

Independent Living Association Quality Standards

Independent Livings facilitate a group of adults living together as a family, and provide a safe affordable home for thousands of people in San Diego County. Each home is as individual as the people who live in them.

The ILA Quality Standards, including the attributes and indicators outlined below were developed by the Independent Living Association Advisory Committee and are recommended as best practices for Independent Livings. ILA Members must adhere to the all of the ILA Quality Standards listed below.

Eight attributes of a quality Independent Living residence:

- 1. Clean, safe and well maintained housing;*
- 2. A clear statement of policies is made available to residents and clearly explained prior to lease signing;*
- 3. Clear process for handling complaints, and opportunities for residents to positively influence their environment and remove unhealthy influences;*
- 4. An environment that respects the privacy of the residents;*
- 5. An environment free of any type of abuse or discrimination that requires all residents to be treated with dignity, consideration and respect at all times;*
- 6. Concerned and competent Owners/Resident Assistants;*
- 7. Clearly outlined amenities that are consistently and fairly made available to all residents;*
- 8. A resident focused living environment.*

Each of the eight attributes is discussed in more detail below:

1. Clean, safe and well maintained housing

Quality housing should be clean and well maintained both inside and out. Private spaces should be adequate in size and configuration to allow for regular daily activities. The home should be free from potential hazards; this is especially true in areas that may pose the greatest likelihood of risk including kitchens, bathrooms and common spaces. Owners/Resident Assistants should respond to all requests for property maintenance in a consistent and timely manner. If residents are responsible (or partially responsible) for cleaning, the duties and expectations should be clearly communicated in terms of scope and timing. The housing should also include appropriate safety and security features including, at a minimum, adequate locks and lighting.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- Owners/Resident Assistants adhere to all laws regarding fair housing and housing code regulations, including but not limited to, ensuring smoke detectors and fire extinguishers are working and regularly checked
 - Owner maintains a clean and hygienic living environment inside and outside the house
 - Pest control is addressed appropriately and in a timely fashion
 - All potential hazards are secured, outside normal household use (i.e., pools, garage items, sharp objects)
 - Home is legally rented or owned
 - Electricity, water (including working toilets and bathing facilities) and heat (or air conditioning) must function appropriately for normal living
 - There is adequate space to move about a bedroom, with space between the bed(s) and dresser and the closet
 - No bunk beds
 - Minimum of (1) of bathroom per (6) residents
- 2. A clear statement of policies is made available to residents and clearly explained prior to lease signing.**

Part of the benefit of an Independent Living concept as a housing model is the flexibility to make it operate in a way that best serves the interests of residents and also serves the property owner's needs. Residents should have a good idea of the expectations and philosophies of a given property before they sign a lease. Every property should have clearly written policies, house rules, regulations, rent payment policies and eviction policies that are consistently and fairly administered. Residents should be given the opportunity to review and agree to all the policies so that they go into the relationship with a full understanding of what to expect from their housing choice.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- A clear statement of house rules, regulations, and eviction policies is provided to every resident and posted in a common area
- Owners adhere to legal eviction procedures
- Clearly written rental agreement is provided to all residents
- Owner/Resident Assistant adheres to written rental agreement including providing all amenities incorporated into the agreement
- Residents are provided information about their right to move out at any time after providing a 30-day notice and appropriate payment
- Residence has a posted earthquake/fire/disaster plan

3. Clear process for handling resident complaints, and opportunities for residents to positively influence their environment and remove unhealthy influences.

All Independent Livings will face challenges from time to time. Some problems may arise because of conflicting personalities, while other problems may be a result of faulty or inequitable policies. Owners/Resident Assistants that establish clear processes for handling resident complaints and encourage opportunities for residents to inform them about unhealthy influences will have happier residents. If Owners/Resident Assistants are open to suggestions and take complaints seriously; with an eye towards constructively evaluating and implementing change when necessary; Owners/Resident Assistants can expect fewer problems in the future, less resident turn-over and a happier living environment for all their residents.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- A written complaint process is included in house rules and posted on the premises.
- Complaints and follow up are documented by Owners

4. An environment that respects the privacy of the residents.

Independent Livings put people in close quarters as a matter of circumstance. However, just because people are living in close proximity to one another, and even sharing common spaces, doesn't mean that they don't have a right to privacy.

All residents should have an individual lease with the same rights granted to other leaseholders at the property. Bedrooms should be delineated from other rooms in the house and allow for proper egress and optimal fire safety. Owners/Resident Assistants should respect the private living spaces of residents by only entering with the appropriate notice or at the invitation of the resident. During times of routine maintenance requiring residents to remove themselves from the premises for pre-determined lengths of time (i.e. plumbing or electrical repair, fumigation, etc.), residents should be given advanced notice (at least 24 hours whenever possible, except in the case of emergencies) so that residents may make the necessary arrangements to accommodate such activities.

Resident's personal property should be respected and clearly delineated from community or household property. Residents should have locks on their rooms, when possible. Resident's individual medical history should never be disclosed or discussed without their explicit authorization except as necessary during a life-threatening emergency and even then, only to the appropriate mental health provider, law enforcement or medical first responder/EMT.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- Owners/Resident Assistants have a knowledge of patient rights as they relate to resident privacy
- Each resident has his/her own bed, dresser and/or closet space, and access to a phone
- When possible, each resident has access to his/her own space for personal belongings
- No information is released without the resident's knowledge and written consent
- Owners/Resident Assistants don't unduly infringe on the personal relationships of the residents and allow, where possible, privacy for interpersonal relations
- Beds should not be placed in common areas (e.g. rooms normally designated as living rooms or areas designed for group access)
- All bedrooms should have a door to clearly delineate them from other rooms in the house (note, partitions such as room dividers and sheets are not acceptable, special considerations may be granted with approval from ILA).

5. An environment free of any type of abuse or discrimination that requires all residents to be treated with dignity, consideration and respect at all times.

Shared living works best if everyone involved treats each other with respect and dignity. A home should be a place that is not only free from physical harm, but also from emotional harm. Residents will be more likely to enjoy their housing experience if the environment that is fostered is welcoming, non-judgmental and respectful. Additionally, Owners should become aware of applicable regulations and standards including Fair Housing laws, Landlord-Tenant laws, and Americans with Disabilities Act regulations.

High quality homes will be welcoming of cultural values and norms of the residents and show sensitivity to differing cultural practices and world views.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- Owners/Resident Assistants have a basic knowledge of mental illness diagnoses and medications
- Owners/Resident Assistants adhere to all laws including fair housing and housing code regulations
- Residents have access to a refrigerator for personal food storage at all times
- Residents have the right to refuse to work for the Owner without fear of retaliation, except as related to chores clearly stated in the House Rules
- Residents are provided a safe environment free of emotional, physical and sexual abuse

- No discrimination against residents on the basis of, but not limited to: sex, age, disability, race, color, or religion is evident in the home
- Residents are treated with dignity, consideration and respect at all times
- Policies prohibiting sexual conduct, not limited to sexual intercourse, between Owners, Resident Assistants and residents are present

6. Concerned and competent Owners and Resident Assistants.

Owners/Resident Assistants play a critical role in the success of an Independent Living. Owners/Resident Assistants should respond to concerns in a manner that demonstrates respect for residents. Owners/Resident Assistants relationships and demeanor in regard to residents should always be respectful and consistent. Owners/Resident Assistants should take the time to become familiar with the business requirements, financial concerns, laws and best practices for shared housing models. It is important to understand the medical diagnosis and difficulties that residents may face, and also important for Resident Assistants to understand what is not appropriate in an Independent Living environment.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- Owners/Resident Assistants are aware of policies and procedures to follow when a serious situation or crisis arises (e.g. death of a resident)
- Owners/Resident Assistants have a basic knowledge of mental illness diagnoses and medications
- Owners/Resident Assistants have the ability to communicate and understand English
- Owners/Resident Assistants have a working knowledge of community health system and support services
- Owners/Resident Assistants have knowledge of hospital systems, rules, and policies including criteria for involuntary hospitalization
- Owners/Resident Assistants have knowledge of patient rights
- Owners/Resident Assistants exercise complete confidentiality within the limits of the law
- Owners/Resident Assistants conduct themselves professionally within the community (including but not limited to relationships with neighbors, law enforcement and the ILA)
- Owners/Resident Assistants respond to requests from the ILA and the community in a timely manner
- Owners/Resident Assistants understand and comply with state law requirement not to provide direct care, supervision or administration of medications, or management of a resident's funds or public benefits.

7. Clearly outlined amenities are consistently and fairly made available to all residents.

While there is not a “right” or a “wrong” list of amenities for an Independent Living to provide (e.g. internet access, meals and snacks, cable television access, on-site parking, laundry or storage), it is important that you are clear about what is and is not included as part of the resident’s home. If an amenity is part of the rental agreement, it should be consistently and fairly offered to all residents. When possible, resident choice should be considered and opportunities for resident input should be sought.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- Owners/Resident Assistants adhere to written rental agreement (e.g. if meals are a part of the rental agreement, they are provided)
- Residents have access to a refrigerator for personal food storage

8. A resident focused living environment.

Independent Livings will be best served and successful if Owners understand what residents need and want. By putting the resident first, you give yourself the greatest opportunity to succeed. Incorporating feedback from residents will allow you to have a better run home, ensure maximum occupancy, resulting in long term, satisfied residents. Additionally, a resident-focused home gives the resident the best opportunity to meet their personal goals which enriches not only their immediate environment, but the entire community.

Indicators of this attribute include:

- Owners/Resident Assistants are available (on-site or by mobile phone/pager) 24 hours/day
- Owners have easy access to basic information on each client, in case of emergency
- Owners/Resident Assistants create an atmosphere where all residents are treated with dignity, consideration and respect at all times