

Fact Sheet: Resident Councils in Nursing Homes

What is a nursing home resident council?

A resident council is an **independent** group of nursing home residents who meet on a regular basis to discuss concerns and suggestions and to plan activities that are important to them.

Why have a resident council?

Nursing home residents can face many challenges living in a group setting or dealing with nursing home policies and procedures. These issues can make nursing home residents feel like their opinions and preferences do not matter.

Many nursing home residents do not want to give up all control over their lives. They want the chance to influence decisions that affect them. A resident council gives them that chance.

What can effective resident councils accomplish?

- Improve communications that allow residents to know the facts about what is happening in the home.
- Help identify problems early, when it is easier to do something about them.
- Serve as a sounding board for new ideas.
- Help individuals speak out about what's bothering them, because speaking up as a group is easier than as an individual.
- Improve residents' quality of life by helping to plan activities and events.
- Create opportunities for residents to work in small groups and get to know each other, develop friendships, and appreciate each other's skills and ideas.

Do residents have a right to meet as a council?

Yes. Michigan and Federal laws give residents the right to meet as a council. At the time of admission, nursing homes are required to inform new residents of their right to create a council if one does not exist or to participate in the council that is already operating. The home must also provide space for meetings and give assistance to residents who need help getting to the meetings.

Resident councils have the right to meet privately or to invite staff members, family, friends, the ombudsman, or members of community organizations to participate in the meetings. The home must designate a staff person to work with the council, to attend council meetings if invited, and to provide needed support services and assistance, such as taking minutes, but the residents remain in charge.

How are resident councils organized?

The structure of a resident council can be the key to its success. The size of the home and the abilities and needs of the residents are important factors to consider in selecting a structure.

In small homes, councils are frequently operated as open meetings for all interested residents. There may be a steering committee to help plan meeting agendas and to follow-up on decisions made by the council.

Larger homes often have councils made up of representatives who are responsible for seeking the concerns and suggestions of residents in their area and for bringing this information to the meetings.

Where can one get more information about resident councils?

The Long Term Care Ombudsman can answer questions, help set up a resident council, or speak about a long term care topic at a council meeting.

Michigan Long Term Care Ombudsman Program

Free and Confidential Help

1-866-485-9393

Email: MTLCOP@meji.org

Website: MLTCOP.org