

Put more LIFE into your golden years with life care planning.

When people contemplate life care planning, they assume it's all about end-of-life decisions. That's certainly part of it, but at its heart life planning is an effort to think through your choices for all possible scenarios so that the trajectory of your future is never in doubt. When tackling life planning, there are four areas of consideration:

1. FINANCES: How will I pay for everything?

This is the most common area of concern. Financial planning includes cash flow management, investment strategies, estate planning, and the selection of appropriate life and health insurance. Between social security payments, pension disbursements, and 401k withdrawals, your income as a senior might be more substantial than you had expected. So seize the cash flow, and start by making a detailed budget. Then think about what you want to do with your time as well as your money — travel, education, bucket list activities — and work those into the budget. Once you assess your monthly expenses as well as your high-ticket priorities, you can focus on strategically arranging your assets to sensibly maximize your return on investment while protecting against future stock plummets and unexpected expenses.

2. HOME: Which living option will work best for me?

As you explore which living option is most conducive to your future, you should seriously consider the benefit of continuing care that only the best senior communities can provide. Making the move to an active senior community provides you with so many more options to meet new people, pursue hobbies, take classes, and indulge in travel than being isolated in a single-family home. Studies show that seniors who live in an interactive, supportive community live up to 7 years longer than those who do not. And a continuing care active senior community means you can remain in the community you've grown to love while receiving the care you or your partner may eventually need. No need to move overnight if a critical health crisis emerges out of the blue. You want your living option to be flexible enough to handle a short-term health emergency, like a broken hip that requires short-term rehab services, as well as a long-term health change, like a stroke or Alzheimer's that requires long-term care accommodations and services. And be sure to consider how your living option flexes if either you or your partner require health accommodations but the other doesn't. You want to preserve the integrity of your relationship without turning one person into a full-time caregiver.

3. LEGAL: What do I need to do to protect myself, my assets, and my family?

You want to protect the assets you have acquired over your lifetime, and use them to take care of yourself and your family. That means legal paperwork. It's not difficult once you start, so take a deep breath and explore all of your options including estate planning, wills, probate, and advocacy. Estate planning is required in order to properly distribute your assets according to your wishes after you pass. Many choose to employ an elder law attorney to help them sort through the complexities of wills, living wills, durable powers of attorney, life insurance investments, retirement plans, and other estate planning devices. A will specifies what assets are to be distributed to specific beneficiaries. Probate is the legal proceeding that transfers your estate according to the terms of your

will. In the absence of a will, your assets will be distributed based on probate law. A living will is a legal document that a person uses to make their wishes known regarding life prolonging medical treatments. It can also be referred to as an advance directive, health care directive, or a physician's directive. A power of attorney (POA) is a document that authorizes someone to act on your behalf. The most common uses for a POA are financial transactions and health care decisions. Most states have one set of laws governing financial POAs and a second set of laws governing POAs for health care decisions. Therefore, it is the common and recommended practice not to mix the two purposes into one document, but instead prepare two separate POAs. A durable POA means that your chosen delegate will act on your behalf if you become mentally incapacitated.

4. HEALTH: What health services will I need as I age?

Your health is your wealth, and that is never more true than when you're an active senior. Your diet and exercise not only impact how you feel day-to-day, but a long-term healthy lifestyle can reduce serious medical expenses and help extend the reach of your cash reserves. Another way to reduce medical expenses is to take advantage of Medicaid and Medicare programs. Medicare is a federally subsidized program that covers 80% of medical costs for people aged 65+ (or those who are any age and are mentally or physically disabled). You choose a healthcare plan that operates in your region — either HMOs or PPOs. You can also elect to have a Medigap policy which covers whatever Medicare does not pay. Medicaid is a government insurance program funded 50/50 by state and federal monies, with guidelines for eligibility. It is primarily for individuals of any age with a low income. For seniors, Medicaid provides financial assistance with the various costs associated with personal care services and nursing care. Both assistance programs have served the seniors of this country well for the past 53 years, but recently the proposed 2019 Federal budget advocates cutting \$544 billion from Medicare spending and \$1.44 trillion from Medicaid spending over the next 10 years. That's a total cutback of almost \$2 TRILLION for the health programs over the next decade. But it's not all doom and gloom. You can take advantage of all both programs offer today, and contact your elected officials tomorrow to urge them to adjust the budget in a way that is beneficial to those that rely on these targeted programs.

Life planning is all about making sure you have the cash you want, the care you need, and the asset protection you deserve. It starts with a frank conversation with your family. After that, it's up to you to take your future into your own hands, and get all your budget priorities, your investment opportunities, and your end-of-life wishes down on paper with the help of a certified elder law professional. The earlier you start to work on life planning, the more carefree your senior years will be.