

A healthcare worker in blue scrubs is assisting an elderly woman with a walker in a hallway. The worker is holding the woman's arm for support. The woman is looking down at the walker. The hallway has large windows in the background.

Crucial Safety Net for Assisted Living Communities

**Amid changing resident
demographics and
staffing hardships, LTC
pharmacies can help**





OVERVIEW

The paradigm shift in the assisted living industry is well underway. Every day assisted living communities are confronting the challenges of a resident population ever increasing in average age and care needs while simultaneously facing dire staffing issues and its consequences on delivering optimal care.

According to a November 2021 report¹ by the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living, nursing homes and assisted living communities across the U.S. are suffering the worst labor crisis and job loss among all healthcare sectors.

The added burdens of these issues have stretched assisted living facilities (ALFs) to their limit, as understaffed communities must contend with providing higher acuity care to an increasingly more fragile resident population.

Though these issues cannot be fully abated by a long-term care (LTC) pharmacy, a comprehensive pharmacy partner can provide a vital safety net to lessen many of the hurdles ALF staff must clear to ensure they are providing the enhanced services required by residents.

Learn how a LTC pharmacy can help ease the burdens being placed on you and your staff.

WHY ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITIES NEED ADDITIONAL PHARMACY SUPPORT

A primary challenge ALFs are facing is the monumental shift from supporting a majority active senior population to delivering healthcare-focused care as more residents age. As the median age of ALF residents rise, along with the overall U.S. senior population, they often need more hands-on and intensive assistance, adding to the responsibilities of staff.

More than half of the country's 811,500 ALF residents are over the age of 85, according to the National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL)². Nearly two-thirds of those residents need help with bathing, 57% need assistance walking and almost half need aid while dressing. Many residents also need additional care for common ailments. According to the NCAL survey over half of residents have high blood pressure, 34% have heart disease, and 42% have Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

These residents not only require more care in daily activities; ALF staff are also encumbered with managing and administering an often-large assortment of medications throughout each day, and older adults are more likely than their younger counterparts to be taking multiple prescription medications. In fact, the average ALF resident now takes 12 to 14 medications per day, and 87% require medication management assistance.

Often, these medications are prescribed by a multitude of physicians, and the prescriptions are obtained from various pharmacies with no oversight into the resident's overall drug regimen. A lack of focused coordination and communication between LTC staff, physicians and pharmacies can greatly increase the risk of ALF residents experiencing adverse drug reactions and interactions.

The enhanced care required by an older population further strains ALF staff, who are already contending with incredible job loss in the industry.

Burnout from the COVID-19 pandemic has been detrimental leading to high turnover rates and staffing shortages at LTC communities, resulting in less staff to deal with the added needs of their residents. Over the first 18 months of the pandemic, a November 2021 report¹ from the AHCA and NCAL found more than 38,000 jobs were lost at ALFs alone, with many ALF staff leaving to work in other healthcare settings or in other industries. Among the 14,000 ALFs and nursing homes surveyed, a staggering 96% reported a staffing shortage, and 100% of those communities had been forced to ask staff to work overtime or extra shifts.





LTC PHARMACIES EASE THE BURDENS WITH SMART, SAFE AND EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

As ALF residents require more thorough care from a strained and thinly stretched staff, an LTC pharmacy is a vital partner in helping communities provide top-tier, safe care with numerous advantages for both staff and residents. A comprehensive LTC pharmacy partner, especially one that is local, provides ALFs and their residents with a bevy of benefits, including:

- **A medication management team:** Keeping residents safe and healthy is the top priority for all ALFs and requires expertise from a medication management team. This team consists of a dedicated group of specialists that pays attention to all your concerns and makes getting to know your staff and residents' medication a top priority. The medication management team should work directly with residents' doctors, community nurses and community staff/administration. This integrated approach provides an extra layer of resident safety and security.
- **Medication safety solutions:** An LTC pharmacy should review a resident's entire drug regimen regularly and when a new medication is prescribed to make certain drug combinations are always safe, medications are necessary, and any potentially harmful reactions are minimized. Depending on your community's COVID-19 policies, these reviews can be completed onsite or virtually.
- **Consistent, smart packaging:** Variations in packaging from multiple pharmacies or with several dosage/medication types can lead to errors in administering medications. An LTC pharmacy can eliminate these concerns with consistent, safe packaging that separates medications by date and time of day making it easy for staff to ensure the resident takes the right medications at the right time. "NO TOUCH" packaging that includes a barcode that can be scanned and used to easily track medicines and their administration helps mitigate human error.
- **Use of the latest technology:** Access to electronic health records and electronic medication administration records (eMARs) can reduce medication errors, keeping residents safe. With this technology, staff will always have real-time data available, simplifying updating and ordering of medications, offering access to resident medication profiles with previous history, and improving accuracy through e-prescribing by removing the potential for error when MARs are hand transcribed. For those organizations that already have an eMAR system, make sure the LTC pharmacy you work with interfaces with it.

Additionally, your LTC pharmacy should utilize the most advanced technology, analytics and insights to help increase profitability, safety and efficiency. This includes tracking extensive data available to your community and transforming it into easy-to-understand analytic reports that evaluate both high-level and specific data on residents, medications and more.



LTC PHARMACIES PROVIDE DIRECT CUSTOMER SERVICE, TRAINING, MEDICATION DELIVERIES AND 24/7 SUPPORT

The piece of mind provided by an LTC pharmacy goes beyond medication management. They also provide a direct line of support, service and assistance. As ALFs are strained by outside factors, they require the expertise and accessibility only an LTC pharmacy can provide, including:

- **Accurate medication billing:** LTC pharmacies work with residents' physicians and insurance to verify all medications are covered by insurance/Medicare/Medicaid and work to find solutions when they are not. From issues with pre-authorization and non-covered medications to the customer support 800 numbers, residents often experience challenges when trying to resolve problems with their bills and seek help from community staff. Look for your pharmacy partner to work with your residents' physicians and insurance companies to ensure that the prescribed medications, or the clinically equivalent alternatives, are covered before the prescription is filled and provide resident billing assistance. Medicare Part D guidance is another invaluable resource to offer the broadest coverage and lower expenses.
- **Education and training:** Well-educated staff are more effective and make fewer mistakes. Look for a pharmacy that works with you to evaluate the needs of your staff and offers onsite training. Nurses and pharmacist consultants should in-service your staff on topics such as med pass, fall prevention, Alzheimer's, the basics of anti-psychotic use, and more. This training will build staff confidence, leading to more positive resident outcomes and a higher probability of staff retention.
- **Direct deliveries to ALFs:** LTC pharmacies serve as an important lifeline you can depend on to resolve issues at any time and schedule medication deliveries that fit your schedule. When you have questions or an emergency, you should have confidence knowing that pharmacists and staff are available 24/7 to provide answers and deliver medications.


CHOOSING AN LTC PHARMACY THAT PROVIDES EXPERIENCE, EXPERTISE AND CONVENIENCE CAN HELP MITIGATE THE ISSUES YOUR STAFF IS FACING

With the increasing average age of ALF residents and their need for more hands-on care, coupled with staffing issues seen nationwide, LTC pharmacies serve as an essential partner to allow ALFs to serve their residents with top-tier care. An LTC pharmacy can ease the burden on the assisted living community workforce, thereby boosting staff retention, and provide support, convenience and safety. Selecting the right LTC pharmacy partner will make all the difference in the world for your residents, staff and your community.

¹ Report: Nursing homes down 221,000 jobs since start of pandemic. Press Releases. (2021, 1 10). Retrieved March 3, 2022, from <https://www.ahcancal.org/News-and-Communications/Press-Releases/Pages/REPORT-Nursing-Homes-Down-221,000-Jobs-Since-Start-Of-Pandemic.aspx>

² ACHA/NACL. (n.d.). Facts & figures. Facts and Figures. Retrieved March 3, 2022, from <https://www.ahcancal.org/Assisted-Living/Facts-and-Figures/Pages/default.aspx>



A caregiver in light-colored scrubs is smiling and holding a clipboard while assisting an elderly woman. The woman is using a silver walker and looking down at it. They are in a bright, modern hallway with large windows in the background.

Guardian Pharmacy Services is one of the nation's largest long-term care pharmacy companies. Guardian's pharmacies provide outstanding client service and resident care to long-term care communities, including organizations that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and assisted living and skilled nursing.

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