



Extending an independent lifestyle for seniors

How the Optum differentiator helps communities attract and retain residents



Supporting specific resident needs

After Eaton Senior Communities resident Steve Auten had bilateral knee surgery, followed by a degenerative spine issue that caused paralysis in his legs, he and his doctors were unsure if he'd ever be able to walk again.

Today, Auten is back on his feet and has a 20-pound terrier rescue dog named Hey that he walks regularly. He's even been able to achieve his ultimate goal: to take Hey to the mountains to play in the snow.

It was a long but remarkable recovery that Auten was able to make in his apartment at the Eaton community in Lakewood, Colorado. He credits his progress to comprehensive in-home medical care, including regular therapy, ongoing medical checks, transportation and other services he needed following spinal surgery and other health complications.

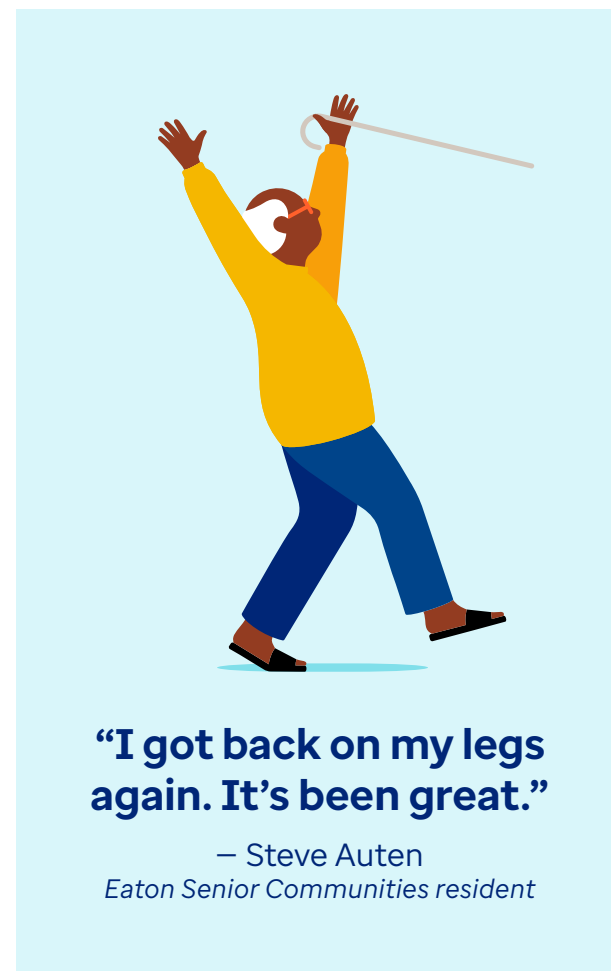
"I was in a wheelchair, and then I went from a wheelchair to a walker, to a cane and into walking on my own," Auten said. "I got back on my legs again. It's been great."

Auten is among a growing number of seniors in independent living who have been able to get the extra in-home care they need with coverage from Medicare Advantage special needs plans, which traditionally were offered only in skilled nursing, and then more traditional assisted living settings.

But as baby boomers age and are increasingly intent on retaining their independence, more health care companies are expanding accessibility to special needs plans that offer a higher level of in-home services than traditional Medicare Advantage plans.

"Seniors' needs are really increasing in nature," said Tim Rogers, vice president of senior community care for Optum in Colorado, Arizona and Utah, who worked in direct senior living employment for 17 years before joining Optum. "The acuity level of independent living residents has shifted over the years, where independent living residents today look a lot more like what the assisted living residents used to look like not too many years ago."

Those changing needs like Auten's are behind the expansion of special needs plans. And they are proving to be true community differentiators.



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– Steve Auten

Eaton Senior Communities resident

The Optum care model: A ‘value-plus’ service to Eaton since 2016

Auten said he signed up with the Optum care model and the UHC Care Advantage Plan, formerly known as the UnitedHealthcare Assisted Living Plan, following his initial knee surgeries. This enabled him to move out of a rehabilitation center and into his independent living apartment at Eaton. He was also able to stay there after a second surgery on his spine, which involved a year-and-a-half recovery.

“I don’t think I could have stayed here without Optum,” Auten said. “I don’t know how many times they came to check on me.”

And even though he’s now back on his feet and thriving, Auten said Optum continues to check on him monthly.

“My Optum provider, Zico Ramnarine, comes here. I don’t have to go out,” Auten said. “She makes sure I am doing OK. She takes my blood and checks my vitals. She suggests certain things. She asks about my medication. And if anything’s not right, she calls my doctor. She has such a great rapport with my doctors.”

Sarah Schoeder, director of wellness initiatives at Eaton, says Auten is just one of many examples of how the Optum care model has helped her community attract and retain residents by offering the extra services and benefits that residents increasingly are looking for – and need – to stay in their homes.

“The UHC special needs program has been a value-plus service to Eaton residents since 2016,” she said. “Residents have moved into our community excited to hear more about the personalized support and cost savings benefits Optum provides. ... It is frequently the first outreach I will receive from a new tenant, to ask to learn more!”



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Extending the independent lifestyle – at minimal cost

Rogers said one of the main goals of the fast-expanding Optum care model is to help communities that are more traditionally focused on independent living residents provide a higher level of service at minimal cost to both residents and communities.

Meeting those increasing needs, however, is often beyond the scope and licensing of many senior communities.

“But we’re able to come in and support those residents who qualify to extend that independent lifestyle for much longer,” Rogers said. “We’re able to be there and provide that clinical coverage, that extra set of eyes, things that the communities don’t necessarily have the resources to deal with.”

Under the Optum care model, residents who qualify for the special needs plan are seen by advanced practice clinicians, who monitor their care and medications from what are often multiple doctors. They also work with care navigators, who help members tap into the full

range of Optum services and benefits, including transportation.

“The continuity of care ensures their health needs are met by a team that knows them personally,” Schoeder said.

Having those teams on site, Schoeder said, “lessens the burden of residents and family alike, as many health needs are met in the comfort of one’s home. Transportation is one of our residents’ biggest needs, and having the ability to see a provider in one’s home for non-emergent needs improves quality of life.

“Eaton residents enjoy less falls and emergency room visits thanks to this protective oversight,” she said. “Collectively this has reduced the burden of Emergency Services in the area.”



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*Director of Wellness Initiatives,
Eaton Senior Communities*

Partnerships that help communities grow

As the Optum care model grows and expands access to more independent living communities across the country, its focus is about more than just providing health care. It's also about helping build community culture.

"We believe the Optum care model literally saves lives, it extends lives," Rogers said. "By extension, it also improves the overall health, wellness and culture of those buildings."

To help communities build a thriving culture, Rogers said, Optum teams become true partners – partners who get to know and work closely with community staff, families and residents.

And that outreach extends beyond plan members.

In addition to sponsoring things like vaccination clinics, wellness events and educational sessions for residents, families and staff, Optum teams also partner in social events and community fundraisers, Rogers said.

"Sometimes, we'll partner with staff to host an ice cream social, or something like that, where residents come in and we'll dish up ice cream for them," he said. "They have a great time. But they

can also ask questions of our advanced practice clinicians that are specific to their needs."

At Eaton, where most residents are on Medicaid, Optum has participated in an annual fundraiser to help raise money to support meals programs for independent living residents who can't afford the additional cost, Rogers said.

"Obviously, the staff get excited about that. But the residents are also thrilled to see us participating, knowing that we are making some investment into their overall well-being," Rogers said. "So we're able to be a part of the culture of growing those communities, and growing the culture of the community to help it thrive."

At Eaton, Schoeder describes herself as one of the Optum plan's biggest fans. So much so that educating new residents about the Optum care model is now part of the initial meet-and-greet session the community holds with residents before they move in.

While getting residents to sign up for the plan requires a bit of extra effort, Schoeder said, "the work I put into Optum enrollment is paid 10 times over in what it does for our community!"



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– Sarah Schoeder
*Director of Wellness Initiatives,
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