

# Family Councils: Making an Impact

**Start, join and support** the family council at your loved one's long-term care community!



**Be effective.**

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**Be empowered.**

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**Be independent.**

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## What are Family Councils?

Family councils are an organized, self-led group of families and representatives of individuals living in long-term care.

### **They:**

- Meet regularly to help ensure rights are upheld and needs are met.
- Communicate, act, support, and provide education to improve the quality of life and care.
- Discuss and offer suggestions and bring collective concerns to facility staff for the betterment of individuals living in long-term care facilities.



## How To Start a Family Council

### **Not every facility has a family council:**

if there is interest in establishing a family council, consider the following:

- Ask other family and resident representatives to join in starting a family council.
- Approach the facility administrator about starting a family council.
- Research already available resources to help the council be successful.
- Contact a local long-term care ombudsman for technical support, information, and resources.
- Set up a day and time for an initial family council meeting.
- Promote the meeting.





# Tips for Promoting Family Councils

## Promoting a family council meeting might include:

- Posting fliers.
- Handing out invitations.
- Making face-to-face contact with other family and resident representatives.
- Communicating with the facility administration regarding reasonable steps to make individuals living in the long-term care facility and their loved ones aware of upcoming meetings in a timely manner.



### Family Council Success:

A family council coordinated and held a staff appreciation event where residents, families, and staff were invited to attend.

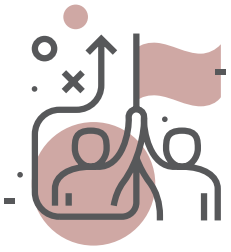


# Building a Strong Family Council

Supporting family councils not only helps the group feel valued, it also may play a role in who attends, why they attend, and the effect the council may have on improving quality of life and care in a long-term care facility.

## A family council may be more impactful when there is:

- Ongoing recruitment. Identify other family members or resident representatives who are involved and ask them to join.
- Appropriate staff involved. Most often, this is administration or social services staff.
- An agenda to ensure meetings are a good use of everyone's time.
- A mission statement and bylaws. Positions like president and secretary may streamline family council processes.
- A process in place for concerns to be addressed. The family council can document concerns, form an action plan, and follow up at every family council meeting.
  - Concerns should be presented to staff, and within a reasonable timeframe, should be responded to, acted on, and reported back to the family council.



# Building Effective Advocacy Strategies

## Strategies for effective advocacy utilized by family councils include:

- Communicating with facility staff when creating a council.
- Involving the person who lives in the facility whom they represent and support.
- Following an agenda.
- Identifying concerns that affect many people and putting them in writing.
- Gathering information and sharing the load amongst members.
- Discussing possible solutions.
- Considering how to document a problem and how to communicate it to facility staff.
- Formally presenting the council's concerns to facility staff.
- Allowing enough time for the facility to reply and take action.
- Discussing the facility's response and follow up if needed.
- Sharing resolved concerns and showing appreciation when the facility is responsive.
- Developing methods of communication with facility staff and with all other families and representatives.
- Celebrating diversity and successes of the family council. Also, letting the facility know what they do well to build a positive rapport.
- Ongoing recruiting.





## Value in Family Councils

**Family councils provide ongoing support and connection for family members and resident representatives who have shared experiences.**

They have a loved one living in a long-term care facility, they visit, observe and may help with the person's needs, they have questions or issues that come up, and they may feel empowered to bring concerns to facility staff by knowing they are not alone.

When family councils are seen by facility staff as part of the team and when the groups work together to resolve concerns on behalf of individuals living in long-term care, there can be positive impacts on quality of life and care.

### **Family Council Success:**

Family council advocacy resulted in a better dining experience for residents to include choices, acceptable meal temperatures, and improved quality.





# Regulations that Support Family Councils

**Federal regulations support the development and support of family councils in nursing facilities. Specifically, the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 483.10(f)(5) states:**

- The facility must provide a resident or family group, if one exists, with private space; and take reasonable steps, with the approval of the group, to make residents and family members aware of upcoming meetings in a timely manner.
- Residents have the right to participate in family groups.
- Residents have the right to have family members or other resident representative(s) meet in the facility with family or representatives of other individuals living in the facility.
- Staff, visitors, or other guests may attend resident or family group meetings only at the group's invitation.

Iowa Administrative Code 481-67.3(6), specific to assisted living programs, supports the right for tenants to associate and communicate privately and without restriction with persons and groups of the tenant's choice, including the tenant advocate, on the tenant's initiative or on the initiative of the persons or groups at any reasonable hour.

Iowa Administrative Code 481-67.3(8) also states tenants have the right to present grievances and recommend changes in program policies and services, personally or through other persons or in combination with others, to the program's staff or person in charge without fear of reprisal, restraint, interference, coercion, or discrimination.

## **Family Council Success:**

The family council efforts created increased privacy and upheld dignity for residents during personal cares and prompted the facility to implement new policy regarding medication administration.



# Why Contact the Iowa Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman?

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- Ask for assistance in resolving a concern.
- Learn about self-advocacy.
- Inquire about resident and member rights.
- Clarify state or federal regulations, facility policies and managed care organization processes.
- Understand the role of substitute decision makers, such as power of attorney, guardian and/or conservator.
- Obtain assistance with the involuntary discharge of a resident or the facility closure process.
- Receive information about resident and family councils.
- Learn about resources available to choose a long-term care facility or Medicaid managed care organization.
- Find details on upcoming events hosted by the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program — including support for family councils.

## **Iowa Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman**

The office's mission is to offer advocacy, support choices, and resolve concerns on behalf of individuals living in long-term care facilities and for Medicaid managed care members who receive services in a long-term care facility or under one of Iowa's Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers.

## **To learn more:**

**Contact the Iowa Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman.**

**Toll free:** 866-236-1430

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Health and Human Services  
Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program