



Senior Care Specialists Can Ease Life Transitions

Don't wait for a crisis to make a plan.

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The U.S. is becoming an older country — in 1950, 8% of the population was 65 or older. By 2022 17.3% were 65 or older — one in six of all Americans. Increased longevity and the aging of the large Baby Boomers group born soon after World War II are key reasons for this shift.



Alyssa Tobias

These demographic changes have enormous implications in many aspects of life, from health care to housing. Alyssa Tobias, MSW, CDP, says we have a “big problem.

How are we going to care of everyone? There is no money for people who age.”

Tobias is in private practice as a senior advocate and is manager of independent living for Waltonwood Senior

Community, which has seven senior residences in Michigan.

“We don't know how we're going to age,” she says. “I want to help them go through the aging process with dignity and safety.”

Even people who are able to age well with minimal health or financial problems may face a time when their multi-floor home is risky or driving becomes a challenge.



Yuliya Gaydayenko

Ideally, geriatric experts say planning for the future should begin when everything is OK. Yuliya Gaydayenko, MSW, MA, who is chief program officer for Older Adult Services at

Jewish Family Service (JFS), recommends that individuals in their early

60s should begin to assess “what will be my network and how can I improve my health.”

Tobias suggests that a senior advocate can help parents and children make a plan in advance. Aging is a family issue, she explains, and sometimes she helps develop consensus among family members.

Geriatric specialists — usually social workers, nurses or gerontologists — who work with older individuals and their families, seek to help them make good decisions about health, housing, nutrition and transportation, now and in the future. They can assist on a one-time basis or provide ongoing care management.

Often there is one focus area of need, such as a dementia diagnosis for the

How to Choose a Geriatric Care Manager or Senior Health Advocate

There are currently no standardized qualifications for professional senior care managers. Some are members of the Agency Life Care Association (AgingLifeCare.org), which provides information about the field and professional development for practitioners. Breuer, who is active in this organization, recommends some criteria for choosing a senior care manager:

- Professional qualifications
- Areas of particular expertise, such as dementia
- After-hours capabilities
- Are they part of a team, preferably multi-disciplinary?
- Length of time in practice
- References
- Family communication policies

The care manager should be “person-centered with the clinical skills to assess your unique needs and suggest services that can help improve quality of life. They can empower people to make decisions,” Breuer says.

on how to “buy some time after discharge, maybe at a rehabilitation facility.”

When there is an urgent issue, Tobias will meet with individuals or families quickly in person or on Zoom. Jewish Family Service has an ElderCare Solutions of Michigan service with a 24/7 phone number staffed by social workers to help with immediate needs.

Whether their title is geriatric care manager, health care navigator, geriatric social worker or senior advocate, these trained professionals help assess an older individual’s mental and physical health status and suggest options for housing and care. For example, Tobias will recommend a company that can make a house safer for senior adults who want to remain in their homes.

Sometimes assistance is needed for daily living, such as bathing, medications and meal preparation. Caregivers or home health care aides are available through agencies

and from personal referrals; geriatric care managers can help with options. Caregiver agency fees usually start at \$25 per hour or more.

Individuals with dementia may need special assistance. Cognitive stimulation therapy or cognitive training classes at JFS can help individuals with early or moderate dementia, Gaydayenko says.

Tobias, who is a certified dementia practitioner through the National Council of Certified Dementia Practitioners, points out that there are different kinds of dementia and a variety of interventions. “Dementia is a family disease,” she says, which impacts more than just one family member.


Typically, an hourly fee is charged for geriatric consulting and care management. According to Breuer, in the Detroit area, the fee is usually \$110-\$175. Long-term care insurance policies may cover some costs, although

not all agencies and individual practitioners accept insurance. Some individual practitioners may charge an upfront retainer as well as an hourly fee.

At Jewish Family Service, their JFS Elder Care Solutions Department provides three levels of service: one-time consultations, comprehensive assessments and ongoing case management that can include accompanying older adults to medical appointments. Low-income individuals are eligible for some free services and subsidies for additional care. The hourly rate for those who can afford the full cost is \$110 depending on the specific assistance provided. JFS also offers workshops and health coaching for older adults to help them manage their health and support groups for caregivers.

Tobias provides a free initial consultation, as do some other private senior care managers. Her return sessions cost \$125, but she will adjust her fees based on the family’s income level and need. Tobias also speaks to groups about aging and care strategies.

Breuer points out that some older adults may not recognize that they need help. “They think that needing help is a foreign concept that doesn’t apply to them. They also fear losing independence, although taking help can help maintain independence.”

The overall goal, Gaydayenko says, is to determine “How do I keep my quality of life?” 

Make your aging plan while you are still healthy .



Lynn Breuer

older adult, concerns about driving safety or a move to a safer environment, says Lynn Breuer, LMSW, CDP, who is senior director of community outreach and wellness at JFS. In such situations, a one-time consultation may be sufficient.

In many cases, outside help is sought when there is a crisis — a fall or sudden illness requires hospitalization, and the older adult isn’t able to return home alone safely. Tobias says that she can advise family members