

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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Coronavirus (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a virus. It can lead to respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, fever, and shortness of breath.

Staying Involved During COVID-19

The past several months, since the pandemic began, have been difficult for everyone, especially for those living in nursing homes. From eating alone to not seeing family and friends, the past six months have been incredibly challenging. Virtual visitation does not always make up for seeing your family in person, and many places have not yet re-started visits, either outdoor or indoor.

As a resident, it can be overwhelming and isolating waiting for administrators and government officials to make decisions that directly impact your quality of life. The best thing you can do is try to get involved in the process. **Talk to your administrator about the visitation policies including visiting hours, numbers of visitors permitted, and steps to be taken to protect residents, staff, and visitors. Talk about what works for you around receiving visitors.**

One way to get involved is to be a part of your facility's Resident Council. While the Resident Council may not yet be fully meeting in person, you can suggest socially distanced, in person meetings and video meetings. The administrator should be keeping the Council up to date on what's going on and as visitation opens up in your facility, can involve the Resident Council in reviewing how the emergency and visitation policies are working, and can include them in the process for making changes when necessary or appropriate.

The Council can also work to make sure that all residents get daily updates on facility conditions and can invite more residents to be involved. In addition to working with your facility on visitation policies, the Council can give input and be involved in decisions around group activities, dining, and helping residents vote. In some facilities, activities and dining are starting to happen with proper social distancing protocol. You can advocate for your facility to start some of these practices in a safe way. **While times are hard, staying involved is a good way to keep busy and help make a positive impact!**

I Still Have the Right to Vote

You, like all Americans, have the right to vote. However, it is not always easy for long-term care residents. The COVID-19 pandemic has made access to the polls even more difficult. Normally, residents are helped by staff, family, friends, community programs, and outside volunteers to register and receive a ballot. However, these supports may not be as readily available this year.

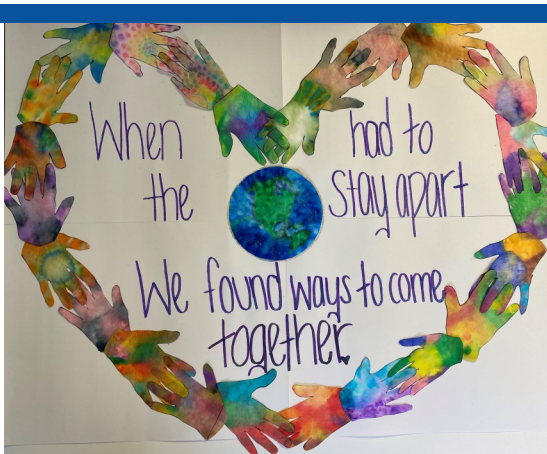


Facilities must help you exercise your right to vote. This can mean helping you to register, apply for an absentee or mail-in ballot, get to the polls, and/or complete your ballot. If you need assistance, talk to a social worker or the administrator, your family, or a trusted friend. Others, including your state's disability rights network, or your county's Board of Elections, may also be able to offer assistance.

Obtaining absentee or mail-in ballots will need advance planning. Have a staff or family member help you apply for or request your ballot. If your facility received electronic devices for virtual visits, they will be helpful for requesting a ballot online. Ask your facility to arrange for a voter registration program to come onsite to provide assistance. Following protocols like use of face coverings, hand sanitizer, and social distancing, such assistance can be provided outdoors, weather permitting, or in a designated space indoors. Because there have been recent delays with the postal service, try to send your ballot request as soon as possible. If you would like to vote in person, it is your right to do so. Talk to your facility about transportation and ensuring you have access to a mask or face covering and hand sanitizer.

Talk to your facility about what plans they have in place to help you vote. If you feel that they are not giving you the help you need, contact your Ombudsman. Find your Ombudsman at https://theconsumervoice.org/get_help.

October is Residents' Rights Month!



Artwork by the residents of Majestic Oaks nursing home in Pennsylvania.

Residents' Rights Month is an annual event to honor residents living in all long-term care facilities and consumers receiving services in their home or community. This year's theme, **Connection Matters**, emphasizes connections – to family, to friends, and to the community – as essential components of good health and quality of life for residents. During this crisis, many creative ways of staying connected were shared that can be replicated and built upon in all communities.

Visit theconsumervoice.org/events/2020-residents-rights-month for ideas for staying connected, resources, and promotional materials.

Share love from a distance

Post a photo and share tips on how you're staying connected to loved ones. Use **#LoveFromADistance** on social media and tag us on Facebook: @theconsumervoice and Twitter: @ConsumerVoices. If you are not on social media and would like to participate, email info@theconsumervoice.org.

For more information and resources on supporting COVID-19 prevention in long-term facilities, visit <https://theconsumervoice.org/issues/other-issues-and-resources/covid-19>.



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