

Southwest

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◆ Policy Brief ◆

Expanding Residential Care & Assisted Living In Rural America

Assisted living facilities (ALFs) have emerged as a promising new model of residential long-term care for the elderly. In rural areas, where 22% of the elderly reside and where there are few options other than nursing homes for long-term care, assisted living could be a valuable option. However, there is an undersupply of ALFs in rural areas, and ALFs found in rural areas are unlikely to exhibit the features of high services and high privacy that embody the philosophy of assisted living. Further, assisted living is predominantly a private-pay phenomenon and largely unaffordable for the vast majority of rural elders. If States wish to make this a viable option in rural America, they must take steps to expand availability, encourage rural providers to offer greater privacy of accommodations and a broader array of services, and adopt policies that make it affordable for low and moderate-income older persons.

Residential care facilities represent an important option for frail older persons as well as for younger persons with disabilities, such as persistent and severe mental illness and developmental disabilities. States and consumers are increasingly relying on these residential long-term care settings and assisted living facilities rather than nursing homes. One result is that the population of residents has been growing older with higher levels of disability and care needs (Hawes et al. 1995).

During the 1990s, one of the most rapidly expanding forms of senior housing was assisted living. Some have argued that assisted living is a promising new model of residential long-term care for the elderly, one whose philosophy distinguishes it from other types of residential long-term care (*Assisted Living Quality Coalition, 1998; Kane & Wilson, 1993*). However, there is such variation in what is called assisted living across states and across facilities that it is difficult to determine from the name alone what types of accommodations and services a facility actually provides (Mollica, 2002).

The Southwest Rural Health Research Center recently completed ***Assisted Living in Rural America: Results from A National Survey***. This report, funded by the Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP), describes rural assisted living facilities (ALFs), their staffing and services, policies on admission and retention, and price. The data are from a national probability sample of ALFs and provide results that are generalizable to the nation and allow comparisons of ALFs in rural and metropolitan areas. The study found an undersupply of ALF units in rural areas, lower availability of ALFs that offered high privacy accommodations and high services, and charges that were largely unaffordable for low and moderate-income older persons unless they had substantial assets to spend in paying for ALF care.

Residential care facilities or board and care homes are known by more than 30 different names across the US. These include personal care homes, homes for the aged, adult congregate living facilities, residential care facilities for the aged, shelter care homes, adult care homes, domiciliary care homes, and assisted living.

Reports and Articles on Assisted Living

American Seniors Housing Association (2002). *Seniors Housing State Regulatory Handbook 2002*. Washington, DC: American Seniors Housing Association.

Assisted Living Quality Coalition (1998). *Assisted Living Quality Initiative: Building A Structure That Promotes Quality*. Washington, DC.

Assisted Living Workgroup (2003). *Assuring Quality in Assisted Living: Guidelines for Federal and State Policy, State Regulation and Operation*. Report to the US Special Committee on Aging, Washington, DC.

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Rural communities and non-profit providers: may have opportunities to develop affordable assisted living and supportive housing for frail elders and persons with disabilities through USDA loan and grant programs (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs>). See also <http://www.ruralhome.org>, for information from the Housing Assistance Council on new initiatives in rural housing and the Gateway; and information from HUD (<http://www.hud.gov/assist/siteindex.cfm> and type in "assisted living").

State policymakers and advocates who wish to expand the availability and nature of assisted living and other types of housing with supportive services in rural areas and for persons with low and moderate income have a number of options to consider (See especially Mollica, 2002 and Mollica & Jenkins, 2002). These include:

- State licensing laws and Medicaid waiver requirements that mandate private accommodations, a wide range of services, and admission and retention policies;
- Use of coverage for personal care services under the Medicaid state plan and Medicaid waiver programs;
- State policies on medical and financial eligibility for Medicaid coverage of nursing home and residential care; policies on spousal protection and spend-down for Medicaid;
- State and federal housing finance policies and tax incentive programs for construction of low-income housing for older and disabled persons; and
- Formal and informal linkages between housing policies and programs and long-term care services.

Creating Affordable Assisted Living & Supportive Housing

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation sponsors *The Coming Home Program* that concentrates on key policy and development issues that affect the availability and quality of affordable assisted living (AL) (<http://www.rwjf.org>). See also the website for the NCB Development Corporation that provides consulting to states, communities and organizations interesting in promoting affordable AL (<http://www.ncbdc.org>).

Gulyas, R. (2002). *How States Have Created Affordable Assisted Living: What Advocates and Policy Makers Need To Know*. Washington, DC: AARP (<http://www.aarp.org>).

Mollica, R. & Jenkins, R. (2002). *State Assisted Living Practices and Options: A Guide for State Policy Makers*. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (<http://rwjf.org>).

Pynoos, J. (1998). *Increasing Housing Options for Frail Older Persons: State Roles and Strategies*. San Francisco: American Society on Aging (<http://www.asaging.org>)

(Reports and Articles Continued)

Hawes, C, Phillips, CD, Rose, M, et al. (2003). A national survey of assisted living facilities. *The Gerontologist* 43: 875-882.

Hawes, C., Rose M., & Phillips, C. D. (1999). *A National Study of Assisted Living for the Frail Elderly, Executive Summary: Results of a National Survey of Facilities*. Download from the ASPE website at <http://www.aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/home.htm>. under Research Projects (National Study of...)

Hawes et al. (1995). *Analysis of the Effect of Regulation on the Quality of Care in Board and Care Homes. Executive Summary*. Download from the ASPE website under "Research Project Archives."

Hawes, C., Greene, A., Wood, M. & C. Woodsong (1996). *Family Members' Views: What Is Quality in Assisted Living for People With Dementia?* (Washington, DC: Alzheimer's Association).

Kane, R.A. & Wilson, K.B. (1993). *Assisted Living in the United States: A New Paradigm for Residential Care for Frail Older Persons?* Washington, DC: American Association of Retired Persons.

Mollica, R. (2002). *State Assisted Living Policy 2002*. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Phillips, C, Munoz, Y, Sherman, M, et al. (2003). Effect of facility characteristics on departures from assisted living: Results from a national study. *Gerontologist* 43: 690-696.

U.S. General Accounting Office (1999). *Assisted Living Quality of Care and Consumer Protection Issues in Four States*. Washington, DC: GAO/HEHS-99-27.

Zimmerman, S, Sloane, P, & Eckert, K (Eds) (2001). *Assisted Living: Needs, Practices and Policies in Residential Care for the Elderly*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Zimmerman, S, Gruber-Baldini, AL, Sloane PD, et al. (2003). Assisted living and nursing homes: apples and oranges? *The Gerontologist* 43(Special Issue II): 107 – 117.

This Policy Brief was produced by the Southwest Rural Health Research Center which is funded by the Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) at HRSA. Our report is ***Assisted Living in Rural America: Results from A National Survey***, by Catherine Hawes, Charles D. Phillips, Scott Holan and Michael Sherman. You can download a copy of the report from our website at <http://www.srph.tamushsc.edu/srhrc>, order a copy from Becky Ray (blray@srph.tamushsc.edu) or contact the **Southwest Rural Health Research Center**, SRPH/Texas A&M, 3000 Briarcrest Dr., Suite 416, Bryan, TX 77802.