

The Hottest Career Trend of the Decade: Aging Life Care™ Management

Jullie Gray, MSW, LICSW, CMC & Lisa Mayfield, MA LMHC, CMC, GMHS



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A S S O C I A T I O N

The experts in aging well.

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One of the hottest career trends in the next decade isn't found in the tech sector, it can't be outsourced overseas or automated, and it offers endless possibilities for advancement and satisfaction.

This dynamic profession has a great deal to offer:

- Find job security throughout your lifetime due to demographic trends
- Make a difference in the lives of others – be an advocate and a positive force for change
- Engage in intellectually challenging and rewarding work
- Enjoy flexible hours and choices about where you practice (medical settings, law offices, home- and community-based programs, to name just a few)
- Advance up the career ladder as your experience grows
- Employ your entrepreneurial spirit if you long to build your own private practice
- Collaborate with a wide range of professionals including those in healthcare, legal and financial services fields

Whether you are just starting your career or yearning to forge a new path, Aging Life Care™ Management (sometimes referred to as care management or geriatric care management) may be just what you are looking for.

Let's take a closer look at why Aging Life Care™ may be right for you.

America's population is aging, and our fragmented health and long-term care systems are hard-pressed to keep up. To say that elder and long-term care will be one of the most daunting healthcare challenges of our day isn't hyperbole. In the United States, the number of Americans over the age of 65 is expected to double from roughly 50 million today to nearly 100 million by 2060.

With the increased demand, there will be significant growth in the profession of care management. This is in part because the United States has an expanding Sandwich Generation. According to Pew, 1 of every 8 Americans aged 40-60 is being pulled in many directions because they are both raising a child and caring for a parent.

The Center on an Aging Society at Georgetown University reports that boomers age 65 and older are expected to increase at a 2.3% rate while the

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number of family members available to care for them will only increase at less than 1%. The pressure on families now and in the future, particularly women, is immense. Many are desperate to find help coordinating care and advocating for their loved one.

What does an Aging Life Care Manager® actually do?

Aging Life Care Managers® help families navigate transitions of aging, support people with disabilities to access services and work collaboratively with a wide range of other service professionals. You can find them in a variety of sectors including non-profit, government services and for-profit organizations. Some practitioners consider themselves generalists, others specialize in working with older adults, people with intellectual or physical disabilities, those living with mental illness, or those struggling to make ends meet.

Aging Life Care Managers evaluate, plan and coordinate care for their clients. Services are tailored to the individual and are designed to optimize the client's health status and quality of life. This is truly a holistic and client centered approach to helping people. It encompasses activities such as:

- Assessing of a wide range of biopsychosocial issues
- Developing a care plan
- Coordinating care and monitoring the client
- Consulting about a myriad of issues related to aging and disabilities
- Managing crises and safety concerns
- Providing information and referral services
- Advocating for the client and family system
- Educating clients and others about a wide range of topics
- Managing family conflict
- Providing coaching and supportive counseling to client's and their families
- Collaborating with other professionals

Do you have what it takes?

Qualities of an Aging Life Care Manager include:

- a can-do attitude, confidence, patience, and curiosity
- an ability to listen, problem solve, and develop strong working relationships built on trust
- a desire to work independently, communicate effectively, and maintain a collaborative presence
- a capacity to analyze information and develop creative solutions for complex problems
- a talent for organization, flexible mindset, and ability to follow through with tasks in a timely way

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Through their work, Aging Life Care Managers become experts about the costs, quality, and availability of resources in their communities.

This profession may be right for you if you are looking for a career where every day is different, challenging and immensely rewarding all at the same time.

Practitioners come from many different disciplines. The typical career path starts with honing skills in diverse health and human service fields related to care management, including, but not limited to, social work services, nursing, gerontology, psychology, occupational and physical therapy.

Those with non-health or human service degrees can break into the field by completing a certificate program in care management, gerontology, guardianship services or other similar training program.

Many practitioners are licensed in their state in a specific profession such as social work, nursing or counseling. Whether licensed or not, after obtaining enough supervised experience, professionals are encouraged to sit for a certification exam in care management to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities to the public.

Most entry level positions require at least a bachelor's degree. However, some job seekers can enter with an associate's degree. Completing a specialized training program in care management can increase the chance of landing a job if your degree and experience do not follow a traditional path in health or human services.

How much money can an Aging Life Care Professional® expect to make?

There are a variety of compensation models for care managers, including hourly or salary. Some practices offer a combination of hourly and salaried positions plus bonuses.

The 2014 Benchmarking Study of Aging Life Care Association members measured industry patterns from January - December 2013. For salaried workers, the starting pay, not including bonuses, was \$46,000-\$50,000 annually. Median hourly wages were \$35.

Entrepreneurs in private practice of all sizes earned significant revenues and businesses grew overall. Median billing in 2013 was \$130,000, which represented 5% growth from 2012. Leaders in the industry reported median gross revenues over \$850,000. Top performing companies had three or more locations and exceeded \$3 million in gross sales annually. Median profit margins overall were almost 43% but industry leaders realized 46%.

Clients (86%) overwhelmingly used their own private funds to cover the cost of services. Other payors included long-term care insurance (1%), Medicaid waiver programs (0.6%), Area Agencies on Aging (0.5%), and other sources that were not specified.

Practices in areas with a population greater than 250,000 enjoyed median revenue growth of 12%. Those in the Central, Southern, and Pacific regions of the U.S. experienced impressive expansion too (median growth of 11%, 20%, and 24%, respectively).

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Still not convinced?

Take a quick look at the trends:

- Households headed by older adults are wealthier, on average, compared with households headed by younger adults, allowing them to pay for the services they need. Those without resources need help accessing services and supports to ensure they can age in place with dignity. Lower income clients often have family members willing to help pay for needed services, or they may qualify for Medicaid waiver programs that include care management.
- Current trends in marriage and family patterns may limit the availability of adult children who are able to assist older parents and disabled relatives in the coming decades.
- Many baby boomers are aging solo. They fall into the category of never married, separated, divorced, or widowed and are looking for trusted advisors to coordinate services they need. According to AARP, by 2030, 16% of women ages 80-84 will be childless.
- Demand for elder care is fueled by a steep rise in the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, which could nearly triple by 2050 to 14 million, from 5 million in 2013.
- The older population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The workforce is in desperate need of practitioners who can meet the needs of these communities.
- There will be a crisis in the field of aging due to the changing demographic trends, yet there is a significant lack of trained providers in all areas of the healthcare field. According to AARP, only 4% of social workers and 1% of physician's assistants identify themselves as specializing in geriatrics.

What are the next steps to becoming an Aging Life Care Manager®?

If this career sounds appealing, connect with others in the field. Joining the Aging Life Care Association (ALCA) provides many opportunities to find other professionals locally and nationally. ALCA provides mentorship as well as clinical and business training programs for professionals at all levels of practice.

Most importantly, ALCA promotes and reinforces professional standards and ethics. Belonging to ALCA also allows you to benefit from the association's marketing, public policy, and advocacy efforts. If you are interested in private practice, you can also grow your business through quality referrals in your area with a listing on the Find an Aging Life Care Expert search feature on the ALCA website at aginglifecare.org.

What are you waiting for? Connect with ALCA today. It may be the best career decision you ever made.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS:



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Jullie Gray is a trained and licensed as a clinical social worker. She combines 35 years of experience working in diverse healthcare settings with her passion for working with older adults and their families.

Jullie is a principal at Aging Wisdom, a care management and consulting practice serving the Seattle Metro area. She is an award-winning care manager, is the president of the National Academy of Certified Care Managers and past president of the Aging Life Care Association. She holds the distinction of Fellow of the Leadership Academy.



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Trained and licensed as a Mental Health Counselor and Geriatric Mental Health Specialist, Lisa Mayfield brings over two decades of experience in mental health and vast expertise working with clients and families affected by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. She is also a trained mediator and has worked for many years supporting families in conflict.

Lisa is a principal and founder of Aging Wisdom, a care management and consulting practice serving the Seattle Metro area. She is an active Rotarian, an award-winning care manager, and is the president elect of the Aging Life Care Association. She holds the distinction of Fellow of the Leadership Academy.

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