



Choosing a Nursing Home

Choosing a nursing home is an important decision. Keep in mind that there may be other long-term services and supports that might fit your needs, such as an assisted living facility or receiving care in your home. Refer to fact sheets on those topics to decide what option is best for you. If you decide that a nursing home is the right choice, here are some points to consider helping you find a facility that best meets your needs.

Track Record of the Nursing Home

- Check with family and friends to see about their experiences with nursing homes.
- Check with the long-term care ombudsman program to see if they have had complaints at the nursing home you are considering. To locate your state/local ombudsman, go to <http://www.theconsumervoice.org/ombudsman> or call the Consumer Voice at (202) 332-2275 or toll free at (866) 992-3668.
- Review federal data on nursing homes at Nursing Home Compare at <http://www.medicare.gov/NursingHomeCompare/search.aspx?bhcp=1>.
- Contact the state licensing and certification agency that inspects nursing homes in your state to see if they offer additional information about nursing homes, such as “report cards.” To locate the state licensing and certification agency, go to <http://www.theconsumervoice.org/ombudsman>, choose your state and look for “Licensure and Certifications,” or call the Consumer Voice at the numbers above.
- Look at state survey (inspection) reports for nursing homes in your state. You can find these reports on Nursing Home Compare or request them from the facility or your state licensing and certification agency.

Background Checks

- Ask the nursing home if they conduct national or state criminal background checks on employees.

Overview of Services

- Ask what services are included in the rate you will pay, and the cost of additional services offered at the facility. Find out if the facility accepts Medicaid.
- Ask what the facility policy is about administering CPR to residents.
- Ask if the facility requires you to sign a mandatory pre-dispute arbitration clause or agreement in order to be admitted. Arbitration is a legal process in which a dispute is settled by one or more arbitrators who decide the outcome instead of a jury made up of members of the community. “Pre-dispute” arbitration means you must agree to arbitration before any dispute – including abuse or neglect - arises. If possible, choose a facility that does not require you to sign such clauses/agreements.

- Find out if the facility provides the type of special care you might need (for example, care for Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, etc.) If the facility does provide that special care, ask what makes this care “special” and different from other care.
- Ask under what circumstances you could be asked to leave.

Staffing Levels, Expertise and Experience

- Ask what education, training and experience the nursing home staff has. If the facility offers specialized care, ask what training staff receive to assist residents requiring this type of care.
- Ask the nursing home about its experience in providing the services you are requesting.
- Ask what the staff-to-resident ratio is for each shift. The fewer residents per nurse or nursing assistant, the better!
- Ask how staff assignments are made and if the same aide will be assigned to you each time. If so, this is the ideal situation.

Meeting Your Needs, Preferences and Routines

- Discuss your needs, and any preferences or routines that are important to you, like staying up late at night or eating breakfast late. Ask how staff will meet those needs, preferences and routines. Ask if you can room with the person of your choice as long as that person consents.

Visiting the Nursing Home

- Take a formal tour of the nursing home.
- Go back unannounced several times, including mealtimes, evenings, and weekends.
- If possible, speak with current residents and any family or friends who may be visiting.
- Determine how far the nursing home is from your family and friends and how easy it will be for them to visit you.

Additional Resources

- The Nursing Home Checklist in the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ publication, *Your Guide to Choosing A Nursing Home*, can be used for nursing home visits. Go to <http://www.medicare.gov/pubs/pdf/02174.pdf> to download.
- AARP offers this helpful checklist for individuals and families to compare facilities: <http://www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/info-05-2012/caregiving-resource-center-asking-right-questions.2.html>.
- For more information on how to get quality care in a nursing home, refer to *Nursing Homes: Getting Good Care There* at <https://www.theconsumervoice.org/catalog/nursing-home-getting-good-care-there>.
- For more in-depth information on these topics, see the *Piecing Together Quality Long-Term Care Guide* produced by the Consumer Voice http://www.theconsumervoice.org/piecing-together-quality-long-term-care/pdf#National_Guide.