these specialized housing to support our seniors, especially in the times such as now.

RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES - THE BALANCING ACT

The active senior living communities are much like other apartment complexes except, they have minimum age requirements for residents and different amenities, while the assisted living facilities provide help with daily tasks. In a way, senior living projects are not traditional real estate but actually healthcare housed in real estate. Even in normal times, caring for the elderly is not always easy, and due to COVID-19, it has become even more challenging.



Elaborating on their initiatives and measures, **Tara Singh Vachani, Executive Chairman, Antara Senior Living** briefed, "We know that seniors are the most

vulnerable segment to get impacted by the pandemic. So, we decided to initiate lockdown protocols a week before it was officially announced since the virus had started to spread in various pockets in India by then. This allowed us ample time to prepare the residents mentally. We made sure that the residents were reassured of the safety precautions being taken by the management throughout. We also organised special sessions to maintain the happiness index at the community and engaged them in fun activities which they could participate in, from the safety of their apartments. Our resident doctor and the head chef worked together to devise a food menu to boost the immunity and nutritional health of the residents."

As a matter of fact, senior Living projects have the advantage of being part of a community and having access to critical services like an emergency response system or

The rush of developers into senior housing in last few years had been based on the straightforward fact of improving life expectancy that will see a rapid rise in the customer base of greying population over the years. As the current discourse is centred more on taking advantage of its demographic dividend, it is also important to take necessary steps to ensure the health and comfort of the older population alongside deriving economic value.



having essentials delivered at their doorstep. As **Ankur Gupta, Joint MD, Ashiana housing ltd** expressed,

"Since all the seniors are in a single cluster, understanding their wants and requirements becomes simplified as they are mostly similar in nature. This helps us in knowing what services are required by each one of them, be it placing a maid whenever required, serving fresh food on time, scheduling activities for their mental and cognitive development, etc. Hence, I believe that there is far more convenience in offering a tailor-made service in a senior living project than any other housing complex which may have to confront multiple demands of various nature."

Indeed, nearly all the senior care facilities in India have set tight protocols, and are following them with utmost discipline. Like the healthcare establishments, these communities too are at the frontline just like the hospitals.

Neha Sinha, Co-founder and CEO of Epoch Elder Care explained "The needs of



Over the years, Tier 2 & 3 markets such as Pune, Goa, Dehradun Ahmedabad, Coimbatore and, Lucknow have witnessed a steady rise in demand. Factors such as lesser congestion, availability of large land parcels and enhanced access to healthcare are also driving the demand for Senior Living facilities in these cities and other like, Dehradun, Uttarakhand as well.

elders are very specialized- whether it is with respect to their mental or physical wellbeing. Senior Living projects are better equipped

to cater to the senior citizen's population, since they are focused on these needs, and provide specialized care with expertise. Both, the physical and mental health of the elderly are equally important during this pandemic, and Senior Living projects are focusing on the overall well-being of the elders as well as ensuring that they remain protected from the outside world. Whether it is early identification of a disease condition, a life threatening situation, a fall, assistance in daily activities such as bathing, eating etc or social engagement- every single thing is thought of and catered to."

REDESIGNING SENIOR LIVING

In the post pandemic world, senior friendly design and architecture will be lot more important and critical in ensuring the safety and security of the residents while keeping them engaged and active.

Currently, senior living companies have enhanced their design features such as creating sanitization tunnels and common spaces adapted to follow the norms for social distancing. On the infrastructure front, facilities have embraced technology by

WHAT IS NEEDED?

Sectoral Status - Need to recognize elder care as a sector with appropriate regulations, policy support, tax structures, availability of subsidized financing and appropriate governance mechanisms. India has had a National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) announced in 1999 much before many of its global peers. Additionally, adoption of best practices from countries like Japan who have found well-designed solutions on how to address an ageing population can aid the transformation of the senior care

segment into a sector.

Sustainable Income - It is important to create sustainable incomes to fund the silver years of the elders. As the idea of senior care finds wider acceptance and adoption in India, financial stability will be crucial to afford these services. Appropriate financial instruments, insurance policies, to cover - health at home, rehabilitation and senior home expenses can provide adequate financial support to the elders.

Quality Standards - Quality and safety of senior living facilities

remain a challenge in India. Establishing and implementing quality and certification standards across elderly care facilities will be key to ensuring standards of safety, and security of elders.

Skilled Caregivers- Ensuring availability of skilled caregivers including fostering community care models is important. Further, establishing geriatric care as a vertical both in nursing and medicine to address the varied healthcare needs of elders will ensure a healthy living environment for them.

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