

Move-in makeover

Transforming how people experience moving into long-term care at Sienna Senior Living

At Sienna, even while the pandemic was still in play, leaders started working on a new vision for creating a fulfilling experience in long-term care, with happiness at the root of daily life. Also, thinking ahead to the seismic demographic shift of the baby boomer generation, it was the right time to do something bold, transformative and purpose driven.

Extensive research into existing care models and consultation with Sienna's resident and family advisory groups revealed that Sienna has some excellent practices in place. Consultations also showed where there are opportunities to raise the bar when it comes to trust, communication, dining experience, recreation and socialization.

Circle

Following more than a year of design work and collaboration with residents, families and team members, Sienna launched the Circle approach, which is made up of four pillars: Settle-In, Savour It, Stimulate and Socialize. Each pillar identifies an aspect of long-term care that is most important to residents and families. The Circle approach is built on a foundation of high-quality clinical care and service excellence.

Since every journey to long-term care starts with moving in, that is where Sienna's changes began.

Moving ranks among the most stressful life events. Throwing in the additional complexities of needing long-term care makes it easy to see

why making this transition can be difficult.

Feelings of sadness, anxiety and loss of independence often accompany moving to long-term care. In addition, the stress of packing, paperwork, complex medical needs, guilt and fear of the unknown is overwhelming. For long-term-care staff, moving day is routine and often down to a science. The faster it gets done, the quicker residents can get settled in. But in the process, the resident and family experience can become overshadowed by necessary tasks: labelling clothing, admission paperwork, and assisting with unpacking.

While we cannot change what needs to be done to move someone safely into long-term care, we can change how we do it. Sienna Senior Living's Settle-In program puts an empathetic lens on an otherwise difficult process to make moving into long-term care feel less transactional and more personal.

Settle-In

The perspectives of residents and families were vital to the design of Settle-In. Their experiences were the basis of the journey map, aligning the structured process of moving in to meeting their individual needs and not the needs of the long-term care home. The journey map highlights four phases of the move-in process where long-term care homes can partner with residents and families to personalize their experience. The phases identified include: Tour, Prepare, Arrival and Settle-In.

An essential part of the Settle-In pillar's success is for long-term care staff to understand how they impact the move-in experience. The right mindset first involves acknowledging that for staff, move-in day is part of the regular workday, but for people moving in – and their loved ones – it is the opposite of routine. This event deserves special attention, specific staff training and processes that provide flexibility to meet every individual's situation and unique circumstances.

Rolling out the welcome mat

Tour

A decline in health usually triggers the pre-move-in stage for long-term care. When a long-term care home becomes available, decisions must be made quickly. When people have the opportunity to tour a home beforehand, it can provide comfort when it comes time to move. Sienna implemented Tour Teams of highly motivated team members (leaders and frontline staff) trained to provide an engaging tour experience. Tours give the team a chance to showcase the home and create an excellent first impression. Long-term care homes can succeed in offering all guests a high-quality tour experience by involving the whole team.

Prepare

In a perfect world, people would have more time to prepare for moving into long-term care. But for most, it's a scramble. The Prepare phase prioritizes all the tasks that can be

done at the home before move-in day, so the team can focus more on the relationship and less on the paperwork during those first overwhelming days. This involves calling them beforehand, completing as much paperwork as possible before move-in day, welcoming people to personalize their space in advance so it feels more home-like on arrival, and helping people know what to expect to soothe their fears and alleviate stress.

Arrival

Be a great host and make their arrival day feel anticipated. Every staff member should know their role in welcoming residents and be prepared to connect with them on a personal level. The attention should be on the resident and family, not the tasks. Small details such as reserved parking, welcome signs, and a personalized welcome gift can help counter some of the anxious feelings that come with move-in day.

Settle-in

The first six to eight weeks after moving into long-term care are crucial for building a relationship based on trust. A series of proactive phone calls and in-person visits from the environmental services, dietary, recreation and clinical teams during these weeks will reassure residents and families that the home is committed to getting things right.

Sustain

Sienna's Ontario and B.C. long-term care communities have received training and are now rolling out the Settle-In experience. An easy-to-use training guide and a train-the-trainer model contribute to its success. Resources include an implementation package and learning modules for each department, providing clear accountability to ensure the experience is standardized across all provinces. Audits and surveys are also integral to sustaining and improving the program.

Reducing stress, building trust

Residents and families continue to provide valuable feedback on their move-in experience. Although every move-in is unique, teams can use these learnings to continue to improve and customize the process.

One significant factor that led to the successful rollout of Settle-In was the team's thoughtful and collaborative

design. Every long-term care provider can begin implementing the Settle-In approach immediately because the basis of the program is about aligning empathy alongside getting the necessary tasks done. Settle-In ensures teams respond with the right behaviours at critical points during the move-in experience and from the perspective of understanding the journey from the lens of those we are entrusted to serve.

Creating a great move-in experience benefits everyone – the people who

live in long-term care, their loved ones, and the dedicated staff who support residents. Feeling welcome, at home, and comfortable from the first day supports trusting relationships, eases the burden of adjusting to a new environment, and cultivates happiness in daily life. [LTCI](#)

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