

## 5 kinds of navigators who help with aging issues

*By Ellen Waldman*

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A few weeks ago, there was an event at Southern Oregon University sponsored by the Osher Life Long Learning Institute (OLLI), on preparing for care for yourself and others. I happened to be one of the presenters. About 400 people showed up, so clearly this was a topic of some pressing interest. Based on this turnout, I am going to highlight a few important items here. In particular, I want to address the idea of having a “navigator,” someone who can help you find your way through the often complex world of options and choices as you age.

Aside from friends and family members (who may or may not really have the inside information on these steps), there are five navigators who are considered professionals in their fields. You will be familiar with three of them: attorneys, health care providers, and financial planners. Each has their obvious specialties, and you would be well-served by consulting with them when planning for your coming years. The next two, Senior and Disability Services, and the Aging Life Care Association, might not be as familiar, and it’s those I will focus on.

First, Senior and Disability Services of the Rogue Valley Council of Governments ([www.rvcog.org/mn.asp?pg=welcome\\_to\\_SDS](http://www.rvcog.org/mn.asp?pg=welcome_to_SDS); 541-776-6222). This office has an abundance of vital services and programs. There is often the misunderstanding that these services are only for people with lower incomes. With only rare exceptions, although their services are free or low-cost, they are available to anyone who is older or has a disability. These range from the Food and Friends program (which used to be called Meals on Wheels), to classes providing powerful tools for caregivers or those with chronic medical conditions. Those with memory challenges, or someone with behavioral health issues, like depression, will also find programs here to help them. There are family caregiver support groups and assistance. This is only a partial list, as they offer many more programs than mentioned here.

And then there’s the ADRC, the Aging and Disability Resource Connection of Oregon, which is under the auspices of SDS. I wrote about the ADRC some time ago, but it’s worth repeating. This is the gateway to a whole array of information and services for anyone more than 60 years old, or their friends, neighbors and families. Not a week goes by when I don’t refer someone to their free services. You can access this help and find out more about their services through their website:

<https://adrcoforegon.org/consite/index.php>; or call 541-423-1365 to reach a real person. The website also contains an updated list of resources, not just locally, but across the country.

The last navigation service is one that I am professionally connected with: the Aging Life Care Association (ALCA). You may have read about this before as well, but when looking for expert navigators, these professionals can be relied upon for unbiased guidance. Their services are not free, unlike the ADRC, but they will provide you with excellent value for the professional assistance you will receive. Whether short-term, a one-time meeting, or years-long care management and coordination, they can be of great help. They did a recent study and asked people why they enlisted the help of the ALCA. The top reason was a family member lived at a distance and they did not know how to help them.

The next reason was to secure an assessment of their own circumstances. When asked what the results were after engaging this help, 94 percent reported peace of mind.

Here's a quote from a recent email: "You're a wealth of knowledge and I wish I'd found you sooner." The ALCA professional has eight core areas of knowledge: crisis intervention; health and disability, including dementia; financial costs; housing choices; family dynamics; local resources; legal options; and advocacy. Think of them as an important information bank. On the website [www.aginglifecare.org](http://www.aginglifecare.org), you will find a list of professionals offering their services here locally, with thousands more across the country.

If you can imagine that in the next period of time, you will want some help navigating the terrain of aging, consider the five resources named here. If you start now, hopefully you can avoid a potential crisis caused by lack of preparation. Free, low-cost, or professional navigation fees: these are options to meet everyone's budget.