

## The importance of resident and family councils in nursing homes

Resident and family councils are vital to the operation of a nursing home, providing a voice for residents and their families. Resident and family councils provide an organized method of creating change, providing support and improving the quality of life for nursing home residents.

Because the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman works to resolve concerns made on or on behalf of residents living in long-term care facilities, it is a valuable resource for resident and family councils when it comes to providing information about:

- Residents' rights
- The role of resident and family councils in promoting residents' rights
- Ways resident and family councils can work with nursing home staff to identify problems and take action on issues impacting residents' quality of life
- How to organize and promote resident and family councils

**Your State and Local Long-Term Care Ombudsmen can be reached at:**

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## RESIDENT & FAMILY Councils in Nursing Homes





## What is a resident council?

A resident council is an independent, organized group of residents who live in a nursing home and meet on a regular basis to promote and enhance the quality of life for all residents.

Resident councils create change, address quality of life and care issues, plan resident activities and discuss matters brought before the council. Specifically, resident councils:

- Permit members to actively participate in making choices regarding activities, meals, daily schedules, personal care and other aspects of resident life;
- Promote the quality of life and quality of care for all residents;
- Provide an opportunity for residents to discuss concerns in a safe setting; and
- Enhance communication and problem-solving between staff and residents.

## What is a family council?

A family council is a group of family members and friends of nursing home residents who work to maintain or improve the quality of life for nursing home residents.

Family councils can structure themselves, determine meeting schedules and assign duties as council members see fit. Family councils:

- Provide information to families of new residents about a variety of topics;
- Offer ongoing support to residents and family members;
- Enhance communication between family members and staff;
- Identify and resolve areas of concern that impact residents; and
- Work with nursing home staff to identify problems and take action on issues that impact residents' quality of life.

## Frequently asked questions

**Q:** Do nursing home staff members participate on resident councils?

**A:** Resident councils should operate independently without staff intervention. Staff members should attend the meetings only at the request of resident council members. However, the facility must designate a staff person to provide assistance and respond to written requests from the council.

**Q:** Can any nursing home have a family council?

**A:** Under federal law, family members of nursing home residents have the right to organize and participate in family councils. Facilities are expected to designate a staff person to assist in responding to requests and concerns; provide a private meeting space for the council; and listen to and act upon the council's grievances and recommendations concerning policies and decisions affecting residents' quality of life.

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