

ASK ENCORE | GLENN RUFFENACH

The Right Time to Move Into a CCRC

The answer: Perhaps sooner rather than later. And that raises a larger issue.



My husband and I are considering a move to a continuing-care retirement community. We are in our early 70s, and both of us are in good health. But we recognize that we might need help in the future. Is there a "better" or "best" time to settle in one of these developments? Residents in some of the communities we have visited seem decidedly older than us. Perhaps we should wait before moving. Any thoughts?

I'll talk about CCRCs in a moment. But there is a more important issue here: the risks associated with postponing big decisions in retirement.

At the risk of stating the obvious, time is something we're running out of as we age. And yet, many of us act as if the opposite were true. Human nature (or, more simply, denial) is a big part of this. It's much more pleasing to focus on the positive aspects of later life—opportunities to follow new paths, increased life expectancy, travel—than on our mortality.

Or, as one retiree told me years ago: "We're all used to planning for growth, but most of us are less enthusiastic about planning for decline."

And so we delay, at least when it comes to some of the more difficult tasks associated with retirement. We wait to downsize. We wait to get those estate plans in order. We wait to talk with our elderly parents about their wishes. We wait to talk with our adult children about our wishes. And we wait (perhaps "hesitate" is a better word) to change our living arrangements. As I mentioned in a recent column, my wife and I have been debating about packing up and moving in retire-



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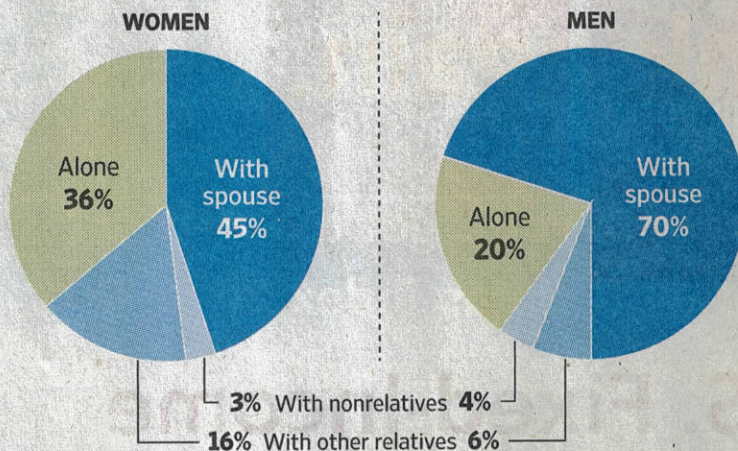
options (at least as far as CCRCs were concerned) had dried up.

No, CCRCs aren't for everyone. (And the contracts that govern housing and services can be ridiculously complicated.) But if you have done your homework—if you have decided that this is the right lifestyle for you—I would err on the side of acting sooner rather than later. And that's pretty good advice for retirement in general.

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Living Arrangements

Among the population age 65 and older in the U.S., the following percentages of women and men in 2015 lived:



Source: Census Bureau

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ment—but we don't do much more than that: debate. And I wonder when, or if, we're going to decide.

All of which brings me back to CCRCs. As the name implies, most continuing-care developments enable residents, if the need arises, to move from independent living to assisted living to nursing care, all within a single community. The knowledge that a person or couple can remain in a particular neighborhood, whatever the changes to their health, is

the biggest appeal of a CCRC.

And here's a good example of where "waiting" can backfire. Generally, CCRCs require prospective residents to be in good health and able to live independently. (Some communities will ask for a medical exam.) You mention that you're in good health today. That's great. But some retirees I have talked with through the years told me they waited too long to apply; their health had gone downhill, and their housing

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