



# The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

## WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM CARE OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM?

Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are advocates for residents of nursing homes, board and care homes, assisted living facilities and similar adult care facilities. They work to resolve problems of individual residents and to bring about changes at the local, state and national levels to improve care. While most residents receive good care in long-term care facilities, far too many are neglected, and other unfortunate incidents of psychological, physical and other kinds of abuse do occur. Thus, thousands of trained volunteer ombudsmen regularly visit long-term care facilities, monitor conditions and care, and provide a voice for those unable to speak for themselves.

## HISTORY

Begun in 1972 as a demonstration program, the Ombudsman Program today is established in all states under the Older Americans Act, which is administered by the Administration on Aging (AoA). Local ombudsmen work on behalf of residents in hundreds of communities throughout the country.

## RESULTS

In 2003, about 11,700 volunteers, 8,353 of whom were certified to investigate complaints and 1,500 paid ombudsmen served in 573 localities nationwide. Ombudsmen investigated over 286,000 complaints made by 177,000 individuals and provided information on long-term care to another 300,000 people. The most frequent complaints involved lack of resident care due to inadequate staffing.

## RESIDENTS' RIGHTS

Ombudsmen help residents and their families and friends understand and exercise rights that are guaranteed by law, both at the federal level and in many states. Residents have the right to:

- be treated with respect and dignity;
- be free from chemical and physical restraints;
- manage their own finances;
- voice grievances without fear of retaliation;
- associate and communicate privately with any person of their choice;
- send and receive personal mail;
- have personal and medical records kept confidential;
- apply for state and federal assistance without discrimination;
- be fully informed prior to admission of their rights, services available and all charges; and be given advance notice of transfer or discharge.

*Webster's Dictionary defines the Swedish word ombudsman as "a public official appointed to investigate citizens' complaints against local or national government agencies that may be infringing on the rights of individuals."*

## OMBUDSMAN RESPONSIBILITIES

Ombudsman responsibilities outlined in Title VII of the Older Americans Act include:

- identify, investigate and resolve complaints made by or on behalf of residents;
- provide information to residents about long-term care services;
- represent the interests of residents before governmental agencies and seeking administrative, legal and other remedies to protect residents;
- analyze, comment on and recommend changes in laws and regulations pertaining to the health, safety, welfare and rights of residents;
- educate and inform consumers and the general public regarding issues and concerns related to long-term care and facilitate public comment on laws, regulations, policies and actions;
- promote the development of citizen organizations to participate in the program;
- provide technical support for the development of resident and family councils to protect the well-being and rights of residents, and
- advocate for changes to improve residents' quality of life and care.

## RESOURCES

The National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center, operated by the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform (NCCNHR) in conjunction with the National Association of State Units on Aging, provides on-call technical assistance and intensive annual training to assist ombudsmen in their demanding work. The Center is supported with funds from the Administration on Aging. NCCNHR, located in Washington, DC, also has many resources to assist residents and their families. Contact NCCNHR at 202-332-2275, [www.nursinghomeaction.org](http://www.nursinghomeaction.org).

To contact a state or local long-term care ombudsman, visit the resource center's website at [www.ltombudsman.org](http://www.ltombudsman.org) and click in the box "Who Are Ombudsmen?" You may also call AoA's Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 and ask for the local ombudsman program or area agency on aging nearest the nursing home or similar facility where the resident lives. The area agency will either be the sponsor of the ombudsman program or know where the program is located. You may also locate the local ombudsman through the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, which is usually located in the State Office on Aging.

*Guide to Choosing a Nursing Home*, a 37-page booklet is available free from the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS). Call 1-800-Medicare (1-800-633-4227) or view it on the web at: [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

AoA recognizes the importance of making information readily available to consumers, professionals, researchers, and students. Our website provides information for and about older persons, their families, and professionals involved in aging programs and services. For more information about AoA, please contact: US Dept of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, Washington, DC 20201; phone: (202) 401-4541; fax (202) 357-3560; Email: [aoainfo@aoa.gov](mailto:aoainfo@aoa.gov); or contact our website at: [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)