

Strengthening Resident Councils

Resident councils are a vital part of community life, person-centeredness, and hearing the voice of residents within nursing homes. More standard approaches and best practices are needed to make sure residents can actively participate in these meetings. The Coalition will assemble and test a guide for nursing home teams to establish and sustain an engaging and inclusive Resident Council.

Guiding Recommendation from NASEM's The National Imperative to Improve Nursing Home Quality

“Resident councils serve to empower the residents of nursing homes and can promote life-long citizenship within the nursing home facility (Freeman, 1997) [...] More research is needed on best practices for resident councils in nursing homes.” (Box 4-7: Resident and Family Councils, p. 189)

*The Coalition thanks the
Quality Measurement & Improvement Committee
for writing this Action Plan.*

Purpose

Nursing home teams must listen to nursing home residents, as well as consider and act on resident recommendations and grievances. Stronger support for resident councils is needed for nursing homes to do so effectively.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Federal Regulations (CFR483.10(f)(5)) state that nursing homes must allow and support resident councils. This is a federal regulatory requirement and failure to comply may lead to a citation under federal tag (F tag) 565. But when resident councils are not run effectively, it may result in a failure to provide an environment in which residents' goals, priorities, preferences, and concerns are heard and acted upon.

While many nursing homes have strong best practices, nursing homes could benefit from a standardized method to establish and sustain an engaging and inclusive resident council. A guide – integrating existing resources, best practices and key approaches and processes for nursing home teams – could be a foundation for nursing homes to develop community-specific bylaws, protocols, and processes that support a resident-directed group.

Recent challenges with social isolation have also challenged the Coalition and others to think about what a modern, equitable, and responsive resident council looks like. If invited by residents, family members, care partners, and other members of the community, may participate to support improvements in quality of life and care. To engage these extended members as well as residents with unique needs, technology should be incorporated to promote virtual participation of both current residents and others in the community.

The Coalition will develop, test, and refine a guide for resident councils – building on existing materials developed by advocates, ombudsman programs, and others. The Coalition will also consider how family councils (also supported by regulation) and resident family community advisory councils (a newer model currently being piloted) may relate to and support resident councils.

Goal: Assemble a well-researched step-by-step resident council guide for nursing home staff, residents, and community members that will be pilot tested in at least 1-2 nursing homes. The resource guide will be used to assist nursing homes to implement, sustain, and continually improve an effective, person-centered resident council.

Phases of Work

Progress To Date

The Coalition conducted a thorough literature review, including reports and existing tools and guides on how to run a nursing home resident council. The workgroup also heard from leaders about how to run resident family community advisory councils (RFCACs) and other more innovative approaches to amplifying resident voices in nursing homes.

Proposed Timeline

Activity	Completion Date
Review existing resident council resources and best practices. Begin developing any additional materials necessary for a complete and broadly accessible guide to launching, managing and improving a resident council. Draft an evaluation plan for the pilot program.	July 2023
Integrate existing and new materials into a single guide – presenting and detailing a standard process and approach.	August 2023
Review draft guide. Circulate to advisors and stakeholders for review – including the Coalition resident focus group.	September 2023
Conduct nursing home recruitment for pilot testing with a focus on nursing homes that may have struggled with resident council engagement or regulatory compliance.	November 2023
Pilot test proposed guide in at least one to two nursing homes. Initial testing will seek to evaluate the effectiveness of the guide as a tool for managing a resident council.	November 2023 – April 2024
Collect feedback and complete basic evaluation. Revise guide as needed. Consider subsequent, larger scale testing.	June 2024

Additional Details

Partners and Stakeholders

Quality Improvement Organization: Quality Innovation Networks-Quality Improvement Organizations (QIN-QIOs) and Long-term Care Ombudsmen may be able to participate or co-lead within their current scope of work without significant additional cost. Other quality improvement consultants may also be considered. Some state-based foundations or organizations may be able to support the work with small grants.

The Coalition has spoken with the Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of Elders (CARIE) – the Pennsylvania LTC Ombudsman Program – about working with the Coalition on the initiative.

Small Group of Diverse Nursing Homes: Nursing homes will need to test the guide in partnership with an external quality improvement leader. They will need to create space, time, and an open culture to implement an effective resident council. They will also have to consider how nursing home leaders will collaborate with and respond to resident council members and their input.

Potential leaders within a nursing home could include the therapeutic recreation (activities) director, director of human resources, social worker, nurses, or other staff members. There would also need to be meaningful executive sponsorship (e.g., the licensed nursing home administrator or director of nursing) for the initiative. A clinical or non-clinical designee could also receive training on how to coordinate and co-manage the resident council.

While most nursing homes will have some staff infrastructure already in place, volunteers may be able to support set up and operations. Volunteers (if residents approve) may also be able to help lead activities, especially once procedures are established.

Equity

The guide addresses the need for resident councils to be inclusive and respectful of each individual resident's cultural and religious background and attend to the unique needs of residents based on race, ethnicity, income, physical ability, language preferences, and other factors. The Coalition will also identify resources and guidance to support residents with cognitive conditions that may make participation more challenging. The Coalition plans to help nursing homes track resident participation from marginalized groups.

Sustainability and Financing

The Coalition will identify funding to compensate nursing homes and staff supporting initial pilot testing.

Initial pilot testing proposed by the Coalition is intentionally limited to help with the iterative improvement of the guide. That said, larger scale testing – at least 5-10 nursing homes, representing greater diversity – would need to occur soon thereafter, pending adequate resources.

The Coalition also hopes to catalyze a national discussion of resident council sustainability as a vital part of nursing home culture change – alongside other efforts to empower resident councils including the piloting of RFCACs.

Select References and Materials

- Alberta Health. 2018. [Alberta Resident and Family Councils Act Toolkit](#). Government of Alberta.
- California Association of Long Term Care Medicine. 2021. [White Paper: Advancing Equity in Nursing Homes: Resident, Family, Community Advisory Council \(RFCAC\) Pilot Program Proposal](#).
- Grabowski, D.C., Chen, A., Saliba, D. 2023. [Paying for Nursing Home Quality: An Elusive But Important Goal](#). *Public Policy and Aging Report* 33(Suppl_1).
- Illinois Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. [Resident Council Tool Kit: For Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities](#).
- Kansas Long-Term Care Ombudsman Office. 2021. [Resident Council Handbook: A Guide to Building a Long-Term Care Resident Council](#).
- The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care. 2017. [Fact Sheet: Resident Council Rights in Nursing Homes](#).
- The National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center. [Resident Councils in Nursing Homes](#).

Acknowledgements

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