

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Vital Resident-Directed Advocacy

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman program (LTCOP) advocates for individuals residing in nursing facilities and residential care communities, such as assisted living facilities and board and care homes. They resolve problems that impact residents' rights, quality of life, and quality of care, and work to improve policies at the local, state, and national levels.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman program is the only federal program mandated to advocate with, and for residents of long-term care facilities.

The Older Americans Act (OAA) establishes the responsibilities of the LTCOP, requiring it to advocate for the rights, health, safety, and wellbeing of residents in long-term care settings through complaint resolution, education, and systemic advocacy. All states, as well as Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and Guam, are required to have an Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman headed by a full-time State Long-Term Care Ombudsman who directs the statewide program. All services provided by the LTCOP are free and confidential.

Key responsibilities of the LTCOP include:

Investigating and resolving complaints on behalf of residents.



Ombudsman programs address a wide range of concerns, including improper discharges, medication errors, call bell response delays, privacy and dignity violations, and allegations of physical, emotional, or financial abuse.

Maintaining a regular presence in facilities and observing care conditions.



Through frequent facility visits, Ombudsman program representatives engage with residents, identify recurring issues such as inadequate staffing, and track trends affecting the overall quality of care and life.

Educating and empowering residents, families, and the community.



The LTCOP provides information on residents' rights, abuse prevention, care planning, and how to choose or navigate long-term care services, including helping residents make informed decisions and advocate for themselves.

Advocating for systemic improvements in long-term care.



The LTCOP promotes changes that enhance resident protections, encourage transparency and accountability, and improve care quality—such as supporting legislation for higher staffing ratios or holding facilities accountable when providing substandard care. They bring attention to systemic failures and work with lawmakers, regulators, and community partners to advance meaningful, resident centered improvements in long-term services and supports.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman in Action

According to the [National Ombudsman Reporting System](#), complaints about quality of care, autonomy and choice, abuse and neglect, and inappropriate discharges are the top resident complaints in all long-term care settings *nationwide*,¹ and have been for many years.

Examples of the Ombudsman program's vital role in protecting residents' rights, ensuring their autonomy, and building trust through consistent presence include:²

Quality of Care: Access to Showers



A resident was not receiving regular showers due to the difficulty he had transferring to the shower chair. He expressed that he was experiencing severe back pain from using a Hoyer lift transfer and requested a sheet transfer instead. The facility refused his requests, citing liability concerns. With persistent support from the LTCOP, the facility agreed to explore alternative options. Ultimately, they provided transfer boards, a decision that balanced safety, pain management, and resident choice which allowed him to resume regular showers every day. Additionally, a consistent five-day shower was established and incorporated into the residents' plan of care.

Protection from Inappropriate Discharge



A resident, recovering from back surgery, received a 30-day discharge notice to an outdated address, risking homelessness. After receiving resident consent, the LTCOP intervened, ensuring facility staff followed the regulations, and resulting in continued care for the individual at the facility.

The Right to Self-Determination and Autonomy



A 65-year-old resident's family purchased a power wheelchair to improve mobility, but the facility confiscated it due to a policy. The LTCOP intervened and was successful in advocating for the return of the wheelchair to the resident, ensuring the resident's right to autonomy and self-determination was upheld.

By The Numbers

In 2023,
The Long-Term Care
Ombudsman program:

- Investigated and resolved **202,894** complaints.
- Provided **3,106** training sessions for long-term care facility staff.
- Resolved or partially resolved **71%** of complaints to the satisfaction of the resident or complainant.
- Provided information and assistance to **502,484** individuals (e.g., residents, family members, and other concerned individuals).
- Conducted **342,189** visits to over **48,000** long-term care settings.
- Supported residents at **17,095** Resident Council meetings.

Statistics are based on federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023 NORS Data (October 1, 2022- September 30, 2023).

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¹ States submit data regarding Ombudsman program activities to the U.S. Administration on Aging each federal fiscal year. That data is summarized in the National Ombudsman Reporting System (NORS).

² Cases are from Florida and Tennessee NORS Annual Reports.