

Fort Myers & Lee County Assisted Living Facilities: A Market Entry & Feasibility Report

I. Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive market analysis and strategic recommendations for establishing an assisted living facility (ALF) in the Fort Myers and Lee County area of Florida. The region presents a compelling and robust market opportunity, primarily driven by a significant concentration of seniors. The analysis reveals that the local demographic profile, marked by a substantial population of residents aged 65 and over, creates a durable and expanding demand for senior care services.

The competitive landscape is segmented into distinct models, ranging from small, residential-style care homes to large, multi-service, "resort-style" communities. This segmentation is a key finding, as it presents a clear path for a new entrant to differentiate itself. A new facility can capitalize on the demand for personalized, high-quality care that is often associated with smaller, more intimate settings. The existing business as a home care agency provides a distinct strategic advantage, as it has already established a reputation for compassionate, individualized care.

Financially, the Fort Myers market is characterized by assisted living costs that are consistently higher than the Florida state average, with significant variability in billing rates. This variability is a function of tiered pricing models based on the level of care required, the type of apartment or room, and the breadth of amenities offered. The analysis also highlights a critical financial metric: the monthly cost of a comprehensive assisted living program can often be more cost-effective for a client than extensive, round-the-clock home care services. This presents a powerful value proposition for a new facility.

Strategic recommendations focus on leveraging the user's existing home care business as a foundation to create a seamless continuum of care. The recommended approach involves initially targeting a specific market niche with a small-scale facility,

which aligns with the company's core competencies and can be a stepping stone to future expansion. A phased go-to-market strategy, from meticulous regulatory planning to a targeted launch, is essential for a successful and compliant market entry.

II. Fort Myers & Lee County Demographics: The Foundational Case for Market Demand

A. Population Dynamics and Age Demographics

The primary market for assisted living services is Lee County, Florida, which is home to a significant and growing senior population. Census data indicates that persons aged 65 and over constitute approximately 29.0% to 29.1% of the county's total population.¹ This figure is considerably higher than both the Florida statewide average of 21.2% and the national average, making Lee County a particularly strong market for senior care. The overall population of Fort Myers has also seen robust growth, increasing by 48.6% since 2010, which indicates a dynamic and expanding community.³

A closer look at the data reveals important distinctions between Fort Myers city and its surrounding locations. While the city of Fort Myers has a median age of 40.3, indicating a younger, more family-oriented population, this stands in contrast to the broader Lee County median age of 49.7.² The demographic profile becomes even more pronounced in nearby areas like Fort Myers Beach, where the median age is a high 66.5.⁶ This data points to a strategic understanding of where senior demand is currently concentrated.

The rapidly growing population of working-age adults and families in Fort Myers proper suggests it is an attractive destination for new residents. This younger demographic, while not the immediate market for assisted living, represents a key forward-looking indicator of demand. This population will eventually need care services for their aging parents, many of whom may be residing in the established retiree communities in the broader county or relocating to be closer to their families. This allows a new ALF to position itself to serve both the immediate, established

retiree market and the future market of adult children seeking convenient, high-quality care options for their loved ones.

B. Socioeconomic Indicators and Market Potential

The financial health of the local population supports a robust private-pay market for assisted living. The median household income in Fort Myers is reported at \$62,160.⁵ In addition, the median value of owner-occupied housing units in Lee County is \$326,300, and the homeownership rate is a high 74.0%.¹ These metrics collectively indicate that a substantial portion of the population possesses the financial capacity to afford private-pay assisted living services, often by utilizing home equity or other assets.

Health and disability data also provide a compelling case for the market's needs. The data shows that 8.3% of the population under 65 in Lee County has a disability.¹ While this does not exclusively pertain to the elderly, it is a leading indicator of a population with potential future needs for long-term care services and a supportive living environment.

The ability to successfully enter this market requires an understanding of these multi-layered demographics. By building a community with a strong local presence in the city of Fort Myers, a new provider can attract both the local senior population and the adult children who have moved to the area. This two-pronged strategy ensures both immediate market viability by tapping into the affluent retiree population and long-term sustainability by capturing the future market.

C. Valuable Tables

Table 4: Lee County Senior Population Demographics

Location	Median Age	% Aged 65 and over	Median Household Income	Median Home Value

Fort Myers, FL	40.3	N/A	\$62,160	\$351,600
Lee County, FL	49.7	29.0-29.1%	N/A	\$326,300
Fort Myers Beach, FL	66.5	N/A	\$90,833	N/A

III. Competitive Landscape and Market Segmentation Analysis

A. Inventory of Existing Assisted Living Facilities

Fort Myers and its surrounding areas, including Cape Coral, Lehigh Acres, and Bonita Springs, host a diverse range of assisted living providers. While a precise count is challenging due to the dynamic nature of the market, one source cites 36 facilities in Fort Myers proper ⁷, and another mentions 41 communities in the Fort Myers area.⁸ The Florida Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA) is the official licensing body, and its online directory is the definitive source for licensed providers, though direct searches are required to compile a full list of facilities and their licensed beds.⁹

Notable facilities and communities identified through the research include:

- Discovery Commons Cypress Point
- Seaside at Fort Myers
- Cypress Cove
- Brookdale Fort Myers Cypress Lake
- The Palms of Fort Myers
- Barrington Terrace of Ft. Myers
- American House Fort Myers
- Amavida
- Calusa Harbour
- The Crossings at Hancock Creek
- Inn Of Cypress Cove At Health Park

The competitive field includes a wide range of facility sizes and types, from small, residential-style care homes with capacities as low as 5-6 residents (e.g., Cairn Park, Amber Oaks Assisted Living) to large, multi-service communities with capacities of up to 175 units (e.g., Calusa Harbour).¹¹

B. Competitive Models and Segmentation

The market is not a single, homogeneous entity but rather a highly segmented landscape. Competitors can be broadly categorized into three models:

1. **High-End, "Resort-Style" Communities:** Facilities in this segment, such as Amavida Living and American House Fort Myers, compete on luxury amenities and a vibrant, engaging lifestyle. These communities offer expansive grounds, multiple dining venues, pools, spas, theaters, and a robust calendar of social activities.¹⁴ Their value proposition is a maintenance-free, independent lifestyle with the added security of assisted living services.
2. **Mid-Range Communities:** A significant portion of the market is comprised of established communities like Brookdale Fort Myers Cypress Lake and The Palms of Fort Myers. These facilities offer a balanced set of services, including assistance with daily tasks, medication management, and social programming, at a more accessible price point than the luxury communities.⁷
3. **Small-Scale, Residential Care Homes:** The existence of facilities with very small capacities indicates a specific market demand for a more intimate, homelike care environment. These providers, often referred to as residential care homes, focus on a high staff-to-resident ratio and a close-knit community feel.

The user's existing expertise in home care is a direct competitive advantage, as it aligns with the values of personalized and compassionate care sought by the residential care home segment. Instead of attempting to compete with large-scale, high-amenity facilities on their terms, the optimal strategy for a new entrant is to leverage its core strength in individualized care. This approach allows a new facility to position itself as a specialized, high-quality option that offers the intimate environment of a residential care home with a more professional and sophisticated operational structure.

C. Amenities and Services as Key Differentiators

The amenities and services offered by competitors are critical differentiators in the market. Beyond the basic assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) such as bathing, dressing, and mobility¹⁸, facilities offer a wide range of additional features to attract residents. For example, Amavida Living and American House Fort Myers provide resort-style pools, fitness centers, transportation services, and a variety of dining options.¹⁴ Many are also pet-friendly.¹⁴

Some facilities have developed proprietary programs to stand out. Brookdale Fort Myers Cypress Lake offers a program called HealthPlus®, which provides residents with a dedicated RN Care Manager to assist with preventive care, chronic condition management, and care coordination, leading to reported reductions in urgent care visits and hospitalizations.¹⁷ The existence of these specialized programs highlights the importance of providing a compelling and unique value proposition to potential clients.

D. Valuable Tables

Table 1: Identified Assisted Living Facilities in Fort Myers and Lee County

Facility Name	Address	City/Area	Care Provided	Licensed Beds
Discovery Commons Cypress Point	6870 Alister Way	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Memory Care	N/A
Seaside at Fort Myers	15800 Beachwalk Blvd.	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Memory Care	N/A
Cypress Cove	10200 Cypress Cove Drive	Fort Myers	CCRC, Assisted Living	N/A
Brookdale Fort Myers Cypress Lake	7460 Lake Breeze Drive	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Memory Care	N/A

The Palms of Fort Myers	2674 Winkler Avenue	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Independent Living, Memory Care	80
Barrington Terrace of Ft. Myers	9731 Commerce Center Court	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Memory Care	N/A
Discovery Village at the Forum	2619 Forum Blvd.	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Independent Living, Memory Care	N/A
Barkley Place	36 Barkley Circle	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Independent Living	N/A
Keystone Place at Four Mile Cove	N/A	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Memory Care	N/A
Avalon Manor ALF	2580 First St.	Fort Myers	Assisted Living	14
Cairn Park 2	2710 Via Santa Croce Ct	Fort Myers	Assisted Living	5
Calusa Harbour	2525 E. First Street	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Independent Living	175
The Crossings at Hancock Creek	3501 Hancock Bridge Pkwy	Fort Myers	Assisted Living, Memory Care	119
Pondella Serenity Court	1923 Ne 6th Street	Cape Coral	Assisted Living, Memory Care	10
Amber Oaks Assisted Living	440 Browstone St	Lehigh Acres	Assisted Living	6

Lehigh Acres Place	1251 Business Way	Lehigh Acres	Assisted Living	60
Gulf Coast Village ALF	1333 SANTA BARBARA BLVD	Cape Coral	Assisted Living	75

Table 3: Select Facility Amenity and Service Comparison

Feature	Amavida Living (Resort-Style)	American House Fort Myers (Resort-Style)	Brookdale Fort Myers Cypress Lake (Mid-Range)
Amenities	Pools, Restaurants, Lounges, Pickleball/Tennis Courts, Art Studio, Library, Theater, Wellness Center	Resort-style pool, On-site bistro, Library, Theater, Game lounge, Full-service spa/salon, Fitness center, Resident vegetable garden	Outdoor pool, Fitness center, Art class, Billiards, Movie nights, Ice cream socials
Services	Assistance with ADLs, Medication management, 24-hour security, Emergency call system, Housekeeping, Transportation to medical appointments	Assistance with ADLs, Medication management, Housekeeping, Laundry, Scheduled transportation	Help with daily tasks, Medication management, Housekeeping, Dining, Brookdale HealthPlus® program with RN Care Manager
Specialized Programs	Heartfelt Connections® Memory Care Program	Living Well Memory Care	Clare Bridge Training memory care program, Brookdale HealthPlus®
Pet Friendly	N/A	Yes	Yes

IV. Client Billing Rate and Financial Analysis

A. Average and Median Billing Rates

The financial data for assisted living in the Fort Myers and Lee County area indicates a strong market with pricing that exceeds the state average. The average monthly cost for an ALF in Fort Myers is reported to be between \$4,334 and \$4,454, which is significantly higher than the Florida state average of \$3,877 to \$4,000.⁷ This premium pricing suggests a market with a high demand for quality services and a population with the means to pay for them.

When examining the broader Lee County area, the median cost for an assisted living facility is slightly lower, at \$3,641 per month. However, this median is accompanied by a very wide range in pricing, with some lower-priced homes costing as little as \$2,199 per month and luxury communities reaching as high as \$6,036 per month.¹¹ Other sources indicate that monthly costs can range from under \$4,400 to over \$10,000, depending on various factors.²¹ This broad spectrum of pricing models highlights the competitive diversity of the market.

B. Factors Influencing Billing Rates and Pricing Models

Billing rates are not uniform and are determined by a combination of factors. The most significant of these is the level of care a resident requires. The base price often covers a standard set of services and a private room, but additional costs are incurred as a resident's needs increase.¹⁴

Pricing is also directly tied to the type and size of the living space. Facilities offer various floor plans, including studios, one-bedrooms, and two-bedrooms, each with a different starting rate. For instance, some facilities list studio apartments starting as low as \$1,955 per month, while others begin at \$3,595 per month.⁷ Specialized services, such as memory care, command a significant premium due to the intensive staffing and structured environment required. Starting rates for memory care range from \$4,220 to \$5,895 per month.¹⁷

C. Financial Comparison with Other Care Types

For a new ALF, a key component of the sales strategy is to position the facility as a cost-effective alternative to other forms of senior care. For the user, who is an existing home care provider, this is a particularly powerful point. While the hourly rate for home care in Fort Myers is \$22 to \$30, the monthly cost for a senior needing extensive care often averages around \$5,196, which is higher than the average cost of assisted living in the area.²⁰ This financial tipping point, where the cost of extensive home care surpasses the cost of assisted living, creates a compelling argument for transitioning existing clients to the new facility.

Furthermore, assisted living is a much more affordable option than nursing home care. A private room in a nursing home in Fort Myers averages \$10,053 per month, positioning ALFs as a more financially accessible and less restrictive alternative for seniors who do not require skilled nursing services.²⁰ This comparison strengthens the argument for assisted living as a value-based solution.

D. Valuable Tables

Table 2: Fort Myers ALF Billing Rate Analysis

Facility/Area	Care Type	Average/Starting Cost per Month	Notes
Fort Myers (Average)	Assisted Living	\$4,334 - \$4,454	Higher than Florida average
Florida (Average)	Assisted Living	\$3,877 - \$4,000	N/A
Lee County (Median)	Assisted Living	\$3,641	Range: \$2,199 - \$6,036
American House Fort	Assisted Living	\$4,490 (Average)	Cost varies by

Myers			apartment and services. ¹⁴
Brookdale Fort Myers Cypress Lake	Assisted Living	Starting at \$3,070	Private apartments; includes dining and housekeeping. ¹⁷
Brookdale Fort Myers Cypress Lake	Memory Care	Starting at \$4,220	Private apartments; includes dining and housekeeping. ¹⁷
The Palms of Fort Myers	Studio (Assisted Living)	Starting at \$1,955	Other room types require a quote. ⁷
Salterra Senior Living	Studio (Assisted Living)	Starting at \$3,595	N/A
Salterra Senior Living	1-bedroom (Assisted Living)	Starting at \$3,995	N/A
Salterra Senior Living	Studio (Memory Care)	Starting at \$5,895	N/A
Home Care (Fort Myers)	In-Home Care	\$22-\$30 per hour	Monthly average for extensive care is \$5,196. ²⁰
Nursing Home (Fort Myers)	Private Room	\$10,053	N/A

V. Regulatory and Licensing Framework: A Pathway to Compliance and Operation

A. The Florida Regulatory Environment

Assisted living facilities in Florida are licensed and regulated by the Agency for Health

Care Administration (AHCA) under the provisions of Florida Statutes Chapter 429 and Florida Administrative Code Chapter 59A-36.²⁵ The legal framework for ALFs emphasizes that they are intended to be "residential environments with supportive services and not as medical or nursing facilities".²⁷ This distinction is critical, as it defines the scope of care an ALF can provide. The Department of Elder Affairs (DOEA) also plays a role in coordinating programs and services for the elderly.²⁶

B. The ALF Licensing Process: A Detailed Road Map

To open a new assisted living facility, the following steps are required:

1. **Administrator Qualification:** The designated administrator must be at least 21 years of age, have a high school diploma or GED, and complete a state-approved 26-hour ALF Core Training course.²⁵ This is followed by passing a state competency exam and a Level 2 background screening.²⁵
2. **Application and Documentation:** A comprehensive application must be submitted to AHCA, along with supporting documents that include zoning verification, fire safety approvals, and proof of liability insurance.²⁶
3. **On-site Survey:** Before a license is issued, the facility must pass an initial on-site survey conducted by AHCA inspectors. During this survey, inspectors will review resident and staff records, audit medication documentation, and perform a physical walkthrough of the facility to ensure all regulations are met.²⁶ A license, once granted, is valid for two years and must be renewed.²⁶

The regulatory requirements for an ALF administrator are less stringent than those for a nursing home administrator, who must hold a baccalaureate degree and complete a 2,000-hour administrator-in-training program.³⁰ This makes the transition into the assisted living sector more accessible.

C. Critical Operational Requirements and Compliance

The transition from a home care model to a facility-based model requires a fundamental shift in operational mindset, with a strong focus on compliance.

- **Resident Care Standards:** ALFs are legally permitted to assist residents with

ADLs, medication self-administration, and other personal care needs.¹⁹ However, there are strict limitations on the types of residents that can be admitted. For example, a facility may not admit or retain a resident who is "bedridden" or who is medically unstable.¹⁹ This underscores the importance of a thorough health assessment (Form 1823 PDF) for all prospective residents.²⁶

- **Staffing Requirements:** Facilities must maintain sufficient qualified staff to provide supervision and services in accordance with resident needs.³¹ The regulations mandate that an ALF must have staff on-site 24/7, with awake overnight staff as needed. Specialized training is also required for staff working in memory care and for those assisting with medication.²⁶
- **Emergency Preparedness:** All facilities must have an approved Emergency Management Plan (EMP). A critical requirement is the ability to provide backup power to maintain temperatures below 81°F for a minimum of 96 hours. This plan must also detail procedures for fire and elopement drills.²⁶
- **Resident Rights:** The Florida Statutes include a "Resident Bill of Rights," which ensures that residents are treated with dignity and respect, have the right to manage their own financial affairs, and are free from abuse and neglect.³²

The user's experience in managing a team that provides personal care is an advantage, but it must be applied within a new, highly structured, facility-centric environment. The primary challenge will be moving from a service-driven model to one where compliance with state regulations regarding the physical plant, staffing ratios, and emergency protocols is a non-negotiable part of daily operations.

VI. Strategic Recommendations and Go-to-Market Strategy

A. The "Continuum of Care" Advantage

The most powerful strategic advantage for a new ALF is its direct connection to an existing home care agency. The new facility should be positioned as the next logical step in a client's care journey, a seamless "continuum of care" solution. The marketing and sales strategy should focus on retaining existing home care clients who are aging and whose needs are increasing to the point where an ALF becomes a more

financially sound and safe option. This not only secures a steady stream of initial residents but also fosters a brand identity built on trust and continuity.

B. Choosing a Niche: Size, Service, and Location

- **Small-Scale as a Strategic Entry Point:** Given the competitive landscape, a new entrant should consider starting with a small-scale, residential-style ALF. This model aligns well with the user's expertise in providing intimate, personalized care, and it typically requires a lower initial capital investment than a large, multi-story facility. This also allows for a focus on a high staff-to-resident ratio, which can be a key selling point against larger competitors.
- **Service Specialization:** The analysis of billing rates shows that specialized services, particularly memory care, command a significant premium. A new facility could differentiate itself and secure higher margins by specializing in memory care, leveraging the expertise in providing compassionate care for individuals with Alzheimer's and dementia that is already present in a home care business.
- **Location:** The demographic data suggests that while the city of Fort Myers is an excellent location for future growth, establishing a facility in a surrounding, more affluent, and older suburb could provide a faster path to initial occupancy.

C. A Phased Go-to-Market Plan

1. **Phase 1: Research and Planning:** Before committing to a physical location, a thorough financial feasibility study should be conducted. The designated administrator must begin the required training, including the 26-hour ALF Core Training and state competency exam, to ensure regulatory requirements are met from the outset.²⁵
2. **Phase 2: Licensure and Facility Development:** The development of the facility should be managed with meticulous attention to all AHCA regulations, from the physical layout and fire safety measures to the implementation of the Emergency Management Plan. The official license application should be submitted with all required documentation to expedite the process and prepare for the final on-site survey.²⁶
3. **Phase 3: Launch and Operations:** The launch strategy should be a targeted

campaign aimed at the existing home care clientele, emphasizing the value proposition of a safe, social, and cost-effective continuum of care. The business should also begin building relationships with local hospitals and medical centers, leveraging its reputation to secure a steady stream of referrals. Transparent and easy-to-understand pricing models will be essential to build trust and attract residents.

VII. Appendix

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Services	Assistance with ADLs, Medication	Assistance with ADLs, Medication	Help with daily tasks, Medication

	management, 24-hour security, Emergency call system, Housekeeping, Transportation to medical appointments	management, Housekeeping, Laundry, Scheduled transportation	management, Housekeeping, Dining, Brookdale HealthPlus® program with RN Care Manager
Specialized Programs	Heartfelt Connections® Memory Care Program	Living Well Memory Care	Clare Bridge Training memory care program, Brookdale HealthPlus®
Pet Friendly	N/A	Yes	Yes

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