

'Aging in place' may be the wrong answer for boomers and their parents

February 20 2015, by Steve Orlando

Baby boomers trying to pick the best living arrangements for themselves or their parents as they age should be wary of a phrase they coined in their younger years: If it feels good, do it.

So says Stephen Golant, a University of Florida researcher who studies housing needs for older Americans. In his new book, "Aging in the Right Place," Golant argues that the popular notion of "aging in place"—staying home and being independent as long as possible—sounds great but doesn't work for everyone.

Older people sometimes become emotionally attached to their homes, Golant said, leading them to think it's the best place to live out their lives. In fact, he said, these places may lack activities, features and amenities needed to age successfully.

As a result, he said, older people increasingly find they must rely on other people to meet their everyday needs. But both [family members](#) and professionals may fall short as caregivers.

"We need to think about two sets of feelings—not just feeling comfortable, but also being in a place where we feel capable of achieving our everyday needs, from self-care to buying groceries to reaching doctors, and don't feel that our lives are spinning out of control," said Golant, who has studied older Americans' housing needs for more than 30 years.

The issue is becoming especially troublesome for moderate-income elders. Wealthy [older people](#) can afford the housing and services they need to live comfortable and independent lives, he said. Very low-income people often can benefit from government-funded programs and services to achieve these same goals—although, they often confront waiting lists and bureaucratic obstacles.

Those in the middle, however, often find themselves outside the safety net of social, long-term care and housing programs offered by federal, state, and local governments, but cannot afford products and services offered by the private sector.

Among other points Golant makes in his book:

- Older people with success stories increasingly live in what are now called "elder villages" – grass-roots, communally organized neighborhoods or building groups that help them feel more engaged and enable them to maintain their independence.
- Assisted living facilities are no different from any consumer product—some are great, and some are awful. Older people should be discriminating customers.
- The hallmark of successful aging is to be proactive in planning next steps, rather than waiting until a crisis forces change.
- Older people who have poor health, disabilities or other disadvantages can still have happy lives if they make the right living choices.

Provided by University of Florida

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