



The Critical but Often Overlooked Importance of Senior Living and Aging Services Leadership in Driving Quality Outcomes and Services

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Introduction

As the Baby Boomers' needs for care settings and services increases, the demand for senior care and aging services administrative leaders will also increase. University landscape for these leadership programs is not adequate across the country. There is a need for significant lead time in developing effective academic programs to teach topics in senior care leadership and management considering the creation and expansion of geographically disbursed academic settings will need to be planned, developed, funded, and then marketed to potential students. The failure to meet the needed demand for highly qualified leaders does have a potential negative impact of the care settings and the high outcomes desired for aging Boomers [1]. There is also a need for stability of leadership, which has an impact on both the culture of the organization and ultimately the quality of life and care delivered to elderly residents.

Need

"The number of Americans ages 65 and older will more than double over the next 40 years, reaching 80 million in 2040. The number of adults ages 85 and older, the group most often needing help with basic personal care, will nearly quadruple between 2000 and 2040. The nation is aging [2] and the impact on the leadership workforce is going to be significant. Employment percent change projected for management positions in senior living and aging services over the next 10 years is 23% in nursing and residential

care facilities, 33% in continuing care and assisted living settings and 44% in home care related services [3]. There will be a demand for 162,000 new management positions by 2030 and 387,700 new management positions by 2040 in the broader senior living and aging services leadership field based on the recent Argentum 2023 workforce report [4].

A vast majority of leaders in the senior living and aging services field have found this practice area by accident or have been motivated by an experience with a loved one or family member. There has not been a public recognition of this leadership career field as a mainstream discipline, which is a problem requiring attention. This fortuitous approach may have been a reasonable way of supplying the people needed during the infancy and growth of this field, but with the pending demographic shift and the looming talent supply gap [5] this will become a recipe for crisis and potential disaster. The aging services field needs a proactive and strategic approach to developing both new talent and leveraging high potential employees to bring them to an experiential level with education grounded at universities and within organizations.

Impact

There is an absence of a broader public understanding of the important impact senior care leaders in senior living and aging services organizations have in improving and sustaining care and

operations. Limited research has been conducted on the role of senior care leaders on quality outcomes and the recent National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report [6] provides little information or recommendations that might provide focus on this important position in a nursing facility or broader field of aging services. Senior care leaders at the community level have a tremendous impact on a positive work culture for staff and the care and services provided for residents. The report, like many others, makes recommendations on the clinical geriatric qualifications of the Medical Director, Director of Nursing, Social Worker, and Certified Nursing Assistant, but nothing on the Administrator or Health Care Executive. This is an oversight and a missing point of emphasis of many public policy efforts and officials.

Focus

Providers and senior living partners who have a role in investing in the development of leadership in the senior living field need to the important role of highly competent and talented leadership to successfully manage senior living communities and services. Providers and partners see the benefits leaders bring to these services with better care and service to the elders of our country. The aging services field and the community need the best and brightest people leading organizations serving a vulnerable population. There also needs to be a proactive solution to expand and enhance academic programs in partnership with providers and others. Public policy makers must recognize the value of this role and also invest accordingly.

What is the value proposition for key stakeholders?

- *Universities* will benefit from access to program and curriculum information, faculty development and support, a strong provider network, and a new student base of individuals with an interest in senior care and aging services leadership, an academic track with high job placement.
- *Providers* will benefit from relationships with a qualified and vetted university network that has an emphasis on developing an expanded pool of high-quality leadership talent interested in senior care and services.
- *Students* will be provided with an opportunity to experience and complete an educational program that prepares them for a personally rewarding and meaningful career in a noble profession with a very high job placement.
- *Seniors* will be the ultimate beneficiary being served by organizations that are led by compassionate high-quality leaders committed to and competent in their profession.

Future/next steps

Leadership stability has an overall impact on quality culture, financial performance, and enhanced older adult satisfaction and

well-being. We are not able to leave that leadership talent need to chance. The time is now to reimagine and invest in a strategic leadership initiative, especially with a growing aging population, and a shrinking workforce and student populations. Universities need pragmatic, public necessary programs with good jobs at the end of a student's educational journey. Senior living is positioned well to offer this with key value propositions around employee development and retention, recognition of the community impact and the need to provide the best possible care and service for the country's deserving seniors [7].

In order to raise the bar for this profession it will take a collaborative effort of many individuals, groups and stakeholders. Just as necessary, will be the spirit of participants with a "rising tide lifts all boats" outlook. Lastly, the elevation of the importance, prestige and opportunities in this very purpose filled career path must be embraced by the broader public as a noble service leading organizations serving and supporting people's parents, grandparents, friends and family.

Acknowledgment

Vision Centre: Leadership Development for Aging Services is a 501C3 sponsored by an elite group of associations, providers and organizations with a shared vision to expand and enhance University programs in senior living and aging services leadership across the country. To learn about the Vision Centre visit <https://www.vision.centre.org/>

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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