

The business of wellness

# Innovative models of wellness memberships

Concepts, considerations and  
development in senior living



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# ICAA Wellness Think Tank Fall 2024

The ICAA Wellness Think Tank gathers thought leaders from senior living and wellness-focused organizations to formulate philosophies and recommendations that benefit individuals and organizations. Launched in 2005, the meetings forge connections among industry leaders while promoting understanding and cohesive action around the ultimate goal: health and quality of life as people age.

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The International Council on Active Aging has led, connected and defined the active-aging industry since 2001. Founded in the belief that unifying the efforts of organizations focused on the health and wellness of older adults benefits both the people they reach and the organizations themselves, ICAA's vision is shared by over 10,000 organizations. ICAA's support of the active-aging industry includes industry research, program development, market development, education and research on healthy aging and wellness, public relations campaigns and recognition programs.

ICAA Education, Inc., a sister company, develops and delivers courses to help active-aging professionals build needed skills and knowledge to impact older-adult wellness and the business bottom line.

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# SUMMARY

Wellness is derived from our ability to understand, accept and act upon our identity and capacity to lead a purpose-filled and engaged life. In doing so, we can embrace our potential (emotional, environmental, cognitive/intellectual, physical, social, spiritual and professional/vocational) to pursue and optimize life's possibilities.

– International Council on Active Aging

## Memberships create person-centered opportunities

Person-centered wellness is the driving force in senior living as longer life expectancies and the preferences of younger-older adults demand communities do more to help people live better, longer. As people age in place, allowing them to choose from the amenities and services that are important to them meets the organization's goals for service and revenue.

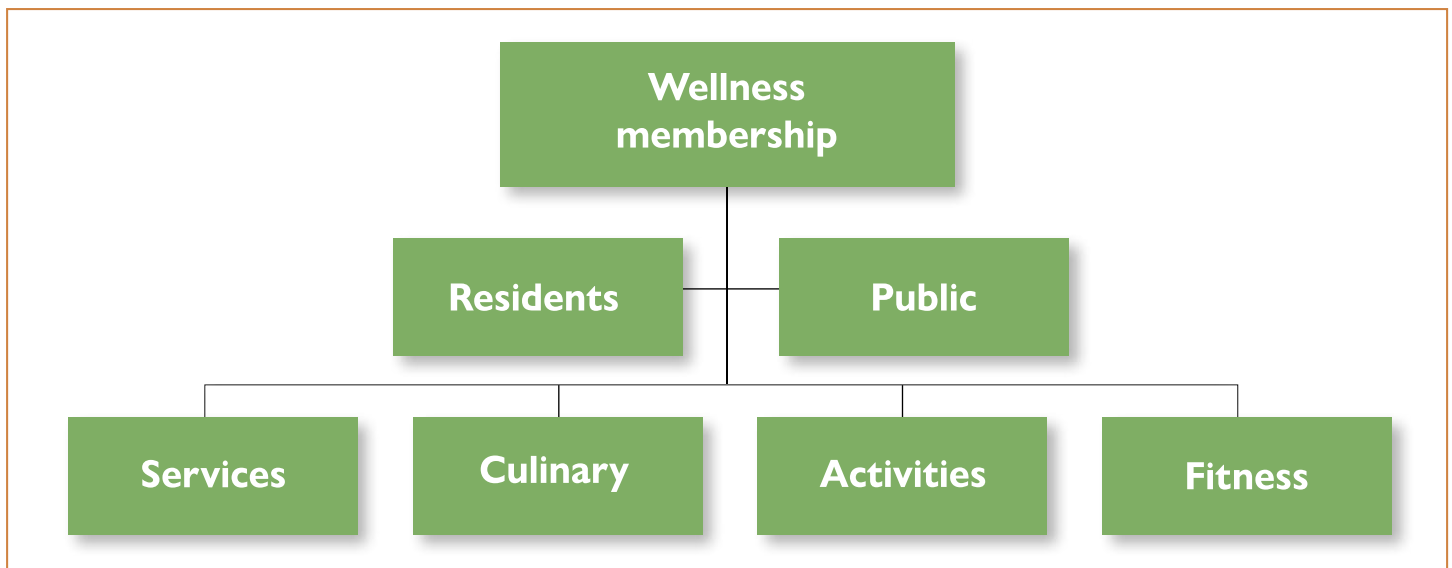
Memberships—a structure used by other types of businesses—is a vehicle that can serve residents, nonresidents and the organization.

Early adopters of senior living membership programs have found them beneficial for adding opportunities for residents and sharing amenities with nonresidents. They have found the community receives positive marketing

value, amenities are fully utilized and prospects join waiting lists.

At the ICAA Wellness Think Tank hosted by the International Council on Active Aging®, invited delegates examined the benefits of memberships and concentrated on how operations can be adapted to enable them. Representing life plan/continuing care communities, independent living, assisted living and memory care homes, active adult properties and service providers, the 60 delegates looked at the potential for membership from a global view.

Membership models enable individuals to pay for access to the community's wellness and lifestyle amenities, services and staff members. Members may be residents of the community or people from surrounding neighborhoods (the public). Benefits in a membership may include the wellness or fitness center, salons, spas, dining, lifelong learning and special activities, such as concerts or travel. Some communities have a wellness concierge or lifestyle





coordinator available. Membership fees are private pay since licensed and regulated healthcare is excluded.

Four types of membership models are being initiated in select senior living communities.

**#1 Resident memberships.**

Residents pay for membership options in addition to base rate for housing and services.

**#2 Inclusive memberships, residents plus public.**

Residents are automatically enrolled in basic membership, nonresidents pay for membership.

**#3 Custom memberships, residents plus public.**

Residents pay for membership options in addition to base rate for housing and services, nonresidents pay for membership options.

**#4 Public memberships.**

Nonresidents pay for membership.

Each of these models is capable of bringing in sufficient revenue to move wellness from a cost center to a profit center. Resident-members are satisfied with life at the community and appreciate selecting the amenities and services they want and can afford. That alone opens the doors to a wider range of income levels. Retention is a valuable result of memberships, since satisfied members tend to stay with programs they value. For the organization, membership revenue is consistent over a period of time.

**Key takeaways**

- Resident and public memberships are most often used by people who live independently.

- Resident memberships do not replace base housing, services, amenities and care packages. Residents pay an additional membership fee to access services they typically would pay for outside of the community.
- Services and places within the memberships operate as a revenue-producing business unit.
- Technology is critical to manage memberships for residents and for nonresidents.
- A system that brings data from multiple systems (frequently dining, healthcare, fitness, engagement activities) into a single accessible software enables efficiency and customer service.
- Communication and sharing among departments is essential for resident memberships to be successful.
- High-quality amenities and services included in a membership power membership sales and retention.

As economics and culture rock the boat of tradition, lessons learned from the rapid growth of active adult communities give impetus to exploring memberships. Residents move in to active adult communities in their sixties and mid-seventies because they want an active lifestyle, seek social connections and can be independent. They are moving because of the environment, not because of age or health concerns.<sup>1</sup>

These are the same people who can be served through membership packages. Some senior living communities already have added membership models. Their lessons learned are a gateway to the wellness business opportunity.

# POTENTIAL

*“It’s making me think about partnerships with outside business entities. What we’re offering to our partners is the space for them to utilize, and we already have built-in customers. Partners can be guaranteed they are going to have X amount of customers.”*

## Wellness memberships open the doors of senior living

Wellness has taken center stage for many operators of senior living communities as they wrap services and lifestyle into a compelling marketing message. Yet, features of the wellness lifestyle (engagement, physical activities, volunteering) may be looked at solely as an expense rather than as the vehicle that impacts occupancy, length of stay, satisfaction, quality of life and healthier lives for longer periods of time.

Innovative wellness membership models are changing the perception of wellness’s contribution, just in time for the 65+ generation that will reside in senior living communities—if the community prepares for them. Membership models may be an upset to the traditional status quo, but executive leaders who look ahead to the sustainability of the organization see memberships as an approach to innovate within the philosophy and priorities of the mission.

Opening the doors of an age-restricted community is not new. Communities may allow public members in a fitness center, offer short-term rehabilitation stays or allow the public on campus once a year during Active Aging Week. A few communities serve the public as well as residents in coffee shops and restaurants.<sup>2,3</sup>

What is fueling the emerging trend is gathering those options into a

## Value of memberships in senior living

- Attract younger population of older adults
- Longer lengths of stay in independent living
- Retention of satisfied residents and nonresidents
- Long-term, low-cost marketing value
- Membership revenue covers cost of included services and amenities
- Increased revenue from private pay guests and residents
- Residents like options to choose within their ability to pay
- Residents benefit from social connections
- Residents feel part of the greater community
- Builds capacity to offer more while limiting increase in base fees for housing and services
- Full utilization of amenities and programs already in place
- Expands reach of community’s mission
- Sustains wellness over time



comprehensive membership package that functions as a separate and influential business unit. Appropriately financed, managed and staffed, memberships enable residents to choose the level of service and extras they prefer and can afford. For the general public, memberships are an option they can purchase to access age-appropriate wellness services in positive environments.

### **Why consider memberships**

Membership models are used by all types of organizations. Professional associations (ICAA, LeadingAge), streaming services (Netflix, HBO, et. al.), health clubs and country clubs all provide a set of services for paying members or subscribers. Not-for-profit organizations such as museums,

service organizations, senior living communities or special interest clubs (e.g., a garden club) have memberships.

In this structure, members pay a recurring fee to access a set amount of services. Whether the fee is paid as dues or a subscription, members become part of a group of like-minded individuals who share their interests or needs. Individuals can gain information or services, form social and/or professional contacts and participate in the organization's activities. Because a membership involves a single price over a period of time, the cost is clear and it is easy to budget.

Organizations benefit from stable cash flow and a consistent customer/member base that reduces turnover. Satisfied members refer others to the



organization, which may decrease marketing costs. Additional revenue above membership dues can be earned by upselling merchandise or additional services. Members become a valuable source of feedback and, increasingly, data to guide decision-making.<sup>4,5</sup>

A membership may include everything in a single level or it may be stratified into tiers with different benefits at each level. To structure the membership:

- Clearly define what is and is not included in each membership level
- Establish membership levels
  - Tier one includes: X
  - Tier two includes: X,Y
  - Tier three includes: X,Y,Z

- Determine eligibility criteria, if any, for membership
- Determine if membership dues/fees are paid monthly or annually

Most consumers are familiar with memberships and subscriptions. An advantage for both consumers and organizations is that membership structures make benefits and pricing transparent.

Senior living providers have used membership to attract new residents, keep up with changing needs and lifestyles, and cover the cost of new and upgraded amenities and services. Beyond covering costs, memberships align with business needs for utilization and revenue generation, and resident needs for choice and value.





## Wellness membership models

	#1 Resident membership		#2 Inclusive membership Residents + public		#3 Custom membership Residents + public		#4 Public membership	
	Resident	Nonresident	Resident	Nonresident	Resident	Nonresident	Resident	Nonresident
<b>Membership</b>	Residents choose among tiers	None	All residents automatically enrolled	Pay membership fee	Addition to contract/monthly fee	Pay membership fee	None	Pay membership fee
<b>Membership fee</b>	Additional private pay based on selected tier		Included in contract and monthly fee	Private pay	Private pay	Private pay		Private pay
<b>Resident access</b>	Any option included in membership tier		All services available to residents	None	All services available in contract	None		None
<b>Member access</b>	Any option included in membership tier		Any option included in basic membership	Any option included in membership	Extra services above what is included in contract	Options included in membership		Options included in membership
			Fee-based programs, services	Fee-based programs, services		Fee-based programs, services		Fee-based programs, services

# MODELS

*“We have a long waiting list at Galloway Ridge because people are excited by the wellness focus. About one-third of new residents come from the surrounding area, and most were members of the Duke Center for Living. Our actuarial study definitely shows the length of time residents stay in independent living far exceeds the national average. Then, the time in assisted living or skilled nursing is well below that national average.”*

– Bob Zimmer, Galloway Ridge at Ferrington

## Types of senior living memberships

Four types of membership models are being implemented in select senior living communities.

- #1 Resident only memberships
- #2 Inclusive memberships, residents plus public
- #3 Custom memberships, residents plus public
- #4 Public only memberships

The benefits included in each type of membership vary according to the goals of the organization and the capacity to deliver them consistently. Members pay out-of-pocket since benefits typically do not include insurance-reimbursable care.

Membership benefits come from internal resources and partnerships with other organizations. For example, fitness centers, salons, restaurants and bistros, arts or educational programs may be on-site, or offered in nearby locations, such as community centers, age-friendly health clubs with aquatics or college-based emeritus classes.

Local field trips or travel itineraries may be in a membership. A membership concierge may be available to obtain discounted tickets to sports events, movies or theater. Priority access may be a benefit, providing the member with a “first-in-line” experience for tickets or a reservation.

Not every senior living community has the capacity to offer memberships. Smaller or older communities may not

have the space to provide additional services or allow the public to access the building. The residents or nearby neighbors may not have the income to pay membership fees. Board members, executives and staff may not embrace the concept or understand why and how it will be executed.

While the leadership of each community must evaluate the membership opportunity, examples of memberships in place at some senior living communities demonstrate the feasibility. Membership models depend on creativity and the willingness to try something different, rather than the size of a building.

## Memberships for residents

Senior living communities have rolled out two types of memberships for residents:

1. All residents automatically become members.
2. Residents pay additional over a base rate for extra services or programs.

### 1. All residents automatically enrolled

Shifting the language from “resident” to “member” changes the perception of a community and builds the sense that residents belong to a special, exclusive group. This wording is used at Convivial Life to describe properties as “active adult membership communities,” which immediately establishes the branding.<sup>6</sup>

All residents and staff at Galloway Ridge at Ferrington are automatically enrolled as members of the Duke

Center for Living at Ferrington. As a medically based fitness center, the Duke Center offers expert staff, equipment, classes and a pool in the basic membership. Residents pay extra for personal training, specialty programs and massage.

A four-tier membership program piloted by Revel Communities at their independent living properties uses a point system to discriminate among the membership tier levels. All residents have an apartment and access to basic services and amenities. Plus, depending on the membership tier they choose, residents receive several points to use for additional services and amenities, such as dining, special events, salon and spa services, tickets purchased through the onsite

concierge or extra housekeeping and handyman services, among other options.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Residents pay additional over a base rate for extra services or programs

For an established community or a new development, memberships offer flexibility and choice without compromising current residents' services. Residents (and their family members) who are financially able and interested in having more options beyond their basic services can choose a membership level.

To prepare for resident memberships, strategic investments in property upgrades, technology and operations are being made at Juniper

Communities. Their model will provide the basics of housing and services at the properties, and offer memberships for extra services or opportunities.

Resident memberships work best when:

- The reasons for memberships are clear
- There is no loss of basic housing and services
- Membership benefits are presented as additional choices
- The ability of fee-based memberships to control costs is explained
- Residents are part of the development process
- Departments interface seamlessly to provide membership services



## Profile: Partnership codevelops a wellness center

Life plan community Galloway Ridge at Ferrington grew organically alongside the larger community. In the early stage of development, a partnership was established with Duke University to share resources and provide services to residents of Galloway Ridge and the general public. The result is the Wellplex, which opened in 2002. Located on the Galloway Ridge campus, it includes the Duke Center for Living at Ferrington, the Center for Rehabilitation and Duke Primary Care.

**Duke Center for Living at Ferrington (DCLF).** A joint venture of Galloway Ridge and Duke University, the 20,000 square foot medically based fitness center is aimed at people 50 years and older. Staffed by degreed fitness professionals, there is a diverse array of classes and programs within a well-equipped gym and pool. The center is in a separate building with a parking area.

**Memberships.** All Galloway Ridge residents and staff members are automatically enrolled as members

in the center, able to access all the basic programs and services. They may pay for additional fee-based programs. Nonresident members pay a monthly membership fee and may add fee-based programs. Currently 261 residents and employees are members; 1,683 people are community members. There are about 9,000 visits per month.

**Partnership.** The director of DCLF is a Duke employee working exclusively at Galloway Ridge. The fitness staff are full-time employees of Galloway Ridge. Group exercise leaders and masseuses are contractors. The staff follows Duke clinical guidelines including preparticipation screening and regular in-service trainings. The DCLF director provides monthly dashboard reports to Galloway Ridge management and the Duke University supervisor. Galloway Ridge pays overhead costs such as utilities, insurance and building maintenance for the center and contracts to use the Duke University name. Duke University pays the director's salary and leases the space for the primary care clinic from Galloway Ridge; Duke operates the clinic independently. A third party

operates the Center for Rehabilitation.

**Value proposition.** As a medically based center, the Duke Center for Living distinguishes itself from other health clubs or fitness studios. The educated and credentialed staff members are a benefit, as is the association with Duke University, which is widely recognized. Classes and personal training sessions are planned to adapt to those with different levels of physical ability. The majority of new members hear about the center through word of mouth.

**Results.** Operating costs are covered by nonresident membership fees, with a small amount returning to Galloway Ridge. The revenue represents about a 1% decrease in fees for Galloway Ridge residents every year. The partnership has been maintained for more than 20 years.

## Example budget for the Duke Center for Living fitness center

The Duke Center for Living on the Galloway Ridge campus is an example of the potential for a membership model in senior living. Each partner, Galloway Ridge and Duke University, absorbs some expenses.

The Duke Center for Living, established for 20 years, is a 20,000 square foot facility with stationary equipment, group exercise, pool, indoor walking track, personal training and massage. There are 1,683 public, non-resident members.

Overhead costs such as utilities, insurance and building maintenance are paid by Galloway Ridge. Operating costs are covered by non-resident membership fees. All staff except the Director are Galloway Ridge employees.

Duke Center for Living	Budget
<b>Revenue</b>	
Membership, enrollment, guest fees	\$ 1,111,700
Personal training, massages	285,800
Programs	36,000
Pro shop sales	5,400
<b>Total revenues</b>	<b>\$ 1,438,900</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Personnel	\$ 770,100
Contracted services	335,600
Office supplies, equipment	9,800
Service charges, fees	48,000
Dues, subscriptions, licenses	3,400
Repair, maintenance	17,200
Advertising, outreach	9,500
Member retention	3,900
Pool supplies, chemicals	8,400
Amenities, locker room supplies	11,500
Pro shop supplies	7,200
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$ 1,224,600</b>
<b>Net to Galloway Ridge</b>	<b>\$ 214,300</b>



# MODELS

*“The needs of our residents are forever changing. The generation of older adults is changing as well. What we’ve been learning is our residents want more choices. There might be a bit of pushback from some, but other residents are really happy with having more choices. As we say, just because we offer more choices, it doesn’t mean you need to choose them. If you want to keep what you have today, that’s great. But for those who want more, we want to offer more.”*

– Rikki Goldenberg, Juniper Communities

## Public memberships attract nonresidents

According to a 2024 ICAA survey, 97% of wellness-centered senior living communities have fitness/physical activity programs and 88% provide dining and food options. It’s not surprising that fitness/physical activity and dining/cafe are most often open to the public for a fee, according to ICAA survey respondents over the past three years.<sup>8,9,10</sup>

Two approaches are used to offer memberships for nonresidents:

1. Memberships to the wellness/fitness center
2. Memberships accessing a variety of facilities and services

## 1. Memberships to the wellness/fitness center

Communities with wellness/fitness centers were offering public memberships more than 15 years ago as a way to cover costs, fully utilize the facilities and offer an amenity that current and future residents would value. While centers feature fitness and aquatics, they may also include physical and occupational therapy suites, snack bars or recreation spaces.

Neighbors choose to become members because they value an equipped and well-managed center with programs geared to people 55 years and older. Wellness centers at senior living communities offer an atmosphere that is different from commercial health clubs, and staff members tend to be educated and



credentialed.<sup>11,12,13</sup> Looking to the future, providers offer the membership as a way to attract a person who is more active and may choose to move in earlier, or stay committed to the community when they are ready to move.

## 2. Memberships accessing a variety of facilities and services

To allow potential residents to experience the lifestyle and amenities a community offers, memberships may include dining, spa, salon visits and lectures/educational programs along with the wellness/fitness center.

For example, nonresident members of The Holbrook Club offered by Holbrook Life can use the community's pools, fitness center, salon, spa and restaurants. Conceived like a country club, the Club is treated as a business unit and attracts younger people who are potential residents. Club member dues more than cover costs, adding ancillary revenue to Holbrook Life operations.<sup>14,15</sup>

A second option is to offer memberships to people who expect to move in as residents within a defined period of time, such as one to three years. Campus programs, amenities and services are available after payment of a membership fee. Priority access to available apartments or healthcare may be included.<sup>16,17</sup> Because of the membership, potential residents are committed to moving in and are already comfortable on campus when they do relocate. Providers gain a stable list of potential residents and revenue.

Public memberships work best when:

- Entrances and facilities are easy to access
- Entries look contemporary and inviting
- Passersby can easily see signage and entrances
- Parking is available
- Public transportation is nearby
- Neighborhood is walkable and safe
- Staff members provide appropriate service
- Marketing is targeted

## Resident and nonresident synergies

When memberships are available, residents and nonresidents share the same space. That is one reason why residents need to be part of the planning process, and why messaging must communicate clearly and consistently the benefits of giving the public access to the community, which is their home.

While some residents may object, there may be less pushback than expected. Residents do not oppose nonresidents coming in to their community for programs or dining options, believe 59% of staff and managers answering the ICAA Wellness Industry Update 2023 survey. Even more respondents (71%) feel executives and managers are open to the idea.<sup>9</sup>

Technology can be an aid in monitoring the people who are in the community and enabling the business office to manage resident and



nonresident groups. To prepare for offering memberships to residents and nonresidents, leadership at Juniper Communities invested time in researching technology solutions and eventually developed a proprietary system collecting data available through various software systems already in use.

Effort was expended to make sure residents and their family members had training in using the community app (application). The app is used by residents and nonresident members to make reservations in restaurants or programs, which helps prevent overcrowding and supports staff efficiency.

Resident and public memberships work best when:

- Resident and public member accounts are separate
- Credit cards can be accepted for all transactions
- Software or paper or staff track nonresidents on the community property
- The number of people who can comfortably be served is not exceeded
- Special events for residents and nonresidents allow people to get to know one another





## Profile: Strategy and technology personalize experiences

At Juniper Communities, preparing the organization to offer memberships began by recognizing the potential and embracing change. The goals were to enable residents to personalize their lifestyle and to open the doors to the larger community through membership options. While memberships are still being tested in a pilot phase, the results of investment in creative restructuring and necessary technology are already evident.

**Structure.** The Catalyst program laid the foundation for memberships by separating healthcare services and chronic disease management from lifestyle services and room and board. Juniper leadership recognized that people want choices, so the operational and accounting structures needed to position for flexibility.

**People.** By moving away from job-specific training to cross-training and knowledge transfers, siloed departments changed to more integrated and collaborative workflows. Engagement associates are becoming lifestyle concierges so they can personalize opportunities for resident-members through the dimensions of wellness.

**Services.** More resident-led programming frees up time for staff to conduct specialized programs and learn the new technology being implemented. Programs offered by local and national partners (for example, the Osher Institute of Learning) add to the experiences available to members. Fee-based meal preparation, takeout options and grocery delivery services are being planned. Nonresident members will be able to access the gym, restaurants and Juniper's Catalyst and Connect4Life programs.

**Place.** Updates were made to existing spaces to create a contemporary setting that did not feel like a traditional "seniors" community. For example, in one community apartments were removed and the space redesigned into the 32 Club restaurant, open to the public as well as residents. The rooftop of a skilled nursing neighborhood was remade into an outdoor sky deck patio accessible to the public, which can host yoga, meditation, concerts and catered events.

**Technology.** Juniper chose partners to develop custom technology solutions since commercial software did not meet the organization's requirements. Technology investment

included both software and devices (tablets, smartphones, computers, credit card Square machines).

Digital signage expanded into a custom application (app) that is available to residents, family members, prospects and future nonresident members. Access through the app is controlled; residents have more access than the public. Service requests, appointments, reservations and a la carte choices are captured to identify what residents want and what they are using. A cloud computing firm is developing dashboards of key indicators. Technology requires training, and as the technologies rolled out, additional training needs were identified and implemented.

**Results:** The initial testing with residents has been positive. Staffing levels have been stable, staff time is freed to focus on consultative roles, the amount of paper has dropped significantly. Because of service requests collected through the app, thousands of dollars in additional revenue was generated in the first month of testing.

# EXPLORE

*“Being really skilled at change management and embracing that at all levels of your organization is the first step.”*

– Katie Kensinger, Juniper Communities

## Must-haves for planning memberships

With a focus on operations, ICAA Wellness Think Tank delegates listed considerations when evaluating membership opportunities.

**Know your purpose.** Have a clear reason for adding memberships to the service package. Know who you are and what you want to accomplish, then dedicate the time and investment to deliver and maintain the membership program.

**Craft a solid business and operations plan.** The detailed plan will guide the how-to. A great idea is no longer great if execution fails. Plan the time frames for development, roll-out and maintenance. Who is doing what, and what are the expectations for each stage?

**Gain buy-in from leadership, staff and residents.** The leaders of the organization, including board members, must understand the value of offering memberships and be willing to invest over the time period needed for the membership to achieve results. Delegates estimated it would take up to three years for measurable results.

Current team members need to understand why you are developing memberships and what the value will be. When staff members are invested in helping plan and deliver membership-included services, they become interested in tracking participation, sharing ideas and collecting information. Resident buy-in is critical since they will be asked to

pay for extras and/or welcome nonresidents into their community. Involve resident champions early in the process.

**Hire or train marketing and sales staff.** Internal messaging to residents and staff members will focus on the business of memberships, rationale and opportunities. What is the value for residents and their families? External marketing of public memberships is separate from that for the community. How will each be differentiated? What is the value of a 50+ focused membership for people who do not need care?

**Maximize resources you already have.** Examine the indoor and outdoor spaces with a fresh eye. What is excellent about the dining or programs? Is there a fitness room or salon or art studio? Do nonresidents already come in for an art show or rummage sale or concerts? Consider the talent pool you already have among staff members and residents and their family members. What expertise can they bring?

**Allow sufficient time for results.** Memberships are a long-term strategy that need time to build. Allow two-three years after launch with sustained support of staff, technology and marketing.

**Set the milestones.** Based on your goals, determine the milestones that show progress. Consider the number of memberships or the revenue. For example, the goal may be 300 nonresident memberships. The milestone may be 100 nonresident



memberships within 12 months. A goal may be X amount of revenue from membership fees plus ancillary extras. The milestone could be US \$50,000 within 12 months.

**Partner with outside business entities.** Add new partners to the ones you already have (e.g., colleges, seniors centers or fitness businesses). Outsource membership add-ons to a housekeeping or maintenance service, partner with a restaurant or culinary institute for food service options. If your property lacks space, why not partner with an off-site fitness studio? Physical activity could be delivered

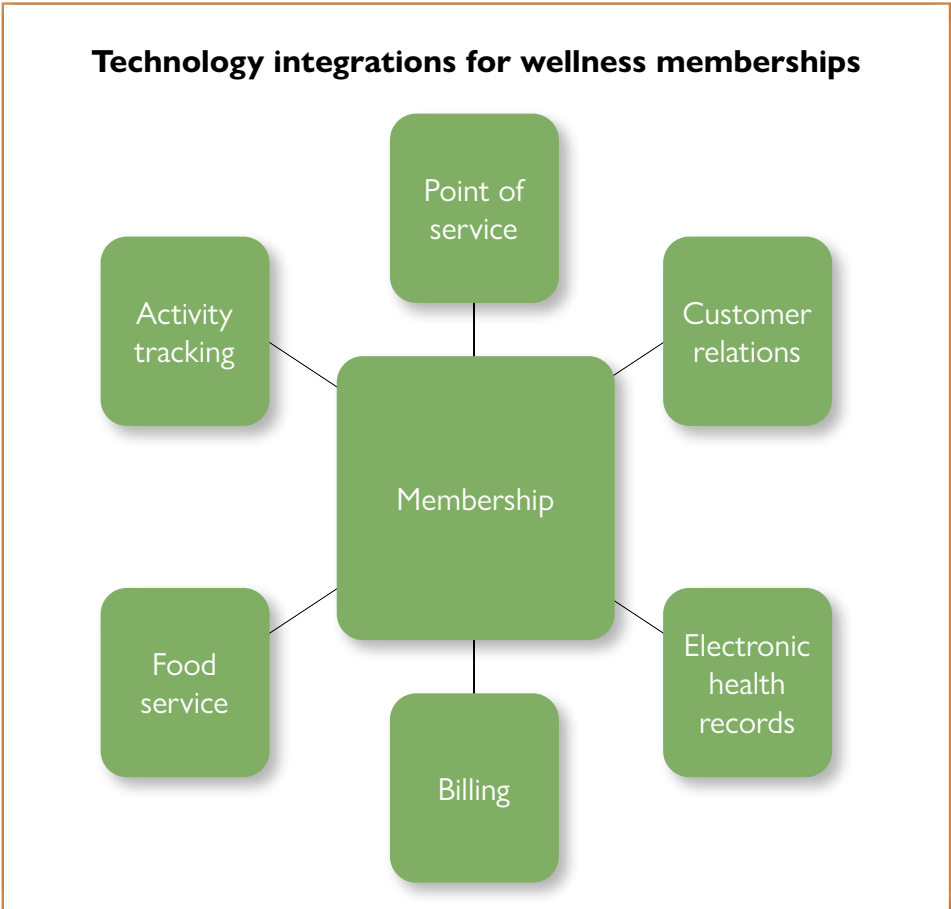
there, with visits to the on-site campus salon or restaurant included in the membership.

### Technology plays a vital role

Wellness encompasses all areas of an individual's life, and infuses all the departments, services and daily activities in a community. While technology has been a benefit in all areas of operations, it also has drawbacks. An unintentional consequence of purpose-built technology, such as electronic health records (EHR), food service software, fitness equipment tracking and point of service (POS) systems is that they often do not communicate with one another. The data each produces reinforces silos separating departments.

To address the issue, some organizations have found providers or developed their own systems to gather information from the various technologies into a single data management program to enable monitoring or systems in one place.

Delegates at the ICAA Wellness Think Tank were unanimous in recommending that technology be enabled to create connections. This would better serve residents at any time, regardless of membership status. If, for example, the EHR interfaced with the POS system, and a digital menu was integrated, Mr. Smith would see menu options appropriate for his low sodium diet. That capability would be of high value to residents as well as to members of the public.



When it comes to technology, there may be a bias that older adults do not use it or want it. The data does not support this. According to a 2024 survey from Pew Research, 94% of people 65 years and older in the U.S. own a cellphone, and 79% report owning a smartphone. Almost as many (90%) of those in the 65+ age group report using the Internet. In Canada, 82.6% of 65+ use the Internet.<sup>18,19,20</sup> Ageism in digital health may be an issue in senior living as well as among the medical community.<sup>21</sup>

While a portion of current residents may not want to use available technologies, another group may simply need to be shown how to use

it. In the future, the technology experience and attitudes of the boomer generation will be receptive to apps and other technologies.

## **Investigate the membership opportunity**

Start your exploration by asking a series of questions starting with, why? Use the answers as the springboard to build your business case for wellness.

Consider the geographic area where your community is located. You know how urban or suburban the area is, how easy it is to get around by walking, car or public transportation, and what





off-campus areas (e.g., parks or entertainment venues) are accessible. Borrowing from the health club industry, consider a 10-mile radius as a start.

### **Discover, ideate and evaluate**

Ask questions like these as you move from the discovery phase through ideation and evaluation. Start with the premise that memberships include options centered on lifestyle choices and do not involve health care or licensed assistance.

**Discover.** Put aside the way your community operates today. Consider memberships in the context of aiding your current residents to find new opportunities. How far can you extend your value to older adults who live outside your walls?

#### **1. Define the purpose**

- a. How would membership support the mission?
- b. Why would membership be valuable for your community?
- c. Would membership(s) pay for additional staff, desirable services or places?
- d. How would memberships align with the business needs?

#### **2. Evaluate market demand for public memberships**

- a. How many people live in nearby neighborhoods?
- b. What are the ages and income levels?

#### **Go to Appendix**

Membership opportunity assessment worksheet  
Membership business case outline

- c. Are there facilities and services similar to yours?
- d. What do others charge for similar services?

#### **3. Conduct a wellness audit to evaluate capacity**

- a. What lifestyle amenities already are in place?
- b. Which amenities are the most used?
- c. What physical activity/fitness programs are most attended?
- d. What engagement activities are most attended?
- e. What are the staffing levels for programs and activities?

#### **4. Investigate competitors**

- a. Which organizations have memberships aimed at older adults?
- b. What is included in a membership?
- c. Does another senior living property have memberships?
- d. Are the memberships public or resident-only or both?
- e. What is included for what price?
- f. How similar or different is the community from yours?

**Ideation.** Out-of-the-box thinking defines this phase. The concept statement is key because everyone will work from it. The concept statement is a brief description of the membership that highlights the significance of the idea and its potential impact. This is the clear statement that will headline discussions and the business case. It may be rewritten a few times.

## 5. Write a concept statement of the idea

- a. Why develop a membership?
- b. What are the goals?
- c. Why is it important?

## 6. Identify advisors and collaborators

- a. What roles in the organization need to be involved?
- b. What internal or external partners are needed?
- c. Which staff members have experience with memberships?
- d. Which residents to include?

## 7. Brainstorm ideas from the initial concept

- a. What is in the membership?
- b. For residents? The public? Both?
- c. What levels or tiers will be offered?
- d. How different from others would your offerings be?

**Evaluate.** With the concept identified, compare potential membership benefits with what is currently available on the property. Add in what external partners could provide. Is it worth moving forward to writing a business case? The business case is how you will convince owners and executives that memberships are worth developing.

## 8. Assess the concept

- a. Who will be served?
- b. What are the benefits of memberships?

- c. How will the community's financials be impacted?
- d. What are the risks of adding memberships for current residents?
- e. What are the rewards for residents?
- f. What are the risks of membership for nonresidents?
- g. What are the rewards?
- h. What changes in operations are needed?

## 9. Refine the concept

- a. What benefits will be offered?
- b. What is in each tier? For whom?
- d. What are the outcomes?
- e. How would success be measured?
- f. What organizational changes are needed?

## 10. Write a business case for memberships

- a. How will memberships add value?
- b. What is the business alignment?
- c. What are the options?
- d. What is the investment?
- e. What is the cost?
- f. What are the direct and indirect returns on investment?
- g. What are the risks?

There is wellness-forward wording and narratives in the recent ICAA white paper, "Living better, longer: The new narrative for senior living." Download it here: <https://www.icaa.cc/conferenceandevents/forums/reports/202404.pdf>

# DEVELOP

*“Why are we looking to expand our program to include people from the outside? It can’t just be about revenue generation, it has got to be about mission advancement, about reaching out to other people in the community.”*

– Amy Laughlin, Presbyterian Communities of South Carolina

## Membership models expand the reach of senior living

Managing a membership program in senior living is the same as operating a business unit in other organizations. A business unit functions independently within the philosophy and purpose of an organization. The unit has its own market and competitors; revenue and expenses are tracked independently from the main business. The managers independently develop strategies and make decisions geared to making the unit successful.<sup>22</sup>

If your mission statement includes phrases such as “enriching lifestyles,” “active lifestyles,” “innovative services” or “inspiring environment,” then membership can sit comfortably next to other independent units such as culinary, housing and care. Private pay memberships are a standalone function separate from housing and care, with independent revenues.

For a membership model to be effective, launch it with a solid business plan, investment, technology, focused management and staffing. Included benefits must be adequate to command the fee set, and of a quality that will attract members and retain them. Members are investing in the quality of the benefits they receive, just as the community is investing in the program.

## Value the impact

Senior living communities are adopting wellness as a way to attract new residents because of the lifestyle, and

better serve current residents who want to live as well as possible regardless of their abilities, health status or level of living. The examples in this report show that memberships can meet those needs. But the return on investment is not only financial.

Memberships give residents a chance to add benefits that make their lives rewarding. The a la carte options enable them to choose what they want, and not pay for services they don’t want. Membership options that increase social connections and encourage additional physical and intellectual engagement lead to better physical and mental health—a longterm impact that fulfills the community’s mission.

Reaching into the larger community extends the services and reputation of the community outside its walls. Nonresident members may never move in because of cost or room availability, yet they will benefit from all the community offers, and pay to cover the costs.

The marketing value is exponential. Memberships bring local people into the community ecosystem, even when membership benefits are off-site. Neighbors spread the word about the community life, bringing in friends. Partners likewise advertise the memberships since the more members, the more the partner benefits.

Wellness can define a community and attract those who value being independent for as long as possible. Ultimately the impact is the long-term sustainability of the community.



# DETAILS

## Resources

### Community examples

Duke Center for Living at Ferrington  
Medically based fitness and wellness  
<https://dukefitnessferrington.com/>

Galloway Ridge at Ferrington  
Life plan community  
<https://gallowayridge.com/>

Holbrook Club  
Benefits for residents and nonresidents  
<https://holbrooklife.com/holbrook-club/>  
<https://holbrookclub.com/>

Juniper Communities  
Independent and assisted living  
communities  
<https://junipercommunities.com/>

### Industry information and tools

ICAA Wellness Audit  
Capture capabilities in staffing,  
programs and place to track progress  
International Council on Active Aging  
[https://www.icaa.cc/wellness\\_audit/audit\\_promo.php](https://www.icaa.cc/wellness_audit/audit_promo.php)

Leadership in Wellness Management  
certificate course  
Modules on culture, communication,  
business planning, teamwork  
<https://www.icaa.cc/certificate/leadership/reasons.htm>

Living better, longer: The new  
narrative for senior living  
Wellness-positive language, outlines  
explain value of wellness  
<https://www.icaa.cc/conferenceandevents/forums/reports/202404.pdf>

Framing the return on investment  
(ROI) in wellness staff  
Staff member's impact on satisfaction,  
revenue and social accountability,  
evaluating ROI  
<https://www.icaa.cc/conferenceandevents/forums/forumreports.htm>

Funding the new wellness model in  
senior living  
Priorities, policies, operations and  
funding opportunities  
<https://www.icaa.cc/conferenceandevents/forums/forumreports.htm>

The promise of well-tech  
Core principles to develop systems,  
checklists, priority matrix  
<https://www.icaa.cc/conferenceandevents/forums/forumreports.htm>

## Endnotes

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# APPENDIX

Membership Opportunity Assessment Worksheet	
<b>DISCOVERY</b>	
<b>Define the purpose</b> Why have a resident membership? Why have a membership for nonresidents?	
<b>Evaluate market demand</b> Size of the 50+ population Similar businesses	
<b>Conduct a wellness audit</b> Amenities already in place Most used amenities Most used programs, activities	
<b>Investigate competitors</b> Community-at-large memberships Benefits and price Other senior living memberships Benefits and price	
<b>IDEATION</b>	
<b>Write a concept statement</b> Purpose of developing a membership Why it matters	
<b>Identify advisors &amp; partners</b> Colleagues Residents External partners	
<b>Brainstorm ideas for benefits</b> Define membership benefits Aimed at residents or public or both Difference from competitors	
<b>EVALUATION</b>	
<b>Assess the concept</b> Content of membership(s) Risks Rewards Financial impact	
<b>Refine the concept</b> Membership packages Target members Outcomes	
<b>Write a business case</b> Brief description of concept Support of mission and objectives Costs Rewards and risks	

## Membership Business Case Outline

Name	Membership for nonresidents
Sponsor	[name]
Revision date	
Final revision date	
Date of approval	
Contribution to business strategy	[brief narrative]
Options considered	Option 1 Option 2 Option 3
Benefits	[narrative or list]
Time frame	Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Etc.
Estimated cost	[dollars, staff]
Expected return on investment	[indirect returns e.g., reach into community; direct return]
Risks	[brief narrative; opportunity risk]



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