

A photograph of an elderly woman with short, curly white hair, wearing a light-colored wide-brimmed hat and a patterned apron over a long-sleeved shirt. She is smiling and looking upwards and to the right. She is kneeling in a garden, surrounded by various plants and flowers. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

Insights and the Future of Wellness in Senior Living

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INTRODUCTION

As the old saying goes, an apple a day keeps the doctor away. In the case of senior living, that “apple” comes in many forms.

It might be a yoga class, or a book discussion, or a camping trip. It could even be a meditation garden, or a foot rub—with lavender oil. Whatever the case, providers are working around the clock to keep residents well.

“*While providers agree wellness is of utmost importance...they are going about it in very different ways.*”

While providers agree wellness is of utmost importance—ahead of dining, entertainment, and other senior housing components—they are going about achieving it in very different ways. What’s an apple in one community might look like an orange in another. And it might be measured in ounces by one organization versus kilograms by the one next door.

This report examines wellness in senior living from its definition to the return on investment providers are realizing. Senior housing is spending millions of dollars and thousands of hours on wellness, but is it worth it? Who defines wellness? What does wellness really mean?

WELLNESS AND SENIOR LIVING

Senior living providers across the country are making strides for wellness. Their approaches vary, but many are devoting resources to resident wellness as an overall goal or purpose, along with employee wellness as a means to support the culture of the organization and, hopefully, retain those employees.

According to the Mather Lifeways Institute on Aging, attention to wellness is rising. The Institute conducts ongoing research on wellness across the Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC) / Life Plan Community market, including resident wellness initiatives and employee wellness.

“In the past five years, there has been a heightened awareness regarding whole-person wellness in senior living communities,” the Institute writes in the summary of findings in its Second Annual Survey of Whole Person Wellness in Continuing Care Retirement Communities, published in 2013. “While models may vary between communities, the basic premise is usually the same; cultivate a culture of wellness for residents, staff and the community by considering the whole person—body, mind and spirit—and

improve the quality of life, minimize illness and functional loss and reduce healthcare costs.”

The Institute recognizes six dimensions of wellness: physical, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and vocational. The most recent survey found a majority of CCRCs had foundational elements in place to support wellness initiatives. However, while programming was available across the six wellness dimensions, most were concentrated in the areas of physical and social well-being. Few opportunities addressed emotional and vocational well-being, though respondents expected to expand opportunities in those areas.

