



# The Impact of Understaffing on the Daily Lives of Nursing Home Residents

A SURVEY REPORT OF RESIDENTS

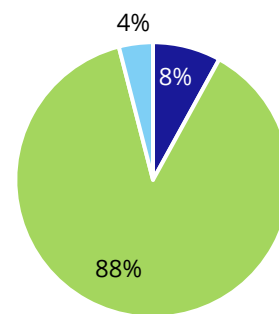
## OVERVIEW

Nursing home residents are entitled to and deserve high quality, person-centered, and person-directed, care. Yet, due to inadequate staffing many nursing home residents go without this care. Countless studies have documented that residents who live in understaffed nursing homes are more likely to suffer harm and neglect. Since the Biden Administration announced its intention to propose a minimum staffing standard in nursing homes, the focus has been on how a staffing standard would hurt nursing home owners and operators. Often lost in the discussion are residents, the people who suffer the consequences of understaffing.

To bring the focus back on residents, Consumer Voice surveyed over 120 nursing home residents in the fall of 2023, asking for their perspectives on staffing and how they are affected by staffing levels daily. The results were striking.

The majority of residents who responded to the survey, **88%, stated their facilities lacked the staff necessary to meet the needs of the residents living in their facilities.**

Is there adequate staff in your facility to meet the care needs of all residents?



■ Yes ■ No ■ I don't know

## KEY FINDINGS

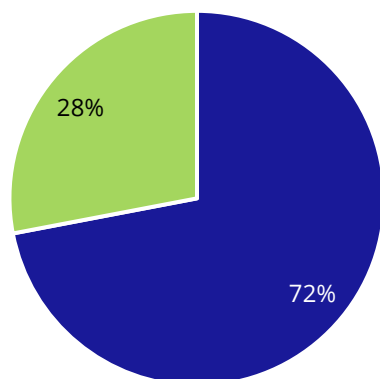
Of the residents who responded to the survey:

- **88%** report they do not have adequate staff in their facilities to meet the care needs of all residents.
- **87%** say understaffing affects them every day or several times per week.
- **72%** wait longer than they would like to get out of bed in the morning.
- **60%** are woken up earlier than they would like.
- **73%** miss activities because there are not enough staff to help them participate.
- **39%** are unable to eat in the dining room if and when they choose.
- **57%** report their meals do not come on time.
- **58%** report they are not given their medications on time with 56% of those respondents stating their medication is late several times a week and 24% stating their medication is late everyday.
- **72%** wait longer than they would like to take a shower.
- **74%** report that they, or someone they know in their facility, has been neglected or hurt because of understaffing.

## WAKING UP IN THE MORNING

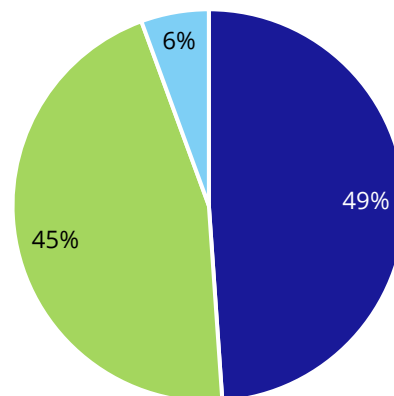
Basic choices that many of us take for granted are often out of reach for nursing home residents. For many residents, inadequate staffing means not being able to get out of bed in the morning. Residents require assistance with transferring out of bed, dressing, and toileting. Yet, many residents are forced to wait to start their day because of understaffing.

Do you wait longer than you'd like to get out of bed in the mornings?



■ Yes ■ No

How often do you wait longer than you'd like to get out of bed?



■ Everyday ■ Several times a week  
■ Several times a month

**72% of the residents who responded reported they wait longer than they would like to get out of bed in the morning.** Of those residents, 49% wait longer than they would like every morning and an additional 45% state that they wait several times a week. Many cite a lack of staff or untrained staff as the reason they must wait. Some residents stated that there have been days when they have waited all day or weren't taken out of bed at all.

There are also residents who report being woken up earlier than they would like, suggesting that residents rarely have control over their mornings. **60% of residents say they are often woken up earlier than they would like, with over 90% of those residents stating this occurs either daily or several times a week.**



### Resident comments include:

*"Aides say they have too many people to take care of. I have to wait."*

*"So far, I haven't been out of bed for three days."*

*"I have been left in bed all day without being touched for any care."*

*"I never get out of bed. Most staff don't know how to use the Hoyer lift, so they don't want to hurt me."*

*"I have to 'time' my hours. I am a Hoyer lift resident and 95% of the days, there aren't enough aides to allow me the chance to get "changed" to use the bathroom."*

*"I don't like waking up at 5:30/6:00am [for] blood pressure [checks] and such. I would love if it was a little later."*

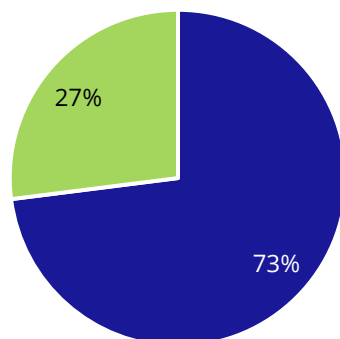
*"I don't get enough rest if there is a 5:30am wake up. This has a negative effect on my health."*

*"Varies per staff on duty. Many are tired, doing double duty shifts due to lack of staff."*

## ACTIVITIES

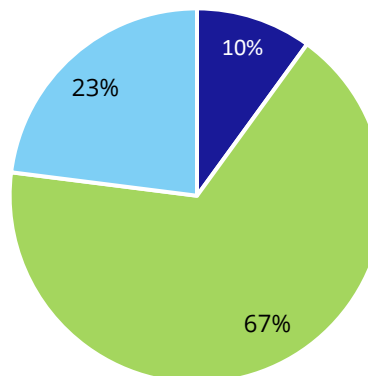
Lack of staff impacts the daily life of residents in multiple ways. Participating in activities is an important way for residents to socialize and stay engaged throughout the day.

Have you ever missed an activity because there aren't enough staff to help you participate?



■ Yes ■ No

How often do you miss activities?



■ Everyday ■ Several times a week  
■ Several times a month

73% of residents who responded say yes, they miss activities because there is insufficient staff to help them participate. Of those residents, **67% miss activities several times a week or even daily**. Residents give reasons such as not enough staff to take them or help them engage in activities as well as not being informed of activities that are occurring.



### Resident responses include:

*"I do not attend any activities because there are no staff to take me, or orient me, or engage me in the activities."*

*"Staff aides are needed to transport me to activities, there are not enough of them to handle all of us. Only five to eight out of 100 make activities due to lack of staff."*

*"At times residents are unaware of activities that they might attend."*

*"I don't go to activities because there are no staff who know how to use the Hoyer lift and activities are not done in the room."*

*"I am not always allowed to participate in activities due to their restrictions on my wheelchair use."*

*"Aides say they have others to take care of. I have to wait. Then I miss the activities."*

*"At times, some residents do not receive any care prior to activities beginning for the day."*

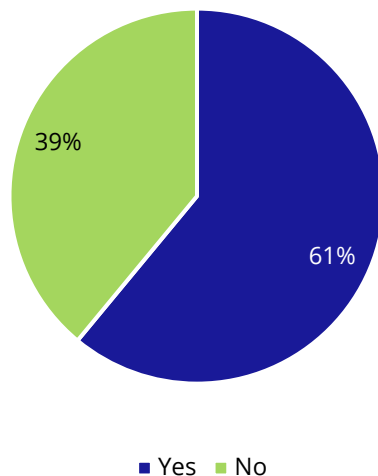
*"They always say they have too many people to take care of."*

*"I'm highly involved in doing activities, so I'm up and about, and ready to go. If no aide comes to tie my shoes or wash me or help me dress, I'm late or I miss the activity."*

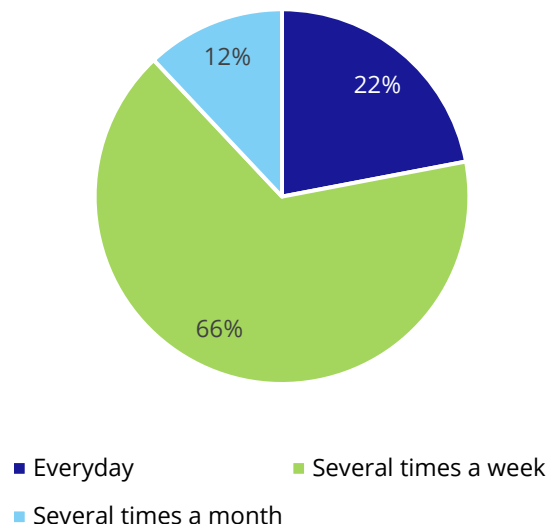
## DINING

Despite being required to provide residents with dining options (communal or dining alone) many surveyed residents noted they do not have choices regarding where or when they eat.

Are you able to eat in the dining room if and when you choose?



How often are your meals late?



Nearly 40% of residents who responded reported not being able to eat in the dining room if they so desired. Some cited staffing and others said that the pandemic continues to affect where they eat. **57% of respondents stated that their meals do not come on time with 66% of those respondents reporting that their meals are late several times a week and 22% reporting their meals are late every day.** 16% replied that they are not given the assistance they need to eat in a timely fashion with 69% of those residents stating that they fail to receive this assistance several times a week or every day.



### **Resident responses regarding the dining room include:**

*"They don't have enough staff to have people in the dining room."*

*"Afternoon aides do not have time to get the Hoyer residents back out of bed."*

*"[Dining is] limited to dinner and lunch, not enough staff to hold breakfast there."*

*"Not enough staff for the dining room."*

*"The dining room has been closed, we have had a COVID-19 outbreak... but I understand that it is over, so I will be watching to see how quickly they resume opening up the dining room and other activities."*

*"Dining has not resumed after the pandemic. Residents eat in their rooms."*

### **Responses over when meals are served include:**

*"If there are staff shortages, meals are late."*

*"Always late."*

*"Rushed to finish meal, aide wants to take tray."*

*"Erratic meal delivery."*

*"Meals are late, 45 to 90 minutes. They have missed giving me meals sometimes."*

*"Meals are late regularly and very awful food."*

*"Carts sit unattended, or kitchen is understaffed."*

*"It depends on what staff are working."*

*"Food is cold because it takes a long time to deliver."*

### **Responses regarding assistance with eating include:**

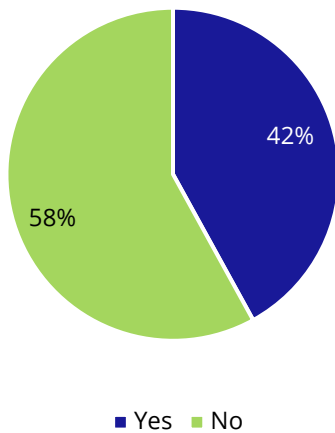
*"Not receiving assistance "has resulted in countless unnecessary aspirations, ER visits, and hospital stays."*

*"My wife comes daily to help feed me."*

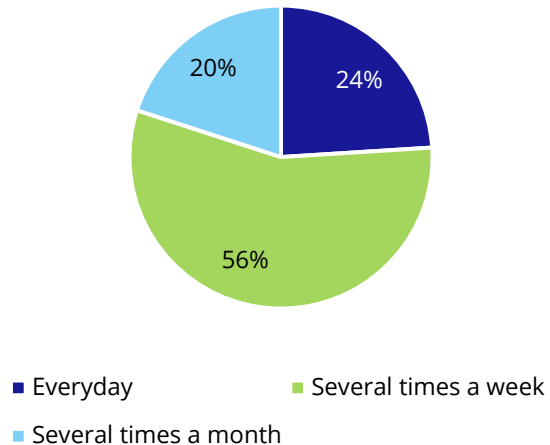
## MEDICATION

Most nursing home residents rely on daily medications. Residents were surveyed about whether they receive their medications on time and, if not, how often they are given their medications late.

Are you given your medications on time?



How often are you given your medications late?



Over 58% of respondents stated they were not given their medication on time. Of those, **56% receive their medication late several times a week and 24% receive their medication late every day.** The reasons cited included a lack of available staff as well as inconsistent staffing.



### Resident comments include:

*"Agency nurses can be a real problem. I must use my call light to try to get my meds on time."*

*"The nurses are very busy."*

*"Lack of staff and nurses caring for too many residents."*

*"Sometimes given inaccurate medication."*

*"It's late mostly on weekends and around shift changes."*

*"Depends totally on the nurse on duty."*

*"The meds are skipped."*

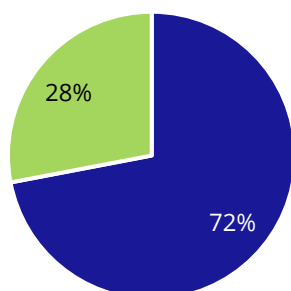
*"I'm sometimes given someone else's medication."*

*"It always happens when the regular staff are not here. The meds can be up to several hours late."*

## SHOWERING AND HYGIENE

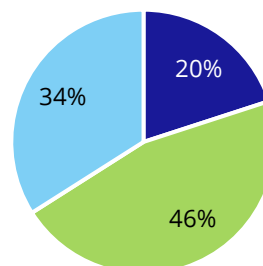
Showering, bathing, and toileting should be basic parts of a resident's day where residents have some control.

Do you wait longer than you'd like to get a shower?



■ Yes ■ No

How often do you have to wait longer than you'd like to take a shower?



■ Everyday ■ Several times a week  
■ Several times a month

Residents were asked if they wait longer than they would like to get a shower, the overwhelming majority of those who responded, 72% said yes. Of those, 46% wait longer than they would like several times a week or daily. The survey showed many respondents do not have the option of a daily shower. Many cited short staffing or untrained staff as the reason they miss showers and several reported being given certain days to shower but not always receiving showers on those days, **some receive showers less than once a week.**



### Resident comments include:

*"Showers are only given twice a week and sometimes missed all together."*

*"They say they shower us, but they don't."*

*"It depends on who is working and how they are staffed."*

*"They don't have time, or the shower is broken."*

*"I have been allotted two shower days, Wednesdays and Saturdays, but the weekend is not good."*

*"Staff do not know proper procedures to shower properly."*

*"Lack of enough staff to handle showers for everyone."*

*"Some residents have not had a shower in months, told there is not enough staffing."*

*"Showering at 11pm or midnight is no fun."*



*"We only get showered twice a week, and there are times that I don't get one despite that it is my day. I will have to complain and wait until Sunday, as that is the only make up day."*

*"Sometimes showers are cancelled."*

*"Sometimes only every two weeks to get a shower and bed changed."*

*"Sometimes they don't remember to take me."*

*"Max two showers a week, if I am lucky."*

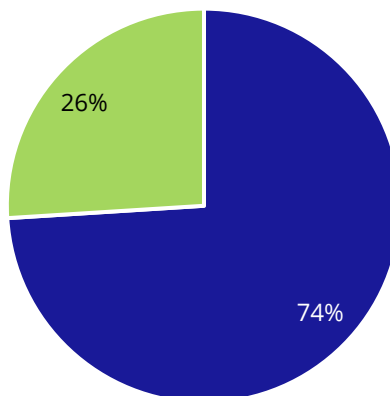
*"Showers were broken last week."*

The lack of control over basic hygiene is not unique to showering. One resident wrote that they have "long waits to go to the bathroom and get off the toilet." Someone else wrote that they are "waiting too long for their briefs to be changed." Another resident wrote, **"Often, I hold my bladder and/or bowels and due to the length of time I have to wait for help, I have had skin breakdowns."**

## NEGLECT BECAUSE OF UNDERSTAFFING

74% percent of residents who responded reported they, or someone they know in their facility, has been neglected or hurt because of understaffing. Many residents reported falls and other medical issues occurring because of the lack of staff. Others report long wait times for their call bells to be answered. Many report that the staff are overworked or undertrained.

Have you or anyone you know in your facility been neglected or hurt because of understaffing?



■ Yes ■ No



### Resident comments include:

*"Lots of falls"*

*"No showers for weeks, meds constantly late or skipped, call lights not answered for hours."*

*"Lots of falls from not being monitored!"*

*"Don't receive assistance when needed leading to falls or infections."*

*"Yes, I fell trying to use the bathroom."*

*"Residents are dropped from the bed."*

*"Yes. Both residents and staff have been hurt."*

*"I often have issues with my oxygen concentrator and sometimes have to wait hours to get help."*

*"I often go 12-hour shifts without seeing a single staff member."*

*"I have endured so much medical and emotional neglect. Staff are so stressed."*

*"I've waited up to three hours for help and that's just one of many everyday occasions."*

*"Staff are not trained properly to take care of residents. Never the same staffing, so they do not care."*

## CONCLUSION

Over 120 nursing home residents replied to Consumer Voice's survey and a significant majority indicated that because their facilities are understaffed they are not receiving the care they need. Studies back up the residents' experiences. Nursing homes that are poorly staffed provide poorer care, have lower health inspection ratings, have more instances of abuse, and lower overall ratings<sup>i</sup>. Better staffing is possible and will lead to a better experience for residents.

**A strong federal minimum staffing standard is a necessary first step in ensuring that residents receive the person-centered care they deserve.** It is essential that any standard be strongly enforced. Without adequate enforcement, nursing homes will continue to understaff, and residents will continue to suffer.

Consumer Voice strongly supports the requirement of a 24-hour Registered Nurse (RN) on site seven days a week at all nursing homes. The current eight-hour requirement is inadequate and leaves residents at risk of harm. Studies overwhelmingly show a direct correlation between registered nurse presence and resident outcomes.

Adequate training and compensation are key to addressing high staff turnover rates that exist in many nursing homes and lead to poor health outcomes for residents.<sup>ii</sup> Currently,

the average nursing home faces a 52% turnover rate with nursing staff each year.<sup>iii</sup> Lack of training is cited, along with poor wages, lack of career advancement, and impossible workloads as reasons for the high turnover in nursing homes.

In addition to the comments in this report, Consumer Voice frequently hears from residents that high turnover and staff from agencies are reasons that their quality of life suffers. They note that when staff do not have relationships with residents and are not familiar with their needs and preferences, they and their fellow residents fail to receive adequate care and that this problem is felt more acutely by residents who are unable to voice their needs<sup>iv</sup>. One resident summed it up as, **“the facility has no problem hiring nurses or certified nurse aides, but they cannot retain them... how safe is one CNA to 36 patients? We are just ignored.”**

Throughout this report, residents voiced their concerns about the daily impact inadequate staff have on their lives. Their quality of life will continue to suffer, and their lives will be endangered until there is a well enforced strong staffing standard and all staff are well trained and fairly compensated.



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<sup>i</sup> [https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/issues/The\\_Importance\\_of\\_a\\_Minimum\\_Staffing\\_Standard.pdf](https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/issues/The_Importance_of_a_Minimum_Staffing_Standard.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/issues/High\\_Staff\\_Turnover-A\\_Job\\_Quality\\_Crisis\\_in\\_Nursing\\_Homes.pdf](https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/issues/High_Staff_Turnover-A_Job_Quality_Crisis_in_Nursing_Homes.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> [https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/issues/High\\_Staff\\_Turnover-A\\_Job\\_Quality\\_Crisis\\_in\\_Nursing\\_Homes.pdf](https://theconsumervoice.org/uploads/files/issues/High_Staff_Turnover-A_Job_Quality_Crisis_in_Nursing_Homes.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Conversations with Consumer Voice’s Consumer Advisory Council throughout 2023