

Whitepaper

Designing a Safe Living Space:

Leveraging Room Design as a Market Differentiator To Promote Safety



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There has been a lot of research conducted on how common areas in senior housing communities impact the psychological and physical wellness of residents, but there hasn't been much focus on their personal living space. This is a missed opportunity because room design plays a large role in the safety and well-being of residents.

SafelyYou data reveals that 40% of detected “on-the-floor” fall events occur when the resident is intentionally self-lowering to the ground. Of these falls, 78% happen from the resident's bed. When analyzing residents' activities prior to fall, 17% were laying down, 30% sitting and 53% were standing or walking. These statistics truly underscore the need to bolster fall prevention programs and make a resident's environment safer.

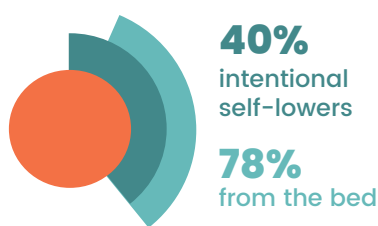
Creating a safe living space is especially important for adults living with dementia, who fall 4x a year on average— twice as often as adults without dementia¹. The complexity of their needs can involve all facets of a building. With a space designed just for them, people can live more peacefully, securely and socially in a world they can understand.

Since creating this space necessitates a unique combination of meeting specialized requirements and analyzing fall metrics, the fall experts at SafelyYou leveraged insights from more than 14,000 fall video reviews to develop a streamlined approach to “**Designing a Safe Living Space.**”

“Square footage is a constant number,” said Shirley Nickels, COO for SafelyYou. “While there will always be restrictions, we can be smarter about how we use that square footage. Even small tweaks can lead to a much more efficient and safe outcome.”

SafelyYou's approach will help senior housing operators quickly get up to speed on best practices so they can establish their communities as leaders in room design. Operators can use their room design expertise as a market differentiator to promote their culture of safety to families who are transitioning their loved one to senior housing, and it can even help inform the design for new developments or renovations to existing communities.

Falls in Senior Housing: Are They Preventable?



Activity prior to an unintentional fall

- 17% laying down
- 30% sitting
- 53% walking/standing

 total detected “on the floor” events

Fall Prevention Begins Before Move-In

A good welcome focuses on making residents immediately comfortable, physically and emotionally. It starts with meeting a resident's family before move-in so the direct-care team can get to know the resident, explain how to design a room for maximum safety and comfort and share examples of an optimal living space. SafelyYou developed two downloadable resources, [Three Conversation Tips](#) and a [Move-In Checklist](#), to help operators and the direct-care staff guide these important discussions.



Three Conversation Tips

An easy-to-use, one-page tool, Three Conversation Tips highlights important details to convey to family members so they understand how their loved one will be living in their new environment. It also provides recommendations for creating a comfortable and safe experience for the new resident. The following is a high-level recap:

- 1 **Understand a Resident's Personal Habits and Routines:** It's important to understand a resident's personal story, daily routines, interests as well as likes and dislikes. Ask a resident's family about their sleeping schedule, preferred foods and clothing as well as favorite TV shows. Even knowing when they like to shower – morning or evening – and if they sleep with a light on will help a resident feel more calm and settled in their new environment.
- 2 **Create a Safe Living Space with Less is More Approach:** Invite family members to visit the resident's room before move-in to discuss mobility status and emphasize the less is more approach to designing a safe living space. Discuss bed, dresser, bedside table and lamp needed in the room as well as personal items to create a cozy atmosphere.
- 3 **Share Examples of a Well-Designed Bedroom:** Since memory care bedrooms are limited on space, share exact room dimensions and examples of good floor plans with family members. Discuss optimal furniture size and positioning, such as putting a bed flush against the wall, so families know what to bring and what to leave behind.



Move-In Checklist

Direct-care staff can also use the Move-In Checklist to address a number of critical considerations with families prior to a resident move-in. The following are just a few highlights:

- ✓ **Resident Considerations:** Discuss environmental preferences and routines, review mobility status and determine level of assistance needed for transfers, dressing and showering.
- ✓ **Furniture and Storage:** Discuss bed size and position in the room, address possible hazards of a bedside table as well as storage needs.
- ✓ **Additional Mobility Considerations:** Understand which personal items a resident needs, so they are within reach. If a mobility aid is needed, ensure there is a clear pathway to enter and exit the room.
- ✓ **Maintenance After Move-In:** Since a resident's condition will change over time, it is essential to continuously adjust the room design for the safest environment possible by regularly evaluating mobility and ability to perform activities of daily living.

Optimizing the Environment for Rest and Sleep

It is estimated that sleep problems impact 25% of those with mild to moderate dementia and 50% of those with severe dementia².

“**Poor sleep can easily increase agitation and confusion during waking hours,**” said Laura Hastings, Director of Care Services for SafelyYou. **“When sleep is compromised, a resident may mix up day and night, have trouble separating dreams from reality and wander more frequently, especially during the evening.”**

In addition to engaging in more active events during the day and more calming undertakings in the evening to transition to a restful sleep, communities also should focus on improving bed safety since many falls occur when residents are transferring in or out of bed or navigating around a bed. In fact, more than 30% of SafelyYou-detected falls happen when a resident self-lowers from the bed. Keep in mind that a resident living with dementia may roll out of bed due to poor spatial awareness, confusion or disorientation.

Environmental Design Considerations to Promote Rest



nightlights to improve orientation



temperature of the space



consistent sleep/wake schedule



security objects available



environmental cues for sleep



sunlight exposure throughout the day

“It’s important to assess a resident’s bed,” added Nickels. “Is it the right width and length and placed in a location that is easily accessible? You also need to examine a resident’s ability to get in and out of bed and match their status with the proper bed features, including head/foot board, mechanical, on wheels, lockable, etc. Their status needs to be assessed on a regular basis, because the size and type of bed will need to change as their dementia progresses.”

When a resident’s mobility decreases and they have difficulty navigating their environment with a mobility aid, it is time to move from a full-size to a twin bed to give the care staff more space to provide support. The next step is moving from the twin bed to a hospital bed as they need more assistance with activities of daily living and continence care. Eventually, residents will spend more time in bed and require elevation and additional safety options.

After confirming bed type, it is critical to determine the best placement for maximum safety. Many beds are positioned flush against the wall to provide a clear pathway for entering and exiting the room. Evaluate proper positioning of a bedside table, so residents can easily access commonly used items. The additional space is also needed to perform transfer techniques.

Optimizing the Environment for Peace and Familiarity

Families really want their loved one’s room to feel like home, but the oversized furniture and endless knick-knacks that worked at home can quickly fill up a room.

“The reality is that residents need a calm and peaceful environment without clutter, which creates visual noise and anxiety,” said Hastings. “A simplified space allows a resident to locate items, focus on activities and remember the sequence of tasks.”

When overwhelmed in their environment, residents may have difficulty with the cognitive processing required to complete everyday tasks. In turn, this increases their risk for falls, according to the Alzheimer’s Association.

A well-organized space also promotes serenity. Simple things like labeling drawers to improve ability to locate key items, designating locations for important items, and providing visual stimulation through personal photographs will help residents become familiar with their surroundings and feel more peaceful.

It’s also important to factor in visual considerations and improve the quality of lighting in the living space. A glare can be uncomfortable and disorienting and shadows can be confusing and disturbing. For instance, a resident may think a stranger is standing in the corner due to a shadow.

“There are some easy solutions to address these issues, such as spacing lighting evenly, selecting fixtures to hide the light source and removing furniture that blocks natural light,” added Hastings.

Optimizing the Environment for Navigation and Access

Research suggests that adults who are living with dementia increase their cognitive burden by 35-40% when they use a mobility aid, since it requires both cognitive processing and physical maneuvering.³

When residents are trying to use their mobility aid in a cluttered environment, they feel like they are navigating a complex maze. And when you factor in that 59% of SafelyYou-detected falls show mobility aids are not used or used improperly, it adds up to a perfect storm for a fall to occur.

The solution is to avoid oversized or unnecessary furniture, remove obstacles from pathways, evaluate how a resident navigates doorways, and limit the use of unstable furniture, such as folding tables.

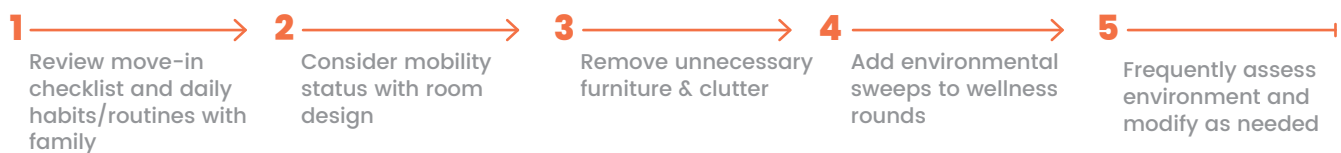
As dementia progresses, it is crucial to periodically assess a resident's ability to safely use a mobility aid. Update your care plan with the type of mobility aid a resident uses, where they like it placed in the room when they are alone. Also, keep a mobility-aid within reach if a resident can self-transfer and out of view if they can't.

Deteriorating vision will impact their ability to navigate. Both peripheral vision and depth perception will decrease over time, so residents may not see obstacles or visual cues to support daily tasks. They will also have trouble judging distances or navigating stairs.

To combat this, place items, such as a mobility aid, within their visual field. And use high-contrasting colors, such as a white dinner plate on a black table, a bright blue chair on beige carpet and colored tape to distinguish transitions in flooring.

Reassess Residents to Keep Room Design Current

As dementia progresses, residents' cognitive abilities and mobility status will change and their room design must keep pace with their declining health. Changes can happen quickly, so it is imperative to reassess a resident's condition once a month and modify their environment accordingly. The **following checklist** will help the direct-care staff with this assessment:



Falls may still happen – although, ideally less frequently. The direct-care team should conduct a fall huddle after a fall occurrence and analyze any environmental risk factors as well as the current health status of the resident. This is the perfect time to reassess the resident's needs and adjust the room design if needed.

“Improving your room design doesn't necessarily mean a costly construction expense,” added Nickels. “SafelyYou's approach makes the most of the space you have and gives senior housing communities the tools they need to take immediate action and reduce falls. From clear pathways for mobility-aid use and lighting considerations to making commonly used items such as glasses or the television remote easily accessible, our road map for the best room design combines our environmental tips with our guide for meeting with families before their loved one moves in. It's just the right holistic approach to designing a safe living space that is tailored for a resident's specific needs. By improving residents' safety and well-being, communities can extend their length of stay and market their room design expertise to increase occupancy rates.”



Resident Room Design for Fall Prevention

For more information about how to improve room design in your community, [watch](#) the webinar, Resident Room Design for Fall Prevention, hosted by SafelyYou with special guest, Erin Berry, Director of Interior Design with Direct Supply Aptura.

For more information about reducing falls in your community, contact info@safely-you.com.

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 2. Alzheimer's: Managing Sleep Problems. mayoclinic.org, 2019.
 3. Todd Devlin. Challenges of Mobility Aids and Dementia Explored. news.westernu.ca.2017