

The Center for Excellence in Assisted Living (CEAL@UNC)

Commentary on *Aging in The United States: A Strategic Framework for a National Plan on Aging*

September 4th, 2024

The national Center for Excellence in Assisted Living (CEAL) was established in 2003 in response to the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging's Assisted Living Workgroup Report, as a unique national collaborative of diverse organizations working together to promote excellence in assisted living. In 2023, CEAL joined with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) to create a closer partnership with research and provide more capacity to advance the well-being of the people who live and work in assisted living through research, practice, and policy. Information about CEAL@UNC is available at its [website](#).

CEAL@UNC strongly supports the development of a National Plan on Aging and commends the Administration for Community Living for its collaborative approach in creating this Strategic Framework. We also applaud the guiding values of person-centeredness, inclusion, respect, and collaboration and innovation.

Despite its comprehensive scope, this framework overlooks the vital role that assisted living plays in promoting healthy aging for the 800,000 older adults—over a third of whom are diagnosed with dementia—who reside in these communities. While aging in place is the preferred choice for most older adults, research shows that [nearly a third](#) view assisted living as a viable, and even preferred, alternative. The growing acceptance and importance of assisted living in the continuum of long-term care, services, and supports underscores the need for its inclusion in a National Plan on Aging.

CEAL@UNC suggests incorporating [its definition](#) of assisted living into the National Plan, defining assisted living communities as *licensed residential settings that provide housing; personal care; wellness, social, recreational, and health-related services such as nursing and dementia care; and 24-hour access to staff. These communities' core principles include person-centered services and policies, as well as an adequate number of well-trained, supported staff. Person-centered services and policies promote quality of life, privacy, choice, dignity, inclusion, and independence as defined by each individual and those who know them best.*

CEAL@UNC highlights that the guiding values underpinning this Strategic Framework are essential to assisted living. Person-centeredness, a long-standing philosophy in these communities, aims to provide care that respects the dignity and choices of older adults. Advocacy groups like [SAGE](#) have worked to ensure that many of these communities offer safe spaces where all older adults can receive the support they need. By definition, assisted living communities promote social and physical engagement, offering safe environments where older adults can engage in meaningful and purposeful activities. Including assisted living in the National Plan on Aging would ensure the comprehensive integration of all aspects of aging, fostering the collaboration and innovation needed to enhance long-term services and supports.

Much like the Strategic Framework, the ideal vision of assisted living is not the reality for all residents. However, given the aspirational nature of this framework, CEAL@UNC strongly advocates for its inclusion to ensure that older adults who prefer to call congregate settings home have a voice in this plan, and the opportunity to receive the support they need in a dignified, person-centered environment. This inclusion would add the various ongoing efforts to improve the experiences of those who live and work in these communities into a truly national plan. For an example of such efforts, see the recent recommendations to the [Special Committee on Aging provided by CEAL@UNC](#).

CEAL@UNC, with its two-decade mission to advance the well-being of assisted living residents and staff, stands ready to collaborate with the Administration for Community Living in developing the inclusion of assisted living into the National Plan on Aging. In that spirit CEAL@UNC would welcome the opportunity to host a listening session with its Strategic Advisors for further input.