

# Senior Living Design

WILL COVID-19 RESULT IN BIG CHANGES?



Quorum's senior living team gathered recently to discuss predictions for the future of senior living design in a post-pandemic world.

Team members agreed that sweeping changes that seem inevitable now, might fizzle when memories of the heightened crisis start to fade. But, they noted that procedural and operational modifications made to prevent the spread of disease have already happened. These types of shifts are less costly and easier to achieve in an existing facility. In some cases, these sustainable operational changes could drive future changes for industry design standards and regulatory codes.

---

## Including PPE storage and dressing areas, where staff can safely suit up or disrobe without cross contamination, benefits everyone.

---

One example is the need for personal protective equipment (PPE) storage with dressing areas where staff can dress or disrobe without cross contamination. Existing centers that have available space can allocate it for this function, but we could see more operators requesting PPE rooms be included in new designs and eventually, regulations requiring it. This is a good idea for safety but profitability too. If staff stay healthy and feel safe, employee retention improves and costs better controlled.



During the pandemic, residents were isolated from family and loved ones, resulting in many experiencing feelings of loneliness and depression. These effects can be unhealthy for any person but are particularly devastating for the elderly. Thusly, more advanced integration of technology for enhancing communications seems likely.



Providing personal electronic devices or telecommunications technology within resident rooms will help residents feel more connected to the outside world and less alone. And while some current residents might not be comfortable using such devices without assistance from staff, future residents will be more and more familiar with computers and personal electronics, driving demand.

Because residents have been spending more time in their rooms and less time socializing with other residents, some industry followers predict that bedrooms will include more square footage in future designs. This doesn't seem likely to our team. There are many factors that go into the profitability of a new facility and driving up the price per square foot in this way would be a hard pill to swallow for owners trying to remain competitive. The group also doesn't see the demand for dual occupancy rooms disappearing.



The research is clear that many residents, especially those in memory care, do better with a roommate. In this case, the mental health benefits outweigh the potential risk of infection.

---

## Designing spaces to be flexible and convertible will be crucial for health crisis preparedness.

---

More important will be the need for flexible spaces that can be easily modified for different uses during a quarantine situation. A game room that can be converted to a snack distribution area or furniture that can be moved or simply altered to function differently is crucial for modified operations during a community health crisis. The use of materials and finishes that repel or even kill germs on contact are

already available for the senior living market. We see an increased interest driving manufacturers to research advanced technologies to develop more anti-bacterial products and a wider variety of products that can withstand harsh chemical cleaning.



Our group stays informed about new technologies through relationships with the manufacturers' representatives. More information about the benefits and research of these anti-microbial and anti-bacterial products is constantly being

released. It's important to pay attention to time-tested product research when specifying materials and finishes and not be lured by the newest, trendy developments.

One technology that our designers think senior living centers could benefit from, depending on the cost, is the use of ultraviolet light (UV) as disinfectant. The light could be utilized in a wide variety of ways to eliminate germs and create safer environments without compromising the comfort of residents.



Our team envisions a UV light portal that would disinfect visitor and staff clothing upon entering and exiting the facility. Depending on the cost, we could see this being an effective technology to integrate in the design of new care centers.

All team members agree that they don't see major design changes coming within the next couple of years. Projects currently in planning or design will continue without major course corrections as a result of our current Covid-19 pandemic experiences. They see likely design innovations developing

over the course of next several years as new projects get funded. It could be ten years or more, before the industry sees any code or standards change because of the pandemic.

---

## Use of UV light to disinfect could become commonplace.

---

Something that won't change is Quorum's process of recommending a design that provides ultimate safety, comfort and function to owners and operators. Our team will continue to design senior living centers utilizing our project experience and our clients' goals as our guiding principles.

*To learn more about Quorum's senior living design capabilities, contact Greg Richardson or Karin Taylor.*

---

### **Greg Richardson, AIA**

Director of Senior Living Design  
gregr@qarch.com  
(817) 546-6322



---

### **Karin Taylor, IIDA**

Principal, Director of Interior Design  
karint@qarch.com  
(817) 546-6326

