

## Study: Seniors fear loss of independence more than death

November 01, 2007 6:00 AM

(BUSINESS WIRE) — Senior citizens fear moving into a nursing home and losing their independence more than death, according to a new research study, "Aging in Place in America," commissioned by Clarity(R) and The EAR Foundation, that examines the attitudes and anxieties of the nation's elderly population. The children of seniors also fear for their parents, with particular concern about their emotional and physical well-being should they have to enter a nursing home.

This is the third in a series of studies since 2003 commissioned by a partnership of Clarity and The EAR Foundation to better understand the health and lifestyle needs of America's aging population. For "Aging in Place in America," two groups were surveyed to allow a comparative analysis of the attitudes of seniors age 65 and older who are living at home with those of baby boomers who have senior parents.

One of the most significant findings of the study is that, when asked what they fear most, seniors rated loss of independence (26 percent) and moving out of home into a nursing home (13 percent) as their greatest fears. These two possibilities are a much higher concern than death, which was the greatest fear for only three percent of seniors.

Other key findings include:

- Vast majority of seniors (89 percent) want to age in place — or grow older without having to move from their homes — and more than half (53 percent) are concerned about their ability to do so.
- Large majority (82 percent) of baby boomers fears their parents will be mistreated in a nursing home and 89 percent fear they will be sad.
- Seniors living at home are determined to maintain their independence; they report that they require — and receive — limited support from their children or other caregivers.
- Not only are boomers concerned about their aging parents, almost two-thirds (63 percent) are providing some kind of help or support to them.
- Half of seniors are open to using new technologies to enable independence, including having sensors installed in their homes to monitor their health.
- Baby boomers have not turned to technology to assist their aging parents. Only 14 percent have actually looked for solutions that would help them ensure the health and safety of their parents.

"These findings tell us that, above all else, older Americans value their ability to live independently," said Peter Bell, president of National Aging in Place Council. "As a society, we must find ways to help our parents and grandparents live their latter years at home. We must make aging in place a national priority and a reality for older Americans."

Clarity president Carsten Trads said, "Clarity and The EAR Foundation commissioned this study because we are committed to finding ways to enhance the quality of life for our aging population. These findings are both concerning and eye-opening. Independent living is a key determinant of quality of life for seniors, and we owe it to them to create solutions that make aging in place effortless and achievable."

Seniors express desire to age in place, aren't asking for help

The study found that the vast majority of seniors (89 percent) feels the ability to age in place — or live independently and remain in one's home — is very important. However, more than half of those surveyed (53 percent) are concerned with their ability to do so.

Seniors cited three primary concerns that could jeopardize their ability to live independently: health problems (53 percent); memory problems (26 percent); and inability to drive and/or get around (23 percent). They said they do not expect nor do they receive much support from those around them. The majority of seniors (55 percent) views themselves as very independent in that they receive no assistance from their children and seem content with that fact. The vast majority (75 percent) said their children are involved "enough" in their life.

Seniors who do require help from others receive assistance with household maintenance (20 percent), transportation (13 percent) and health care (8 percent). Very few (1 percent) reported receiving any financial support.

Seniors open to new solutions

The study also examined seniors' attitudes toward technologies that enable an independent life. Virtually all seniors are comfortable using the telephone while almost half of seniors are comfortable using personal computers, Internet and e-mail. Not surprisingly, seniors' comfort level with computer technology decreased in older age groups, particularly those over 75 years of age.

Furthermore, 65 percent of seniors said they are open to or would like to use new technologies that enable independence. More than half (54 percent) would consider the use of ambient technology in their homes — specifically, sensors — to monitor their health and safety.

"Seniors are clearly more open to technology than many people believe," said Trads. "They are very comfortable with familiar devices, like the telephone, and will even try new technologies, like sensors, if they help them age in place. We must view technology as a resource for our aging parents and grandparents, whether that means expanding the capabilities of familiar technologies, or by introducing new solutions into the home."

## Boomers worried about emotional, physical well-being of aging parents

The study also examined the attitudes of baby boomers who have at least one living parent to assess their attitudes and concerns, as compared with the seniors. Baby boomers echoed the seniors' desires and concerns over aging in place and living independently. The vast majority (94 percent) feels it is important their senior parents are able to age in place. However, more than three-fourths (79 percent) are concerned about their parents' ability to do so, and more than half (57 percent) are very concerned.

Baby boomers are extremely concerned about their parents' well-being if they have to move out of their home. Eighty-two percent fear their parents might be mistreated if they move into a nursing home. And 89 percent worry their parents will be saddened by the loss of their independence, with 79 percent saying they are worried their parents would not like living in a nursing home. Additionally, 70 percent are concerned their parents will be afraid to move out of their homes.

"We are all concerned about our parents' quality of life as they age; however, this study sheds light on the tremendous amount of anxiety the baby boomer generation, in particular, experiences regarding this issue," said Clarity's marketing communications manager Chris Dutton. "They worry that Mom and Dad will be forced into a nursing home and their quality of life will deteriorate. They are contending with worries that their parents will be sad, lonely, scared, or, even worse, mistreated."

Their parents' health is another major issue of concern for baby boomers, with 77 percent citing this in the survey. Boomers also said they are worried about the potential for falls/injuries (75 percent) and their parents' ability to drive (58 percent).

"These are emotionally charged issues that boomers and seniors face every day," said Dutton. "Baby boomers not only have to worry about their parents, but — as the sandwich generation — they are raising families of their own, providing support to everyone in their lives and, in turn, dealing with an increasing amount of stress."

Consistent with their expressed concern about the well-being of their parents, the majority of boomers are not concerned that their parents might someday be a burden to them. More than half (51 percent) are not concerned they may have to financially support their parents and 60 percent are not concerned their parents might have to move in with them.

## Two in three boomers helping senior parent

Not only are boomers concerned about their aging parents, most (63 percent) are actively involved in providing some kind of help or assistance. As the sandwich generation, boomers are tasked with caring for and providing support to both their own children and their parents; over half of boomers surveyed have children under age 25.

"Boomers are juggling a great deal of responsibility, raising their children and caring for their parents at the same time," said Trads. "It is important that boomers have help and support to successfully manage their caregiver role. Outside sources — such as technology — can help boomers provide the necessary support so their parents can remain in their homes."

Household maintenance (40 percent), transportation (34 percent), medical issues (33 percent), help with financial decisions (28 percent) and, finally, financial support (19 percent) were the most frequent types of support reported by boomers.

Baby boomers with children are more likely than those without children to provide non-financial assistance to their parents, including help with household maintenance, medical issues and medication, and transportation. Baby boomers without children are more likely than those with children to provide financial assistance to their parents, including making purchasing or financial decisions and providing financial support.

## Boomers have not turned to technology to help parents

Like seniors, baby boomers are open to new technologies that would help seniors age in place but very few are actively seeking these products. Half of baby boomers (49 percent) are interested in new technologies that would help them monitor their parents' safety and wellbeing. Half of the baby boomers (51 percent) also think there are technology products available aimed at meeting the needs of seniors and (50 percent) would be open to the use of ambient technology — specifically, sensors — to monitor the health and safety of their aging parents. Contrary to this expressed interest in technology, only 14 percent of baby boomers have actually looked for any technology solutions that would help them ensure the health and safety of their parents.

"From the iPod to the BlackBerry, technology is such an everyday part of baby boomers' lives; however, they have not yet realized the potential benefit of technology to help care for their parents," said Trads. "More technology solutions need to be developed to allow aging in place, so that boomers and other caregivers have more options when trying to help our aging Americans."

## About "Aging in Place in America"

The research was commissioned by the Clarity/EAR Foundation strategic alliance, which was formed to educate the public about the needs of the growing senior population, including hearing loss and other disabilities. The research was conducted by an independent research company, Prince Market Research, a member of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations. More than 800 seniors and baby boomers were polled. The research methodology was designed to ensure that the results are accurate within a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. To access the full report, visit: [www.clarityproducts.com/research](http://www.clarityproducts.com/research).

