

Right to Vote

A Voter Education Program

Residents of nursing homes have the same rights as all United States Citizens - including the right to **vote** and to **participate** in the political process {483.10(a)(1)}. Residents should be Informed about election issues and offered the opportunity to assert their views through the political process. In addition, staff and families may benefit from learning about concerns directly affecting residents.

The following activity has special significance because 2002 is an election year! ***Planning a voter education program is easy.*** Ask a candidate to give a speech or presentation at your facility, or invite a speaker to discuss issues important to residents.

Workplan for setting up a candidates forum*:

- Pick a date and time for the forum. Set it far enough in advance to allow adequate publicity and to ensure that candidates will be able to attend.
- Have residents choose which issues the candidates will discuss.
- Invite candidates to attend the forum. Let them know what issues you would like them to address.
- Prepare an informational fact sheet for the people who attend the forum.

- Get other groups to help out with planning, organizing, and drawing in more attendees to the forum. Contact religious, civic, or volunteer groups.
- Prepare an agenda for participants and candidates.
- Publicize the event. Involve resident and family councils by asking them to post flyers and posters in the home, advertising in the facility newsletter, and announcing the event to employees, family members, and residents. Inform the community about the event through flyers and posters in libraries and religious facilities. Send out a press release and contact someone at the local newspaper(s) who covers aging or health issues.

- Locate a room within the facility to host the forum. Make sure it is large enough to house the amount of people you expect to attend.

- Check with the Administrator to reserve the room, if possible.

- Secure a microphone and speakers for the event if the equipment is available and if you expect a large crowd.

- Confirm that staff will be available to set up the room on the day of the event, make refreshments available, and be sure staff and resources will be available for assistance in producing written materials.

One nursing home set up a “senior forum” which allowed staff and residents to learn about issues and voice their concerns.

It is important to discuss what needs to be done, appoint a committee to carry out the plans for the project, set deadlines, and include as many members in the long term care facility as possible. Advertise in the facility and in the community before and after the event, and evaluate the project afterwards. Also, recognize the people that participated in the project. Most importantly, make the project enjoyable and engaging!

*Modified from “Toward More Effective Resident Councils,”and “Resident Councils in Action” by the Minnesota Alliance for Health Care Consumers, 3231 First Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408, (612) 827-8151

For residents who are less able to participate or choose not to participate in a candidates' forum, a history activity might be successful. With history books from a library and/or pictures, have residents reminisce about the first time they voted or share memories of an interesting election.



For more help, call the League of Women Voters at (202) 429-1965 or contact your state American Association for Retired Persons (AARP). The AARP presents useful nonpartisan information on national and state issues important to older people in the form of easily distributable papers. They also offer information about candidates, candidate forums, and voter registration drives. AARP volunteers conduct issue workshops and candidate forums. Issues covered by the organization include Medicare, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Social Security, Tax Reform, and Campaign Finance Reform. They also present information on other issues. You can also contact the League of Women Voters and the AARP for information on how to set up a voter registration drive.

All residents should have the opportunity to vote. Long term care facilities can affirm this resident right by recruiting volunteers to escort residents to the polling booths. If a resident cannot travel to a polling booth, he or she should have access to absentee ballots. A long term care facility may also be a good place to set up a community polling booth.