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Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging Identifies 10 Senior Living Trends
Choice, Control, Connections, Convenience Top Older Adults' Desires

Evanston, Ill. (February 1, 2011) — Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging derived 10 top senior living trends after surveying 600 senior living organizations representing more than 1,000 communities from 15 states. Trends indicate that older adult living communities and care providers must anticipate and cater to the personal needs and interests of residents by offering options beyond the basics and include more comprehensive provision for in-home care.

Trends are identified to allow developers and providers to address opportunities and create innovations to help shape the future of senior living relative to services, programs, amenities, and design. The ultimate goal is to create environments and lifestyles where people *want* to live, not where they *need* to live.

Based on survey results, the following are the top 10 emerging senior living trends.

1. Senior living residents are choosing to “age in place.” Residents will seek services and programs that will support “aging well” in place. These include home care and home health services, onsite health clinics, and geriatric assessment programs.

2. Health and wellness programs and services are top priorities. According to the survey, the percentage of senior living communities offering wellness programs for residents and staff will nearly double (from 40 percent to 78 percent) in the next five years. Fitness programs, wellness coaches, spa services, aquatics, saunas, and steam showers will be important features for the next generations of residents. A significant percentage of respondents are also interested in developing partnerships with health systems and fitness centers to meet the growing demands for health and wellness services.

3. Technology will be key to promoting and sustaining independent lifestyles among senior living residents. Senior living providers are developing residences equipped with advanced “smart home” technology to provide safe environments where residents may maintain a high level of self-sufficiency as they age well. Additionally, residents will expect easy access to wireless internet throughout the community and more providers are anticipating the need to provide computer training for future residents.

4. Resident programs must focus on meaningful activities and intellectual stimulation. Resident participation in lifelong learning opportunities will continue to grow. Survey results found that three out of 10 respondents are currently in some form of partnership with colleges or universities. Within the next five years, it is projected that eight of 10 respondents will partner with academic institutions. Additionally, senior living providers are planning to significantly expand web-based educational offerings to residents.

5. Senior living providers will provide services “beyond” their four walls. Senior living providers are going to be expanding “beyond” their four walls and offer services and programs to older adults living in their own homes. The majority of older adults live in their own homes and the trend is expected to continue as boomers age. To that end, providers are planning to expand services to community-dwelling older adults including adult day programs, services to the homebound, and in-home care services. Social connections are just as important to one’s health, and thus programs to prevent social isolation are important for community-dwelling older adults. For example, Mather’s—More Than a Café model provides services and programs for older adults in a single location, serving as a dining venue and as a place for social engagement, learning, wellness activities, and community resources.



6. Long-term care is transforming to support person-directed care and meaningful relationships.

For senior living communities that provide the full continuum of living options, supporting the needs and preferences of residents who require long-term care is a high priority. The Green House® long-term care model is an innovative effort to “de-institutionalize” long-term care settings and practice. Green House homes are self-contained residences for six to 10 older adults who receive comprehensive care by a self-managed work team and clinical support staff. The homelike environment and person-directed model of care maximizes residents’ abilities, offers meaningful and engaging programs, and empowers staff. According to the survey, the projected growth in Green House and other small house models over the next five years will be significant. Less than six percent of senior living communities currently offer one of these models, but nearly one-third of respondents predict they will in the next five years.

7. Residents are demanding “customized services” driving the need for senior living providers to offer a customer-driven portfolio of services and programs.

This trend indicates that senior living providers will need to focus efforts on offering “specialty” programs such as memory care, palliative or hospice programs, and rehabilitation or restorative services. Additionally, residents will expect more value for fees they pay for services, programs, and amenities. As educated consumers, residents will expect senior living communities to effectively manage expenses such as adopting energy-efficient environments.

8. Language, perceptions, and attitudes of care providers must be updated to reflect changing older adults’ needs and expectations.

A senior living community could have “life coach” rather than an “activity director.” The old model of an “activity director” is not going to have the right mind-set to understand and know how to treat customers with higher, more self-actualizing expectations.

9. Senior living industry may become a hotbed for job creation.

With a shortage of professionals trained in gerontology and geriatrics, recruiting and retaining qualified workers will be essential. At the same time, there is potential for new service businesses and growth in areas such as home care workers and transportation.

10. Above all, consumers want choices and value.

If there is a single phrase that sums up the future of senior living, it is “resident choice.” The model of senior living has come a long way from the “we know best” view. There is no one-size fits all community or program. Older adults are demanding more choices, control, a redefinition of what community means and convenience within and outside of the community. These choices include financing options and customized portfolios of services that takes into account individual expectations, services, and programs considered to be “added value,” access to “on demand” services, and purposeful engagement in activities.

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About Mather LifeWays

Based in Evanston, Illinois, Mather LifeWays enhances the lives of older adults by creating Ways to Age WellSM. Founded in 1941 by entrepreneur and humanitarian Alonzo Mather, Mather LifeWays is a unique non-denominational, not-for-profit organization dedicated to providing a continuum of living and care; making neighborhoods better places for older adults to live, work, learn, contribute, and play; and identifying, implementing, and sharing best practices for wellness, workforce issues, memory care support, and empowering caregivers. To learn more about our senior residences, Community Initiatives, and Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging, call (847) 492.7500 or find your way to www.matherlifeways.com.