

**ULI Chicago's "Front Stoop Series"  
Senior Housing in the COVID Era  
June 11, 2020**

A Conversation With:  
Matthew Phillips, *Executive Vice President*, Senior Lifestyle  
Adan Kaplan, *CEO and Founder*, Solera Senior Living

On June 11th, ULI Chicago members convened for the Front Stoop Series to discuss "Senior Housing in the COVID Era." The discussion was led by Matthew Phillips, EVP at Senior Lifestyle and Adam Kaplan, Founder of Solera Senior Living. Senior Lifestyle is a seasoned seniors housing provider with communities in 30 states. Solera is a relatively new venture launched in 2016 that currently has three operating communities and six under construction/development.

The media has reported time and time again the rising number of deaths of seniors in long-term care facilities and nursing homes due to COVID-19. This has caused a misunderstanding by the general public that all senior living institutions are experiencing the same misfortune however, Matt and Adam have been spending a portion of their time making a clear distinction between nursing homes, where most of these unfortunate circumstances have occurred, and the type of product they manage which includes independent living, assisted living and memory care. Matt was able to say that 70% of all Senior Lifestyle communities have been COVID-free while Solera has not had a single case of COVID in any of their communities.

When COVID-19 reached the U.S., it turned operating models for senior living on their head. Highlights from the discussion regarding ways the seniors housing landscape had to quickly react and the ways in which it may continue to evolve into the future are as follows:

- **Immediate effect on day-to-day operations:**
  - New infection prevention protocols were drawn up and implemented immediately
  - There were temporary suspension of new move-ins; only essential visitors were allowed into the communities with required temperature checks; additionally, in order to decrease exposure, communities granted employees periods of sick leave, "hero" pay and a place to stay if they were willing to work doubles.
  - Communal dining became in-room service and in-person group programming came to all but a halt; outdoor and virtual became more the norm.
  - Improving communication was never more important, not just within the community but between residents and their loved ones; training the residents to better utilize smartphones and services like Zoom became necessary.
  - Marketing had to focus more heavily on client-relationship management data, social media and smart partnerships in order to educate the consumer and broaden and solidify reach. Highlighting safety, service and comfort is now key.
  
- **Long Term Effects on Operations and Design**
  - The use of technology can and likely will play a more predominant role in the industry than it has in the past. Communication, programming and medical appointments have had to be virtual in order to minimize exposure, this trend will likely continue at least in some capacity.
  - Physical design changes may include more balconies, more 1 BR units in place of studios, isolation suites, focus on outdoor spaces; additionally, delivery entrances, mail rooms, reception may all be laid out differently to better address separation and wellness checks before visitors/vendors enter buildings.
  - Air and water filtration and sanitation measures have changed and will continue to evolve; increased staffing and "hero pay" may remain market standard.