**Knowledge is Power**

*Understanding the rights of nursing home residents*

An estimated 1.4 million older adults and people with disabilities live in nursing homes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. If a nursing home participates in Medicare or Medicaid – and most do – it must meet requirements “to promote and protect the rights of each resident.”

This means nursing homes are required to care for their residents in a way that enhances the quality of life for residents, respects their dignity and ensures they are able to make choices for themselves.

Established by federal law, the “Residents’ Bill of Rights,” states if you live in a nursing home, you are entitled to rights including:

* The right to be fully informed in a language you understand of all aspects of your residency.
* The right to participate in all aspects of your care.
* The right to make independent choices based on your needs and preferences.
* The right to privacy and confidentiality.
* The right to safe and appropriate transfer and discharge, including the right to appeal decisions.
* The right to visits from friends, family, providers and other people of your choosing.
* The right to participate in social, religious and community activities.
* The right to organize and participate in resident groups, often called resident councils.
* The right to complain without fear of repercussions.
* The right to be free from discrimination.
* The right to be free from abuse, neglect and restraint.
* The right to adequate medical care and treatment.
* The right to get information about alternatives to nursing homes.

Some states have laws and regulations that establish additional rights for nursing home residents. Some states also guarantee a similar set of rights for people who live in assisted living or similar settings.

Every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam have an advocate, called a Long-Term Care Ombudsman, for residents of nursing homes, board and care and assisted living facilities and similar residential care facilities. These advocates work to resolve problems affecting residents’ health, safety, welfare and rights. Residents, their families and others have the right to contact their local Ombudsman program to help them understand their rights, learn about community resources and work through problems.

For more information on these rights, and to find your local Ombudsman program, visit [acl.gov/ombudsman.](https://acl.gov/ombudsman) The website also provides information on other programs and services available to help older adults and people with disabilities who need help with daily tasks, like getting dressed, bathing or cooking, to receive this support in their own homes. These programs can help delay or avoid nursing home care, guide nursing home residents looking to transition back into the community and support family members serving as caregivers.