

The ombudsman guide to

*Choosing a good
nursing home*



DRCOG

Denver Regional Council of Governments

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Photo by Nanette Martin

Getting Started

Obtain a list of facilities in your desired location. Call the facilities you are interested in first; don't wear yourself out visiting facilities that do not have openings. Be prepared to briefly describe the care requirements of the person in need of placement, including such challenging behaviors as wandering, aggressiveness or psychiatric concerns.

Call the Denver Regional Council Of Governments' (DRCOG) Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program at 303-455-1000. An ombudsman is an advocate for nursing home

residents and a resource for consumers. This person will provide free information on the facilities, including the results of the most recent state inspections, strengths and special services and patterns of complaints received by the ombudsman office.

Make an appointment to visit the facility. If you are interested in it, make a second unannounced visit, preferably on a weekend or evening.

What to look for

Is the facility clean? Are odors pervasive throughout the facility or in isolated areas? Are the odors temporary?

Look at the residents' rooms. Are they clean, comfortable and home-like?

Are the closets adequate? Do the drawers and closet doors open easily and safely?

Ask to see a resident bathroom. (Do not enter a resident's room without permission from the resident and a tour guide.) Is the bathroom clean and organized? Are the toiletries and personal items stored appropriately?

Are towels and wash cloths available?

Do residents have easy access to a private telephone in a quiet place? Is the telephone equipped with a hearing-enhancement device?

Can you easily find posted instructions on how to contact the ombudsman, the county health department, the adult protection division of the county department of social services and the county Medicaid office?

Are pleasant areas available for private dining and family visits?

**Long-Term Care
Ombudsman Program
303-455-1000**

Pay attention to the staff and the service p



Photo by Nanette Martin

Observe and talk

- Look in the dining area during a meal. Are residents who need help being assisted in eating? Are adaptive devices, such as special utensils and dishes, used when appropriate?
- Are people served their meals promptly?
- Do the menus posted reflect what the residents are eating?
- Are the residents clean, well-groomed and positioned comfortably?
- Are the residents up and active during the day? Are they engaged in activities or interacting with people in common areas?
- Visit with the residents. Ask them how they like the food, if they feel well cared for and if they have enough to do. Tell them that you are thinking about bringing someone to live there. Ask them if they like living there and would they recommend it to others.

**Observe the
interaction between
the residents and
the staff**

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with the residents

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- Observe the interaction between the residents and the staff.
- How do staff members address the residents? It is usually not appropriate to address adults as “honey” or “sweetie.” Some residents like to be called by their first name; others prefer the formality of Mr. or Mrs.
- Do staff members respect the resident’s privacy? Do they knock at the resident’s door and wait for a response before entering?
- Are privacy curtains pulled and/or doors closed when personal care is provided?
- Are call lights within residents’ reach and are they answered within a few minutes?
- Is water available at the bedside for the residents? Are cups available and can residents easily get a drink of water? Ask how the facility ensures that each resident receives enough water every day.
- Are staff members wearing identification badges?
- Do staff members acknowledge your presence? If you are visiting without a tour guide, someone should tactfully inquire about your presence at the facility.
- Do staff members look calm, well organized and attentive to the residents?

Become informed about the facility's management and administration

- Read the most recent state survey regarding the facility; this report provides results from the annual licensing inspection conducted by the state's Department of Public Health and Environment.
- Find out the name of the management company that operates the facility. Ask what other facilities this company operates in the region. You may want to review the health department surveys for these facilities to see if the company consistently provides good care. Surveys and complaints against a facility are available for public viewing at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. For more information, call the Health and Facilities Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at 303-692-2800.
- Meet the administrator, the social worker and the director of nursing of the facility. Ask how long they have worked at the facility. Be alert to frequent administrative changes. These are the people who will ultimately be responsible for correcting any concerns or complaints that you or the resident may have.
- Ask how complaints are addressed and how problems are resolved. Find out which staff person has been designated as the person to handle grievances.

**For more information,
call the Health and
Facilities Division of
the Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment at
303-692-2800**

Understand the payment system at the facility

If the prospective resident will be paying personally, ask to see an itemized list of the daily charges and clarify the billing procedures for additional items. For example, many facilities include personal care items such as incontinence pads, tooth paste, rubber gloves and tissues, in the residents' daily rate. However, some facilities do not cover these items and can legally increase their cost if they provide them. You can save some expense by providing such items yourself.

It is important to know you have the right to purchase medications at the pharmacy of your choice, but you are then responsible for either delivering the medication yourself or ensuring that the pharmacy will deliver the medications in a timely manner.

Ask about the facility's billing procedures and get the

name and telephone number of the staff person to speak with if you have questions.

Ask how money for the resident's personal needs is handled. The facility should provide banking services and quarterly statements for residents. Money for personal needs funds amounting to \$50 or more must be in interest-bearing accounts.

Medicare will pay for a limited amount of time in a nursing home depending on the rehabilitative needs of the resident. If the resident continues to stay in a facility and requires Medicaid assistance, it is important to choose a facility that accepts both forms of payment (Medicare and Medicaid) and can ensure a Medicaid bed will be available; otherwise the resident will be required to move to another facility that accepts Medicaid.

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When you are considering a nursing home for yourself or a loved one, you want to find one that is a bright, comfortable, inviting place to live. You want a home that provides a variety of stimulating activities and has a history of providing good care to residents. It should be a place where family members are invited to participate in activities and meals. Some nursing homes offer additional services, such as outpatient rehabilitation services; temporary, short-term recovery assistance; respite care; assisted living; specialized care units; and hospice services.

These criteria will help you choose a nursing home that will meet your needs. However, if a problem does develop after admission, you can contact a **DRCOG ombudsman** for assistance at **303-455-1000**. This person will listen to your concerns and will work with you and the nursing home to resolve them. The ombudsman service is free for residents and their families. Ombudsmen help ensure the health, safety, welfare and rights of residents living in long-term care facilities. All complaints are kept confidential.



**Donations to the Ombudsman
program are appreciated**

DRCOG

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for further information call

303-455-1000

