

THE RESIDENT ADVOCATE

A newsletter for long-term care residents containing news and information on rights, care issues, and updates on national policy.

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Join the Consumer Advisory Council



Connect with other residents from across the country and provide input on national policy issues.

Email us!

info@theconsumervoice.org

Moving on From COVID-19: What Does It Mean for Residents?

In late January 2020, a federal Public Health Emergency (PHE) was declared in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to some changes in rules and policies affecting residents' rights, Medicaid and Medicare, and facility operations. The PHE ends on May 11, 2023. Here's what you need to know:

COVID-19 Vaccines, Testing, Masking:

- Nursing homes will continue to educate residents and staff on the COVID-19 vaccine and offer to help them get vaccinated.
- Staff vaccination requirements have ended – although all residents, staff, and visitors are encouraged to stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations.
- Routine testing of staff and residents without symptoms is no longer recommended; however, nursing homes must comply with accepted standards, such as CDC recommendations for testing. Residents and staff with signs or symptoms of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status, must be tested as soon as possible.
- Requirements for masking in nursing homes vary by community. Talk to your nursing home's administration about requirements in your facility. **Remember – you have the right to wear a mask if you choose.**

Residents' Rights:

- Residents' rights that were waived, such as to choose roommates or refuse relocation within the facility, and the right to receive notice before transfer to contain or treat COVID are reinstated. Residents who were moved for these reasons should be given a choice to return to their original room or nursing home, or remain in their new location, depending on room availability.

Nurse Aide Training:

- Nurse aides must complete training and certification requirements within 4 months from the end of the PHE.



Eligibility for Medicaid:



- Residents receiving Medicaid will undergo a check, or redetermination, of their eligibility – which is based on a person's income, assets, and functional ability. States are supposed to redetermine eligibility by using existing information, however individuals may be asked to submit additional information. Residents and their representatives should ensure their contact information is up to date with the Medicaid agency. Medicaid enrollees who receive a notice of potential termination have the right to appeal the decision, and to a hearing. Ask for help if needed.

Contact your long-term care ombudsman program if you need assistance, https://theconsumervoice.org/get_help.

Good Staffing–The Key to Quality Care

One of the biggest challenges in long term care, even before the pandemic, is not having enough staff to fully meet residents' needs. Currently, federal regulations only require facilities to have "sufficient staff," a vague standard that results in states and individual facilities adopting their own requirements and leads to inequity in nursing home care. Later this spring, the federal government is expected to release a proposal requiring minimum numbers of staff in nursing homes. At the same time, efforts are being made to improve working conditions, reduce turnover, and provide better education in order to recruit new workers.



Higher staffing levels result in better care

Numerous studies have found links between higher staffing levels and better quality of care. Without adequate staff, residents routinely miss showers and other personal care, have long wait times for call bells to be answered, and are left lying in bed, not being moved or turned, increasing the risk of pressure ulcers. Poorly staffed nursing homes are more likely to be cited for abuse, have worse health inspections, and have lower quality ratings than adequately staffed nursing homes.

Improve quality by reducing staff turnover

Additionally, on average, 52% of nursing staff turnover annually, meaning that the average nursing home has to replace half of its direct care staff each year. Research shows that staff leave because of poor pay, lack of benefits, high workloads, inadequate training, poor management, and lack of career advancement. Studies also show that high staff turnover means poorer health outcomes for residents and higher numbers of complaints.

Nursing homes working to reduce turnover will not only support staff, but also provide better care for residents. Strategies for reducing turnover include involving nurse aides as part of interdisciplinary care teams and in care planning for residents, managing workloads to reasonable levels, ensuring staff have the necessary training and resources to meet the needs of residents in their care, and offering living wages and benefits, including sick time.

Residents and families can support improved staffing in nursing homes. Here's how you can help:

- Reach out to your local elected officials and your state and federal representatives about what it means for your care and quality of life when there are not enough staff in your facility.
- Involve your Resident and Family Councils in discussions with your nursing home leadership about how to address staffing concerns and reduce turnover.
- Join Consumer Voice's Consumer Advisory Council and join other consumer advocates throughout the country. Contact info@theconsumervoice.org for more information.

Cindy Napolitan, a passionate nursing home resident living in Dallas, TX, has first-hand experience living in an understaffed nursing home:



"During our monthly resident council meetings, the number one concern of residents is always the lack of staffing. The most important department to residents is nursing care."

Dignity for All: Staffing Standards Now!



**DIGNITY
FOR ALL**

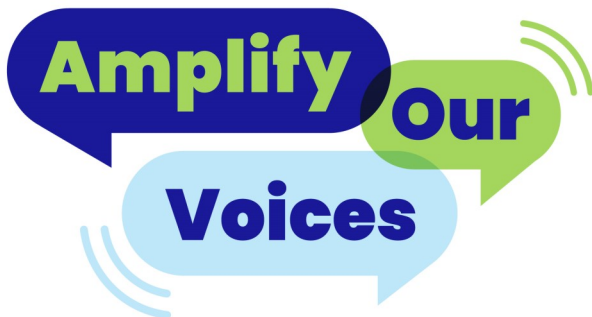
A campaign focused on centering residents and workers in the fight for better staffing standards.

Share your story

Share what it means to live in a nursing home with inadequate staffing:

<https://theconsumervoice.org/dignity-for-all/staffing-survey>

Residents' Rights Month 2023: Amplify Our Voices



National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care

Residents' Rights Month is an annual event celebrated each October to honor residents living in all long-term care facilities.

This year's theme – **Amplify Our Voices** - emphasizes a community of long-term care residents coming together to make their voices heard. Amplifying your voice means being outspoken about sharing your preferences and choices and sharing who you are and your experiences. Residents' voices are the most important at the decision-making table – your story deserves to be heard!

Resident's Voice Challenge

The Resident's Voice Challenge is an opportunity for long-term care consumers to respond to and reflect on this year's theme. Resident's Voice entries can include original essays, poems, artwork, photos, or videos. This year, we are encouraging residents to create videos of themselves amplifying their voices. **Submissions are due September 1, 2023.**

Email info@theconsumervoice.org or mail to 1025 Connecticut Ave, NW, Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20036.

For more information and resources on how to advocate for yourself, visit theconsumervoice.org, call 202-332-2275, or email us at info@theconsumervoice.org.

