



ARGENTUM
EXPANDING SENIOR LIVING

Using Accreditation to Evaluate Quality

A Primer on Senior Living Accreditation

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ABOUT ARGENTUM

Argentum is the leading national association exclusively dedicated to supporting companies operating professionally managed, resident-centered senior living communities and the older adults and families they serve. Since 1990, Argentum has advocated for choice, independence, dignity, and quality of life for all older adults. Argentum member companies operate senior living communities offering assisted living, independent living, continuing care, and memory care services. Along with its state partners, Argentum's membership represents approximately 75 percent of the senior living industry—an industry with a national economic impact of nearly a quarter of a trillion dollars and responsible for providing over 1.6 million jobs. These numbers will continue to grow as the U.S. population ages. Argentum's programs and initiatives are driven by its membership. For more information about joining Argentum, please visit [argentum.org/membership](https://www.argentum.org/membership). Learn more at [argentum.org](https://www.argentum.org).

DISCLAIMER

Argentum and its executive staff have attempted to provide the best possible information as a service to the association's membership. Argentum specifically disclaims responsibility or liability for the information it is providing from any legal, regulatory, medical, or compliance point of view.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers face a wide range of options for the products and services they purchase, and senior living is no exception. Because of the highly technical nature of services, consumers and other members of the public often are unable to judge for themselves either the need for a product or service, or its quality. This inability to distinguish quality can be a substantial barrier to purchasing.

Accreditation is one method for identifying quality. Accreditation is the voluntary process by which a nongovernmental entity grants a time-limited recognition to an institution, organization, business, or other entity after verifying that it has met predetermined and standardized criteria (*Certification and Accreditation Law Handbook, Second Edition, 2004*). It is a credential that is held by an organization, instead of an individual.

USES OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is used by many industries and sectors, including education, laboratories, healthcare, and senior living, to:

- Demonstrate compliance with quality standards
- Earn recognition for quality
- Increase commercial strength
- Promote an organizational culture of quality

ACCREDITATION CONSIDERATIONS

Here are suggested considerations for evaluating whether accreditation is a good fit for a senior living organization as well as for evaluating the accreditation itself:

1. Is the purpose of the accreditation consistent with organizational strategy/goals?
2. Is the accreditation body a recognized authority in the senior living sector?
3. Does the accreditation body have a good reputation among senior living audiences?
4. Are the standards that serve as the basis for accreditation a good fit for the senior living industry?
 - a. Are the accreditation standards consistent with industry best practices?
 - b. Is the terminology appropriate?
 - c. Would a qualified person be able to review the standard and know whether a community's policies and procedures meet that standard?
 - d. Do the standards reasonably support quality outcomes?
5. What is the process for accreditation—is it reasonable?
6. How long does it take to achieve accreditation?
7. Is the accreditation body autonomous, with a governance structure designed to protect the public's interests?
8. What are the costs for initial accreditation? For periodic reaccreditation?
9. What is the duration of the accreditation?
10. What are the benefits of the accreditation? For example, will it provide communities with deemed status among state regulators?
11. Does the accreditation body provide a publicly accessible registry of accredited communities?

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

As noted in the definition, standards provide the basis for an accreditation program. An organization must demonstrate compliance with standards to achieve accreditation, so the quality of accreditation standards is an important factor. In general, accreditation standards are developed by the industry being accredited—by those who have the subject matter expertise to be able to identify and define best practices.

REACCREDITATION

Also noted in the definition is a reference to the time-limited element of accreditation. Organizations can be substantially compliant with best practices at the time of initial accreditation but can fall out of compliance due to operational changes (e.g., new policies and procedures) or changes to best practices—for example, a need for enhanced infection control practices following a pandemic. Reaccreditation is the process for ensuring ongoing compliance with best practices over time, comparable to recertification for ensuring ongoing competence by certified individuals.

SUMMARY

Accreditation can be a useful tool for demonstrating quality and building a culture of quality consistent with established best practices. This can be helpful to businesses, consumers, and other interested stakeholders from among the public.

When considering an accreditation, be sure to evaluate the accreditation standards for applicability and purpose. Accreditation typically requires revisions to operations, policies, and procedures, so consider the amount of time that will be needed to bring the organization into compliance with accreditation standards. Lastly, consider the costs associated with initial accreditation and reaccreditation.

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