

Advocating for Rights and Better Care in Nursing Homes

Tips for Residents and Families

As a nursing home resident, you have the right to quality, person-centered care. Nursing homes are required by federal law to provide the care and services you need to reach your highest level of well-being. Too often residents find themselves in situations where their rights are being violated and their needs are not being met. It is important to know the steps you can take to advocate for yourself when this happens. If things go wrong, there are specific actions you can and should take to try and change the situation within your facility. There are also ways to advocate for change on a broader level outside of your facility.



ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN YOUR NURSING FACILITY

- **Discuss the problem with nursing home staff and the administration.** Start with the staff member directly involved. If that is not successful, work your way up the nursing home hierarchy: staff supervisor, department head, administrator, facility owner/board of directors.
- **Raise your concerns at your next care plan meeting or request a special care plan meeting.** The care plan meeting is an opportunity to share your concerns with staff, talk about what can be done, and develop a solution. Ask which staff person you should follow up with if the problems continue.
- **Use the facility grievance process.** A grievance process is a formal way to raise a problem or complaint. Every nursing facility is required to have a grievance process. Ask for a copy of the facility's grievance policy and follow the process to file a complaint or concern. The facility must work to resolve the problem promptly. You must receive a written response telling you what was done to investigate the complaint, the findings, whether the complaint was confirmed, and any action the facility has taken, or actions they will take to correct the problem.
- **Raise your concerns with the resident or family council.** Resident and family councils can be an effective resource for maintaining a consumer voice in the facility and for addressing facility-wide concerns with administrators. If your facility has a resident and/or family council, consider joining it. If your facility does not have one, consider starting one. To learn more, visit our [Resident Council Center](#) and [Family Council Center](#).

- **Contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.** The Ombudsman program advocates for residents and can help resolve concerns. If you have any questions or concerns about your facility or the way you are being treated, contact the Ombudsman program in your state. Find your [Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program's contact information here](#).
- **File a complaint with the State Survey Agency (SSA).** This agency is responsible for overseeing nursing homes and investigating complaints. You can file complaints anonymously if you prefer, and you can reach out to your Long-Term Care Ombudsman program for assistance. Find information about how to [file a complaint with your SSA here](#).



ADVOCACY STRATEGIES FOR IMPACTING LONG-TERM CARE POLICY

- **Share your story.** By telling your story and sharing your experiences living in a long-term care facility, you help decision-makers and the public better understand the challenges nursing home residents face.
 - Send your stories to your local officials, state legislators, members of Congress, the Governor, and the media.
 - Use social media to share your story with the general public. Apps such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok, allow you to post videos or write stories discussing and showing your experience in long-term care facilities.
- **Contact your elected officials.** Elected officials need to hear directly from residents and families about what is happening in long-term care facilities. By connecting with decision-makers, you alert them to problems they may not otherwise hear about. You can also ask state and federal legislators to initiate or support legislation or administrative actions that may address a problem or improve the care and lives of nursing home residents. For strategies on how to talk with your local representatives, [click here](#). To learn who your elected officials are, [click here](#).
- **Reach out to the media.** The media can be an important way to [inform and educate](#) the public and legislators about issues residents are facing, as well as create pressure for change. Share your story with reporters, submit an Op-Ed, or write a letter to the editor.
- **Sign up as a Consumer Voice member and join the Action Network.** Membership is FREE for all individuals receiving long-term care. Joining the Action Network will provide you with the tools you need to take action regarding national and state policy developments, such as the ability to contact your members of Congress (and other elected officials) directly through our website, sign on to letters, or write and issue a letter to the editor.
- **Vote.** It is important to vote in both federal and state elections, as both play a major role in the policies that shape the future of long-term care. Ask candidates how they will ensure access to affordable, quality long-term care and services. For tools on voting in long-term care facilities, [click here](#).

