Outside of cohousing, we live in a culture that values materialism and wealth, with social ties taking a back seat. This despite evidence that "social capital" is a significant factor in health and happiness - more than eating right, more than exercising. We've heard the claim that cohousing adds 10 years to your life, and we can believe it. As I describe "what is cohousing?" in talks, I add "why should I care?" Folks are attracted to living smaller on the earth, of sharing resources. But it's the very real notion of longevity and happiness through relationships that gets folks to sit up and listen. Deep down, we know we are meant to have tribes, to be among people who know us and care about us. For most of our history as humans, this is how we lived.

In The Social Life of Genes, author David Dobbs profiles how our social lives can change our gene expression, with significant impacts on our health and well being. While we may think of our bodies as "stable biological structures," we're actually more "fluid" than we realize, with new cells being built and reengineered each day. And regeneration of cells is affected by our social experience.

Research has shown that loneliness is a health hazard ( see Peter Lazar's blog). Feeling stressed or being isolated shuts down our viral defenses, and plays a role in inflammatory immune responses. But even more, a pivotal study showed that genes driving inflammation to fight infection were very active in lonely people, even though they weren't sick. UCLA researcher Steve Cole explained that although it's known that stress is a risk factor for disease, "it can't hold a candle to social isolation.

Many studies correlate poverty with disease, so what is it about a life of poverty that makes us ill? Research indicates that driving these immune responses is not poverty, but whether a person sees the social world as scary. And what drives that? In another pivotal study, social support for children, defined as at least monthly contact with a trusted adult figure, came close to inoculating kids against "genetic vulnerability" leading to disease. Research also showed that a lack of a reliable social connection harmed the kids as much as domestic abuse. Dobb explains, "we sometimes conceive of social support as a sort of add-on, something extra that might somehow fortify us. Yet this view assumes that humanity's default state is solitude. It's not. Our default is connection. We are social creatures, and have been for eons."

I was fascinated by these comments from UCLA researcher Steve Cole, paraphrased by Dobbs: "You can't change your genes. But if we're even half right about all this, you can change the way your genes behave - which is almost the same thing...We're constantly trying to hunt down that sweet spot between too much challenge and too little...If you feel like you're well supported; if you come at the world with a sense that people care about you, that you're valuable, that you're okay; then your body is going to act as if you're okay - even if you're wrong about all that. Your experiences today will influence the molecular composition of your body for the next two to three months, or perhaps, for the rest of your life. Plan your day accordingly."

...read more

Alice Alexander, Coho/US Executive Director

Conferences & Events

**Aging Better Together**

**THE POWER OF COMMUNITY**

Conference | May 20-21, 2016 | Salt Lake City
Produced by Coho/US and SageHill Cohousing

Click on logo above for conference details or Register Now

**Aging Better Together Schedule Here**

**What is a Senior-Friendly Cohousing Community?**

Cindy Turnquist, SageHill Cohousing

...Please don't confuse the term senior-friendly with senior-only. Senior-friendly can refer to either multi-generational or seniors only communities. They both modify the cohousing model to create physical and social environments that allow people to flourish as they get older. Join us at the **Aging Better Together Conference** to learn how to transform an existing community into a senior-friendly superstar, or how to design a new
community for the lifespan of all who will live there. The conference provides over 30 sessions and three keynote presentations to guide you in this journey. Experts in cohousing, successful aging, and community founders will share their knowledge and experiences on everything from how to start a community to end of life care in an existing one.

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National Cohousing Open House Day

Saturday, April 30, 2016
Cohousing communities across the country are welcoming the public for tours and visits.
For Communities, we'd love to have you sign up! Learn more here
For Visitors, see the list of participating Cohousing Communities. Find ones near you or travel to those of interest for this special occasion! RSVP here.
For Press and Community Promotions, click here for a press release and other materials to spread the word.
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Cohousing Blogs

Loneliness is a Health Hazard
Peter Lazar, Shadowlake Village Cohousing (Blacksburg VA)
Have you ever felt a “feeling” of loneliness that seems physical and tangible? Similar to the feeling of hunger, it seems the loneliness feeling serves an evolutionary need: We feel hungry so that we eat and don’t die. Likewise, we physically feel lonely so that we make connections with each other and we can collectively thrive.
A recent UCLA study now suggests a cellular connection to this physical feeling: Researchers from the UCLA School of Medicine, University of California at Davis and University of Chicago recently found complex immune system reactions at work in lonely people.....
A wonderful aspect of cohousing is that you can enjoy your privacy and individuality, but you can simply walk outside to enjoy the connections all around you. I’d love to see a study of the cellular health of cohousers. Are we more healthy because of the community we enjoy? ... read more

Common House vs Condo Clubhouse: Do you Dare Tell the Appraiser that One is about Substance and the other Fluff?
Wendy Wiesner, Partnerships for Affordable Cohousing

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While it has been arguably necessary, it is also unfortunate that cohousing projects are most often sold to appraisers and banks as nothing less—and nothing more—than a condominium.

You've cut costs and squeezed expenses, and your appraisal is still a barrier to getting a loan. It's looking like there's nothing left to do short of axing the common house... At the same time, the clubhouses in new condo developments have pop-your-eyeballs-out expensive light fixtures, state-of-the-art humongous TV (or TV's), and the latest in celebrity-endorsed exercise equipment.

...What's the rub? First of all, appraisers have learned to value condo amenities—including the clubhouse—from a status and vanity perspective. What is most important is whether the eye candy will push someone over the line from rent to buy... Whether these amenities are useful (or not) isn't the central question, and there's actually a perverse incentive to make clubhouses less than utilitarian....Imagine a common house conceived with such pretentiousness in mind! 

What Does "Open" Mean? 
Sharon Villlines, Takoma Village Cohousing

When lying awake one night reflecting on various decisions made in cohousing and in my neighborhood community, I explored some questions about what is open and transparent in a world where everyone belongs to several organizations and tries to involve and represent a larger community.

What is required to truly inform and solicit information about the needs, desires, or preferences of "the community." How does a group know when it is being inclusive and transparent? And accountable?

"The meeting was open to everyone" is a common standard. But when the meeting was announced once on a neighborhood email list, scheduled on a week night at a time when single parents can't attend, some people are not home from work yet, and people also have other meetings is it an open meeting? Or the meeting is held the first Thursday of the month but no agenda announced? Or anyone can attend, call us. 

Read more

Living in Community

Not Dressing Up as Much
Diana Sullivan, Germantown Commons (Nashville TN)

"I feel different," Essie said quizzically as she stood in front of her new condo. "I'm not dressing up as much as before." We had just started moving in to the brand new homes completed in August 2015. Germantown Commons is a 25 home cohousing community one mile from downtown Nashville surrounded by historic Victorian homes, and cobblestone sidewalks with little white picket fences. The community is walkable to a coffee and chocolate shop and a dozen or more restaurants. Essie was talking about how she had no reason to dress up and leave the property. She was enjoying so much wandering around in our community and chatting with all of her neighbors. But, it didn't take long to start hearing in the community the whispering comments of 'why did he park there?' or 'who does she think she is to say that?' These are the moments when you realize you're living together and learning more about one another. 

Read more

PDX Commons Breaks Ground in Portland Oregon

Almost exactly three years from the first meeting of the two families who had the vision for PDX Commons, ground was broken on January 31, 2016, signaling the start of construction on the project. The 22 member households (and counting) will build a four-story 27 unit senior cohousing community in Portland. Completion and move-in is planned for early 2017. The site is one of the most walkable, transit-accessible locations in Portland. The community will also bring a new commercial space to the developing Belmont corridor (Photo: Kim Nguyen photosbykim.com)
Like many other baby boomers, the experience of caring for elder parents had a profound effect on my vision of aging in America. This experience created a new and powerful purpose for me. There had to be a better way!

Research has shown that the highest quality of life can be found in a community of peers who care about each other's well being. So I began my search for models for aging in community and...here I am today; joining others who are committed to building senior-friendly cohousing communities in the U.S.

I can't tell you how many times when introducing the concept of senior cohousing people light up and say, "My friends and I have always said that someday we want to live near and grow old together." When I ask what is holding them back they reply, "It's a dream of ours but we don't know how to wrap our arms around it; to make it a reality." This motivated me to create the Aging Better Together Conference in partnership with Coho/US. Join us at the Conference to learn how to make aging in a community, surrounded by others committed to knowing and caring about each other, a reality for YOU. read more....

**Cohousing Directory Metrics**

Established Communities = 161  
Completed = 135  
Building* = 26  
Own Site = 22  
Forming = 99  
* Many building communities have residents but continue to add members and build homes.

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**Resources**

**What is Cohousing?**

NCB Financial Services

Green Tax Incentive Compendium 2016

Senior Cohousing: Existing and In-Process Communities

**Tag Cloud**

The Cohousing Directory

New Forming Groups Listed:

**Raleigh Senior Cohousing**  
Raleigh, North Carolina

**Flagstaff Creative Cohousing**  
Flagstaff, Arizona

**Silver Leaf**  
Paonia, Colorado

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**Emerging Trends in Real Estate**

As reported by the Urban Land Institute, the *2016 Emerging Trends in Real Estate* profiles Housing Options:

Homeownership rates are declining (slightly) in the US...slightly less than 64% of Americans own homes, following a steady decline from the peak of 69% in 2004. That means a sharp pencil will be needed to create the best products in the right markets. The winning providers will find the right mix of rental, affordable housing, and creative options to meet the needs of a shifting population. Tools such as tax credits, flexible zoning, private/public partnerships, and land trusts will grow in importance. Design will become more important, with concepts like micro housing and cohousing helping address scarce resources and new lifestyle choices among buyers.

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