



A New Decade of Authentic Resident Engagement

**LINKED SENIOR RESIDENT
ENGAGEMENT WHITEPAPER - 2020**



Purpose building for older adults is the biggest opportunity for the senior living industry today. Innovators in the field have started improving the experience of residents in a meaningful way by committing to support resident engagement that is authentic and individualized, which in turn improves quality of life as well as clinical and financial outcomes. We now know through case studies, research and operationally proven examples from industry leaders that the most successful models of care are those that use a wellness-based approach, focused on providing meaningful engagement.

This is even more important as experts continue to find evidence of how social determinants of health can influence long-term health and well-being. Standing in the way of this model of care is the fact that resident engagement is currently under-valued and more communities are facing staffing challenges, increasing consumer demands and an uncertain regulatory future. **Despite the obstacles, the value of resident engagement can be unlocked when it is well-defined and when evidence-based and innovative best practices are implemented and measured.**

INTRODUCTION TO RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT

A Definition

Dr. Jiska Cohen Mansfield provides us with a clinical and research-based definition of engagement for those living with cognitive change or dementia, saying that it is the "...act of being occupied or involved with an external stimulus."¹ This is a good start but there also needs to be a psycho-social component to this definition. For example, meaningful interactions between staff members and residents as they socialize are crucial when it comes to ensuring that person-centered experiences are delivered in a way that empowers older adults to live each day with purpose, whatever that might mean for them. Resident engagement needs to be defined as the act of collaborating with the older adult so they are able to find purpose everyday.

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Importantly, although resident engagement is an effort led by activity directors, life enrichment managers and recreational therapists, it needs to be an organization-wide undertaking, involving all departments, to deliver on the promise of providing opportunities for individualized and meaningful interactions.

Resident Engagement Improves Quality of Life and Offers Clinical and Financial Value

The Rush Memory & Aging Project, a study of 2,500 older people in the Chicago area, found that purpose in life is one of the most robust predictors of health and wellness in old age. Those with a high sense of purpose are less likely to develop dementia. Also, they have a slower rate of cognitive decline and a lower risk of mortality, and they even experience less of an effect from Alzheimer's disease in the brain. This is an excellent example of how optimizing resident engagement can increase purpose and ultimately positively influence health.

Furthermore, a 2017 study by the International Council on Active Aging (ICAA), found that people who participated in activities lived 2.6 years longer on average.² Another study from ICAA, published in 2019, collected survey responses from 267 senior living professionals and found that 60% of respondents believed that by 2023 their community would focus on wellness and lifestyle rather than just provision of care based only on a diagnosis.

Providing meaningful engagement for residents is also associated with positive clinical and financial outcomes. In September 2019, Linked Senior published a research study in the [Seniors Housing & Care Journal](#)³ that showed an increased use of Linked Senior platform was connected with decreased cognitive dysfunction, decreased aggressive behavior and increased social engagement. Data from this study was collected at three long-term care communities in Toronto from 256 residents who were observed during a 12-month period. The estimated cost savings of using Linked Senior to provide resident engagement was \$22,000 per year per facility.

1 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2684326/>

2 https://www.seniorlivingforesight.net/can-this-tool-get-more-residents-engaged/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=can-this-tool-get-more-residents-engaged&inf_contact_key=4714c6217c7740d9d24e82d7630da3c3

3 <https://www.nic.org/publications/analytics/senior-housing-investment-journal-2>

There is a growing body of evidence-based research that outlines the many benefits of prescribing meaningful and person-centered engagement rather than just pharmaceutical interventions. For individuals living with dementia, access to a wide range of engagement opportunities can help decrease the instances of negative behaviors.⁴ There is even evidence that by participating in cognitively stimulating activities, a person living with dementia may experience a slower rate of cognitive decline.⁵ Furthermore, according to a recent Mather Study, residents who form strong bonds within their community tend to engage in more healthy behaviors and have better overall health.⁶



RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AS A BUSINESS STRATEGY

How Do You Measure It?

To measure resident engagement, a provider must commit to assessing resident needs, planning individualized engagement activities, implementing that plan and then evaluating success. This workflow is how resident engagement staff approach their job, in recreational therapy it is simplified as “APIE” (Assess, Plan, Implement and Evaluate).

Providers should measure engagement, for every single resident, in real-time and make adjustments as needed. Ultimately, what is measured, can then be improved and it should be a provider’s top priority to consistently optimize the experience of the residents they serve.

To better understand and improve resident engagement in the senior living industry, Linked Senior has developed a simple framework that focuses on three questions:

- 1** Are we engaging all of our residents?
- 2** Are we engaging residents based on their unique needs and preferences?
- 3** Are we maximizing well-being for every resident?

4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5300033/>

5 <https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/66B/4/416/587134>

6 <https://www.matherinstitute.com/senior-living-professionals/free-industry-information/age-well-study-report-2020/>

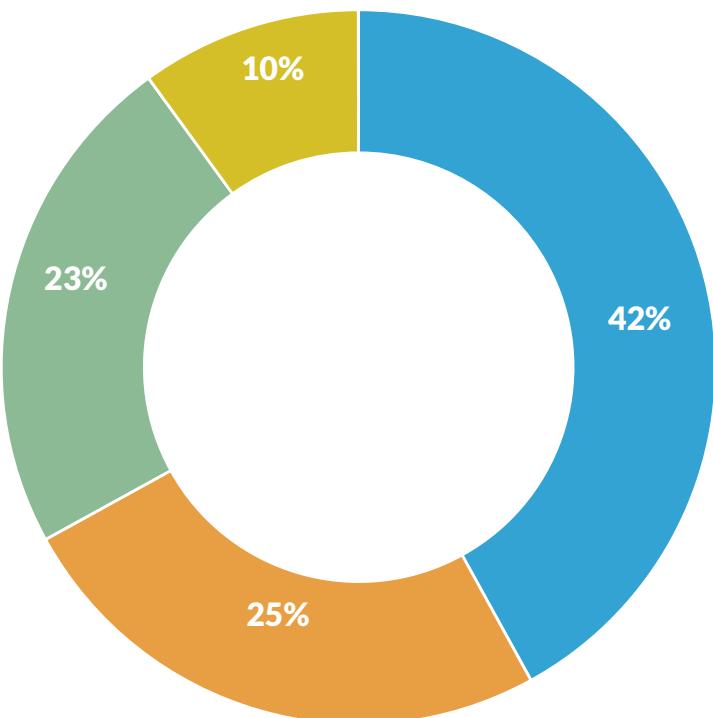
In a 2018 Linked Senior survey of resident engagement professionals nationwide, 52% of senior living professionals and 58% of long-term care professionals shared that documentation (care plans or individual service plans, notes, and monitoring participation) was the most challenging part of their job. In a November 2019 Linked Senior survey of 162 professionals, 67% of respondents reported that the most challenging part of their job was a lack of time and insufficient staffing. A CDC report from 2016⁷ found that residents in nursing homes receive just 11 minutes of engagement each day outside of assistance with activities of daily living. In assisted living communities the number is higher, at 20 minutes per day, but this is still woefully low. Despite these obstacles, Linked Senior clients have on average, across all settings, increased engagement by 135% from 2018 to 2019 (refer to Table 1.)

Confronted with staffing shortages and limited time for engagement, a “quick fix” can be providing a resident with an antipsychotic medication. A Human Rights Watch report released in February 2018⁸, found that approximately 179,000 people living in U.S. nursing facilities were being given antipsychotic medications even though they didn’t have an approved psychiatric diagnosis. As of October 2019, CMS reported that the national prevalence of antipsychotic drug use for long-stay nursing homes residents was 14.3% in 2019 Q2.⁹ These numbers are concerning especially since [research](#)¹⁰ consistently shows that the most effective way to meet the needs of residents is through an individualized, person-centered approach to care.

Another troubling part of this issue is that many communities still rely on paper-based methods to measure engagement, which can be both inefficient and time-consuming. Linked Senior conducted a survey of activity professionals in December 2019 and found that 75% of the 207 respondents did not have a tool that allows them to report on resident engagement in real-time. Instead, many professionals are using paper or excel for attendance tracking and some report they don’t track engagement at all. Communities can advance the field of resident engagement first by moving away from the paper-based strategy of documentation and second by understanding exactly what to measure when it comes to engagement.

A December 2019 survey of activity professionals revealed that **75% do not have a tool that allows them to report on resident engagement in real-time.**

42% Paper
25% Other such as EMR
23% Microsoft Excel or Word
10% Not tracking attendance



7 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_03/sr03_038.pdf

8 <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/02/05/they-want-docile/how-nursing-homes-united-states-overmedicate-people-dementia>

9 <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/antipsychotic-medication-use-data-report-updated-01242020.pdf>

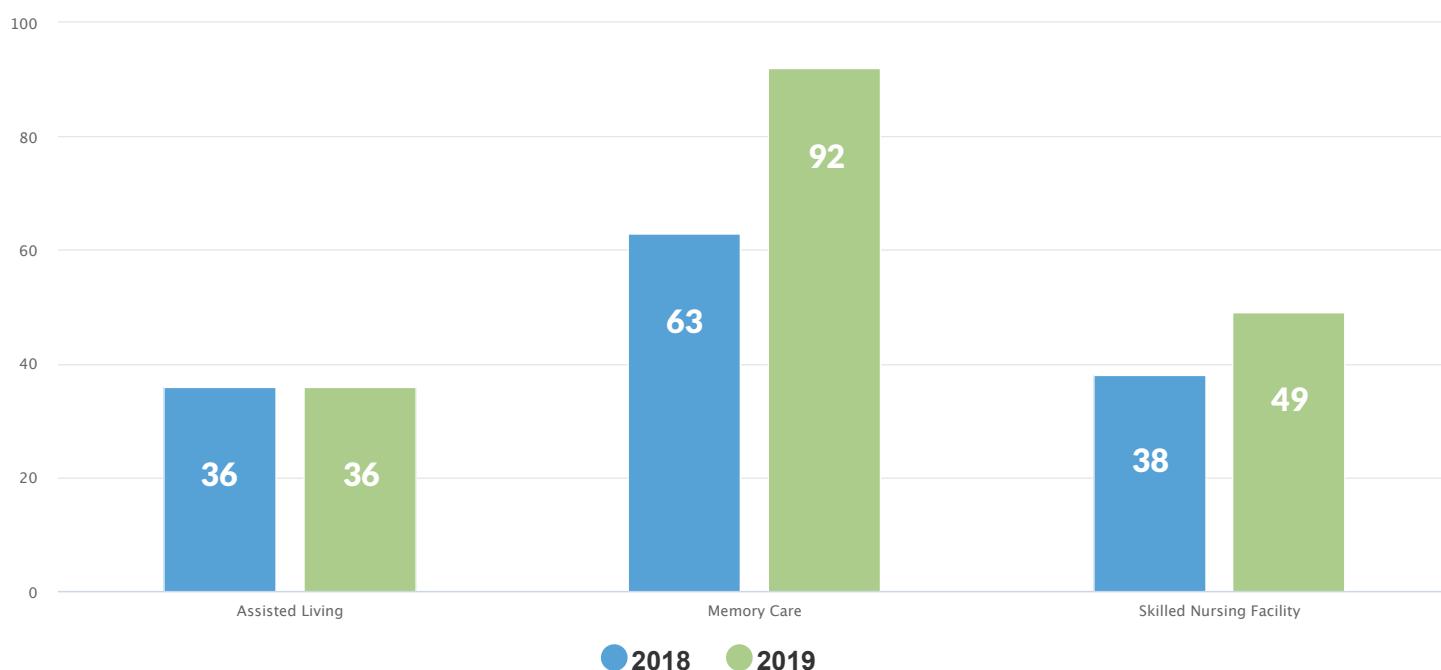
10 https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/58/suppl_1/S10/4816735

How Can It Be Improved?

The industry can advance the field of resident engagement by asking themselves the following questions:

Is the engagement person-centered or solely based on a medical condition?	Can the engagement be measured?	Is the engagement provided operational, interdisciplinary and scalable?
Are the activities and interactions being provided tailored to the unique preferences of each older adult? A certain type of engagement shouldn't be offered only because it is considered appropriate for a person's current cognitive or physical abilities. A resident's diagnosis isn't the full picture of who they are and what they find meaningful.	If engagement professionals are using the correct tools to measure engagement, then they will be able to show data that demonstrates the positive impact of quality resident engagement on quality of life, clinical outcomes, staff and family satisfaction and the organization's bottom line.	Resident engagement staff need to be given time for training that builds skills, have tools available to them that are intuitive, and understand from management how they will measure interactions with residents. Furthermore, engagement is an organization-wide effort, led by programming staff but supported by every department.

TABLE 1: AVERAGE NUMBER OF MINUTES OF ENGAGEMENT PER DAY BY LEVEL OF CARE



Linked Senior clients have on average, across all settings, increased engagement by 135% from 2018 to 2019.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT?

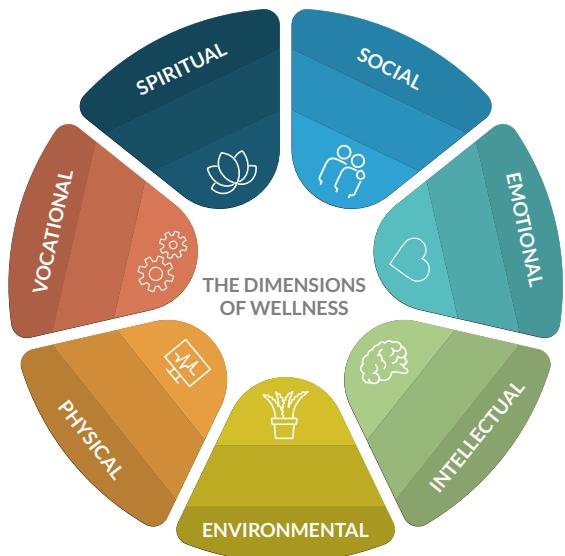
The resident engagement department is the cornerstone when it comes to supporting the well-being of every older adult. When visits from family and friends become sparse, that department provides critical socialization opportunities that can protect against the negative impact of social isolation and loneliness on a resident's physical and mental health. In one study¹¹, researchers found that loneliness can be associated with declines in functional ability as one ages. A 2017 study, conducted by the AARP Public Policy Institute along with Harvard and Stanford universities, found that a lack of social contacts among older adults is associated with an estimated \$6.7 billion in additional Medicare spending annually.¹² To address these issues, the future of resident engagement must be built upon three main concepts:

Person First

The future of resident engagement needs to be based on a holistic approach to care that prioritizes person-centered strategies and tools that make advancing wellness a priority. Thankfully, this is already beginning to happen. Providers are starting to pay close attention to the importance of a multidimensional approach to wellness for a resident's health. The dimensions of wellness they focus on are: spiritual, physical, emotional, vocational, environmental, social and intellectual.¹¹

The [Preferences of Everyday Living Instrument \(PELI\)](#)¹³ tool is an excellent example of a wellness-based approach that puts the needs and interests of a resident first. The PELI is an innovative assessment tool that helps integrate resident preferences into their daily lives. PELI is also powerful because it supports QAPI and other quality improvement programs by providing actionable measures and grades.

The work of the Preference Based Living team aligns closely with the mission of [Pioneer Network](#)¹⁴ which was founded in 1997 and continues to be a powerful advocacy organization working to create a culture of aging that is life-affirming, satisfying, humane, and meaningful. Each of these organizations understands the importance of social determinants of health and how the environment in which a person lives can have a dramatic impact on their overall health and well-being.



11 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4383762/>

12 <https://www.aarp.org/ppi/info-2017/medicare-spends-more-on-socially-isolated-older-adults.html>

13 <https://www.preferencebasedliving.com>

14 <https://www.pioneer-network.net>

Data Driven

To unlock the opportunity of resident engagement, providers need to collect actionable data which will help them increase the quality of life for residents. Whether it is in optimizing the experience they offer, providing better care, increasing satisfaction of their competitive advantage, a provider ultimately needs to explain how they are engaging the older adult and how that care is being improved over time.

The industry has started establishing measurable goals, such as how many residents they are engaging meaningfully each month. These are exciting times because we know that what is measured can be improved! Many providers have started setting a goal of meaningfully engaging at least 85% of their residents each month.

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Organization-Wide Effort

The WHY of resident engagement is to help older adults find meaning in their lives and stay connected to their purpose regardless of their interests or cognitive changes. To achieve this goal, it is important that senior living providers collaborate with those they serve to fully understand what purposeful living means to them. It's time to seize this opportunity and make our industry proud of how we engage older adults.



DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES FROM LEADERS IN THE RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PERSON-CENTERED CARE FIELD:

Engagement is not a static thing.

Providers need to seek post-admission information about every resident so that adjustment in personalized activities can be made as the needs and preferences of the older adult evolve.

Dr. Susan Levy, Past President,
AMDA, the Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine



Meaningful engagement is dependent on the attitude and skills of staff members.

To ensure that staff can offer authentic engagement, management must give them opportunities to participate in evidence-based professional training.

Vicki de Klerk-Rubin, Executive Director,
Validation Training Institute



Community engagement is key.

More providers are finding ways for residents to engage with the environment outside of the immediate senior living building. Pioneer Network has started to give "[Community Commitment Awards](#)"¹⁵ to honor residents that are making a difference in the external community.

Penny Cook, President/CEO, Pioneer Network



Creativity and the arts are important.

One incredible example of this is the recent work of the nonprofit organization [TimeSlips](#)¹⁶ and their partnership with Signature Healthcare in Kentucky to direct a theatrical play with residents as the actors.

Kirsten Jacobs, Director of Dementia Wellness and Education, LeadingAge



¹⁵ <https://www.pioneernetwork.net/about-us/overview/community-commitment-award/>

¹⁶ <https://www.timeslips.org/>

"These are exciting times for the resident engagement discipline. As professionals we are becoming better at providing a quality experience and using data to support successful models of well-being. This is probably the biggest opportunity in the aging world, and an exciting decade lies in front of us!"

Charles de Vilmorin, CEO & Co-founder
Linked Senior



"Resident engagement is today's most untapped opportunity for enhancement of person-centered care, high quality of life for residents and improved business indicators. I believe it has tremendous potential for us, our residents and their families."

Lynne Katzmann, Ph.D., Founder and President,
Juniper Communities



"Resident engagement has taken center stage and helped redefine 'quality of life'. Going forward, the Activity Professional and Life Enrichment Coordinator will be the driving force that ensures all direct support staff and the interdisciplinary team possess the skills for engagement."

Dawn Worsley, Board President, National Certification Council for Activity Professionals



"Engagement is not a one size-fits-all endeavor. One of the core principles of The Green House Project is meaningful life. This principle encompasses individualized engagement that is purposeful and meaningful—and seeks to fully integrate life within the greater community."

Susan Ryan, Senior Director
The Green House Project



"The research is clear that tailoring activities to individuals' preferences leads to greater engagement and quality of life for residents. We have a saying in academia, do you treasure what you measure or measure what you treasure? Today's technology allows providers to measure resident engagement, which is needed in order to move the dial towards increased resident social connectedness."

Dr. Katy Abbott, Associate Professor of Gerontology,
Miami University Scripps Gerontology Center

