

What's Trending in Long-term Care Facility Design?

By Joy Choquette
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The number of residents living in long-term care facilities in the U.S. in 2015 was 1.3 million. That figure is likely to grow higher in the future, as Americans are living longer than ever before. By 2030 the roughly 73 million Baby Boomers will be age 60 or over. Clearly the need for long-term care facilities and senior residential areas will continue to be in high demand.

What design trends are on the rise specifically regarding long-term care facilities? A principal and a senior project manager weighs in on the top three design trends now.

The inclusion of more tailored residential apartments and cottages, along with a robust offering of on-site amenities is one trend that stands out to Christine Cook, NCARB and principal at [three](#), a design boutique based in Dallas, Texas.

“Throughout the continuum of care, we are careful to ensure consistency of design aesthetic and quality of materials, from independent living to assisted living and memory care,” said Cook.

Even the term “long-term care facility” is one that many communities are getting away from in terms of marketing, Cook says.

“Owners and operators have begun working to connect to their target residents through lifestyle choices, in combination with a healthcare amenity — terms like ‘active aging’ and ‘purposeful lifestyles’ resonate favorably with both residents and their families.”

Though not a design trend per se, this change in perception is important. More residents are looking at joining a community by choice rather than residency as need-based. This impacts how designers conceive and configure new senior living communities, says Cook.

Anthony Vivirito, senior project manager at [The Architectural Team](#) (TAT), based in Boston, says that there is an increasing trend toward bringing natural elements into senior living communities.

“Many of our projects now emphasize a connection to nature and the outdoors, with vibrant outdoor living areas that can function as an extension of indoor spaces, or access to outdoor recreation in the surrounding community,” he says. “We also see greater interest from clients in a biophilic design approach that integrates organic and natural elements. In addition to outdoor access, this includes ensuring ample natural light for interior spaces, and using greenery and natural materials including wood and stone.”

Additional green design is on the upswing, with increased interest in LEED and similar certifications.

Cook agrees that organic elements in long-term care facilities and other senior living communities are more popular than ever before.

“We find that an authentic expression of materials goes a long way to delivering on these environments, and our clients favor this approach: real stone, wood and metal in their natural state, for example, and finishes that hold their color with natural light,” Cook says. “Of course, materials must be durable and resilient enough to respond favorably to heightened cleaning protocols, especially post-COVID. Since natural materials are not always appropriate, the desire for authenticity can be satisfied with the latest in faux stone and vinyl flooring, which are increasingly convincing and pleasing to the eye — plus their use can help lower construction costs during an escalating market.”

Vivirito says that lessons learned throughout the pandemic will influence future design trends in long-term care facilities.

“In terms of protecting against viral transmission and other contagious diseases, this means including flexible and adaptable programmatic elements such as dedicated visitation rooms and decentralized common areas for smaller groups, as well as specifying touchless controls for washrooms, elevators, and the like,” he says. “These spaces can be designed to promote social distancing while remaining functional and beautiful.”