

COVID-19 Update: Caring For Aging Parents During a Pandemic

When the roles reverse, and you find yourself in charge of your aging parents' well-being, the task can be incredibly daunting, both emotionally and financially. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a whole new set of complications for the elderly population, particularly those in nursing homes. [According to The Atlantic Monthly Group's long-term COVID tracker, as of September 24, 41% of COVID-19 deaths were linked to long-term care facilities.](#)

This overwhelming statistic has sparked conversations between clients and their advisors about how to either create or reshape plans for aging parents given the persistent health crisis. Determining what is right for your family is a personal journey, but below are some steps for putting a plan in place to protect your parents' health and financial well-being for years to come.

Start by having the tough conversations. We know that no one enjoys talking about their demise and what would need to happen with their assets. It is certainly human nature to avoid this topic altogether. At MAI, we help our clients plan for and facilitate these discussions with their loved ones. It is vital, especially during a major global health crisis, to make sure your parents solidify their intentions by putting pen to paper.

It is also a good time to sit down with your parents and evaluate their overall health and wellness. Find out what their risk factors are and encourage them to limit exposure to others during this era of social distancing. Map out the next several years and determine if any changes should be made, such as the possibility of in-home care, transitioning them to a long-term-care facility, or moving them in with either yourself or other relatives. Even if your parents are in excellent health now, it is important to plan well into the future and be prepared in case their condition worsens.

Determine health care directives. Once you've begun discussions with your parents, determine if health care directives such as a living will and health care powers of attorney (HCPA) are in place and up to date given current circumstances.

The HCPA is a legal document naming an agent who will make health care decisions for you if you are unable to make those decisions for yourself. An HCPA may also include provisions to withdraw or withhold life support and/or nutrition and hydration under certain circumstances. A living will is a legal document declaring your wishes for life-sustaining treatment to be withheld or withdrawn if you are unable to make informed decisions and are in a terminal condition or a permanently unconscious state. Completing these documents should be considered a top priority.

Evaluate their full financial picture. Once you have gone over your parents' wishes related to their health care directives, it is a good time to transition to their estate plan and financial well-being. If possible, take time with your parents and an advisor to discuss your parents' estate and their intentions for distributing their estate in the event they pass. Do your parents have a last will and testament in place to avoid passing intestate?

Walk through their assets, ensuring that assets are titled correctly and beneficiaries are named on their retirement and life insurance plans. Ask your advisor whether your parents will need a revocable living trust allowing for distribution without the burden of probate.

While it may seem like an arduous task to organize all of these details, not doing so could put your parents at risk of having the state determine what happens to their assets.

Is a durable general power of attorney in place allowing someone to affect business transactions on their behalf? This is also important because, in the event that your parent is incapacitated, someone will be able to manage finances, change bank accounts, write checks and pay the bills.

Map out a plan for long-term care. In addition to deciding where your parents should spend the later stages of their lives, it is important to figure out how that care will be paid for. Their age and medical condition will determine whether your parents can purchase long-term care insurance right now. If they already have it, make sure you have a copy of the policy handy and are aware of their coverage details. It is important to become familiar with those provisions now.

Review your parents' medical and health care coverage. While Medicare Part A and B likely cover elderly parents, it's important to be aware of their Medicare Supplemental and Part D prescription coverage as well. Understand what the supplemental policies cover and how to file claims. You should also keep a list of your parents' medical providers, including general practitioners and specialists, as well as any prescriptions.

Finally, discuss with your parents their online access to financial accounts and medical plans. Gather their logins and passwords so that in an emergency you can gain access to these resources.

While putting plans like this in motion during such a scary time for many people may seem overwhelming, you and your parents can gain peace of mind knowing their wishes will be carried out both medically and financially. MAI's motto is to take care of our clients, take care of each other and take care of our community. Taking care of your parents is right in line with that philosophy, especially amid the current pandemic.

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