

A memory care home is a small residential house licensed to care for people living with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, typically serving a handful of residents rather than the dozens found in a large memory care community. For many families the real decision is not whether to choose memory care, but whether the right setting is a home-style house or a larger community with more on-site amenities.



What Is a Memory Care Home?

A memory care home is an ordinary-looking house in a residential neighborhood that has been licensed and adapted to support residents with memory loss. Residents share a kitchen, living room, and dining table, and caregivers prepare meals, help with bathing and dressing, give medications, and supervise around the clock. The home is built around a small group instead of a campus, which changes almost everything about the daily experience.

You may also see these settings called [residential memory care](#), memory care group homes, or small-home memory care. The names vary by region, but the idea is the same: a household-sized setting with dementia-specific care.

How Memory Care Homes Differ From Large Memory Care Communities

Size is the main difference, and it shapes the rest. A large memory care community usually has a dedicated wing or building with many residents, a larger staff across shifts, a full activity calendar, and shared spaces such as a courtyard, salon, or dining hall. A memory care home has fewer residents, a smaller and more consistent set of caregivers, and a routine that looks like a family household.

Because a person with dementia often finds noise, crowds, and unfamiliar faces unsettling, the quieter pace of a home can reduce agitation for some residents. Caregivers in a small home tend to learn each resident's habits closely, including when they wake, what they like to eat, and what calms them in the evening.

The trade-off is range. Larger communities can offer more structured programming, on-site therapy services, and a wider choice of apartment layouts. A home offers closeness and consistency but fewer built-in amenities. Neither setting is better in general. The better one is the one that matches the person's needs, temperament, and stage of dementia.

Who Tends to Do Well in a Memory Care Home

Memory care homes often suit people who are easily overwhelmed in busy environments, who respond best to one-on-one attention, or who would feel more settled in a home-like setting than in a facility. They can also work well for people who are mobile and social in small groups but struggle with large dining rooms and crowded activities.

The need is growing. The Alzheimer's Association's 2025 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures report estimates that about 7.2 million Americans age 65 and older are living with Alzheimer's disease, which is one reason families are looking harder at every kind of memory care setting, including small homes.

When a Larger Community May Be the Better Fit

A larger community may suit someone who is social and energized by group activities, who needs frequent access to on-site therapy or nursing oversight, or who is likely to need a higher level of care as dementia progresses. Families who want a wider range of programming, or who want a campus where care levels can change without a move, often lean this way. If you are weighing a locked or secured setting, our guide to the memory care unit explains how those work, and our post on finding the [right memory care community](#) covers the larger-community side in more depth.

How Memory Care Homes Are Licensed

Licensing is the first thing to verify, and it differs by state. In California, memory care homes generally operate as residential care facilities for the elderly, which are licensed through the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing Division. You can look up any California facility's license status and inspection history through the Department's public facility search before you visit. In Arizona, small residential settings are licensed by the Arizona Department of Health Services as assisted living homes, which by definition serve no more than ten residents.

A license does not tell you how good a home is, but an unlicensed home is a clear reason to stop. Always confirm the license, the licensed capacity, and whether the home is approved to care for residents with dementia before going further.

How to Choose a Memory Care Home

Start with the person, not the house. Write down how your loved one sleeps, eats, wanders, and reacts to noise and strangers, how much help they need with bathing, dressing, and toileting, and whether they have other medical needs. This gives you a concrete basis for comparing homes.

Then ask each home direct questions. How many caregivers are on duty during the day, in the evening, and overnight? Is anyone awake overnight? What dementia-specific training does the staff have? How does the home handle wandering, behavioral changes, and falls? What happens if your loved one's needs increase, and at what point would the home ask them to move? How are medications managed, and who is the nurse or administrator on call? Careful answers to the last two questions matter most, because a small home that cannot meet higher needs may require a second move at a hard time.



What to Look for on a Visit

Visit at more than one time of day if you can, and include a mealtime. Watch how caregivers speak to residents. Look for calm, unhurried interactions, residents who look clean and comfortable, and a home that smells fresh. Check that the layout is safe, with secured doors and yard, clear walkways, and grab bars in bathrooms. Ask to see the most recent licensing inspection report so you can read any citations for yourself.

Why Many Families Work With a Senior Care Advisor

Small homes are harder to find than large communities, because many do not advertise widely and availability changes quickly. A senior care advisor can match your loved one's needs, budget, and personality to licensed homes and communities in your area, arrange tours, and help you compare them side by side. At Placement Helpers this service is free to families, and you can start with our [free care assessment](#) to see which type of setting fits best.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is a memory care home?

A memory care home is a small, licensed residential house that provides around-the-clock care for people with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia, usually for a small number of residents who share common living spaces.

How is a memory care home different from a memory care community?

A memory care home serves a small group in a household setting with a consistent set of caregivers, while a memory care community is larger, with more residents, more staff, and more on-site amenities and activities.

Are memory care homes licensed?

Yes. In California they are generally licensed as residential care facilities for the elderly by the Department of Social Services, and in Arizona they are licensed as assisted living homes by the Department of Health Services. Always confirm a home's license and dementia approval before you visit.

How do I know if a memory care home is right for my loved one?

Compare the person's care needs, temperament, and likely progression with what the home can provide, ask what would happen if their needs increase, and visit at different times of day. A senior care advisor can help narrow the options.