



Reading a Retirement Residence Contract

The clauses that cost families money — decoded in plain language before you sign.

General guidance for Ontario families, prepared 2026. Programs, rules, and rates change — confirm current details with a qualified professional before acting.

A retirement residence agreement is a tenancy plus a care contract woven together. Most surprises hide in four places: the care-package ladder, the annual increase clause, the deposit terms, and the exit rules. Take this guide to your review — and never sign on tour day.

Before you read a single clause

- Confirm the residence is licensed with the Retirement Homes Regulatory Authority (rhra.ca) and read its inspection history.
- Get the full fee schedule for EVERY care level, not just the one you need today.
- Ask for the last three years of rent and care-fee increases, in writing.

The base fee: what is actually included?

- Exactly how many meals per day, and are tray service or special diets extra?
- Housekeeping frequency, linen service, and laundry — included or per load?
- Utilities, cable, phone, internet — itemize each.
- Transportation, activities, and outings — which are free, which are billed?

The care-package ladder (where budgets break)

Care is usually sold in tiers or a-la-carte. The key questions: Who decides when your parent moves to a higher tier — a nurse assessment, or the family? What does each step cost? Can you bring in outside care (like a private PSW or an Ontario Health atHome worker) instead of buying the residence's package? Get every answer in writing.

- Ask: "Show me the exact monthly cost if my parent needs help with bathing, dressing, and medication."
- Ask: "What care needs would make my parent no longer able to live here at all?"

Money mechanics

- Deposit: how much, is it refundable, and under what conditions and timeline?
- Annual increases: capped or uncapped? Rent increases for most retirement homes follow Ontario rules, but CARE fees often are not rent-controlled — confirm which parts of your bill can rise freely.
- Notice period to leave: 30 days is common — what exactly must be paid after departure or death?
- Absence credits: if your parent is in hospital for a month, what is refunded (meals? care fees?)

Rights you keep no matter what the contract says

In Ontario, retirement-home residents are protected by the Residential Tenancies Act and the Retirement Homes Act — including the right to a written care plan, the right to refuse care, protections against eviction without process, and a formal complaints path through the RHRA. A contract clause cannot take these away.

CASL tip: bring the agreement to a free CASL consultation before signing — we can point you to senior-focused legal partners who review these contracts every week.