

Nursing Home Residents' Rights

How to Choose a Nursing Home

Selecting a nursing home for yourself, a loved one, or a friend is an important and often difficult decision. Ideally, you will have the time to gather the many facts you'll need to make that decision.

Unfortunately, that decision is often made in a crisis atmosphere, when a person is about to leave the hospital or after a serious illness or operation.

Finding the right nursing home is all-important to you or your loved one's well-being. The nursing home selected will be the person's home for the duration of his or her stay, and sometimes for the remainder of a person's life. A careful search for a nursing home will prevent future problems. This fact sheet is intended to give you some guidelines in selecting the most appropriate nursing home for you or your loved one.

Advance Planning

Here are some things you can do in advance that will help you in the selection of a nursing home for yourself or a family member:

- ▼ Find out what nursing homes are located in your community and learn what you can about them. If you have friends or relatives who are familiar with the homes, ask them for their suggestions.



If you know people who live in nursing homes, pay them a visit and gather some first hand impressions. Find out if the nursing home has a list of references.

- ▼ Check with the California Department of Public Health's District Office and ask to see the latest list of nursing homes in your area. This document lists all facilities by county and currently licensed by the State Department of Health Services and includes the address, administrator's name, type of facility, number of beds, and other information.
- ▼ Examine the State Department of Health Services' most recent survey (inspection) results of each nursing home you visit. Every nursing home is required to post a copy in a readily accessible place.
- ▼ Each county has an Ombudsman Program, which provides a variety of advocacy services for nursing home residents in California. Contact your local Ombudsman office for information about choosing a nursing home in your neighborhood.
- ▼ When you have made a list of the places that seem the most appropriate, you should make a personal visit to each one. Choose at



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least three or four nursing homes to visit so that you can have the best idea of what type of nursing home best fits your needs and personal preferences. It is best to make an appointment with the administrator, director of nursing, and social services director. Take along a list of questions to ask during the visit.

- ▼ If possible, pick a location close to home and relatives or friends.

Visiting a nursing home

Here are some things to consider when visiting nursing homes:

- ▼ Visit each nursing home. Observe staff/resident interactions. Are staff listening attentively and respectfully to residents? Observe resident to resident interactions. Are residents relating to each other? Are there visitors in the nursing home? What is the atmosphere? Does it appear home-like or is it institutional?
- ▼ Speak with the people who work in the nursing home, and more importantly, speak with the residents who live in the nursing home and their families.
- ▼ Try to visit a nursing home more than once and during different times of the day.
- ▼ Visit during mealtimes. Look to see if residents are eating in the dining room or in their rooms. Also note if those needing assistance are being assisted while eating. Do residents appear to be enjoying the food? Are they eating it? What is the atmosphere in the dining room? Are residents talking with each other? Are staff talking with the residents during the meal?
- ▼ Ask about the activities program. What activities are offered? Look at the activities calendar; would the activities appeal to you or your family member?
- ▼ Ask staff how decisions are made to provide therapy and rehabilitation.
- ▼ Ask about admissions criteria. If your family member is eligible for Medicare, ask if the facility participates in Medicare and if so, how many rooms are certified for Medicare. Ask what happens when the resident's Medicare coverage is completed; is the resident asked to move to another room?
- ▼ Ask about payment requirements and billing procedures. If your family member will pay privately for his or her stay, ask what services the daily rate covers and what the extra charges are for other services. If your

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- family member will be on Medi-Cal, ask whether the facility participates in Medi-Cal and which services are not covered by Medi-Cal.
- ▼ Note the physical condition of the nursing home. Make sure the building is clean and well maintained. Are there private areas available for visiting?
- ▼ Evaluate the quality of the care and the concern for the residents you see. The staff should show a true interest in and affection for the individual residents.
- ▼ Ask how many residents, on average, each nurse aide or direct care nurse is assigned to.
- ▼ Ask the dietician at the nursing home for a list of menus for the month, and ask to taste a sample of the food being served. Also inquire about how special diets are handled.
- ▼ Ask about access to emergency care, dentists, and eye doctors.
- ▼ Make sure the special services you may require are offered and available to you or your family member. A resident who recently had a hip replacement will need physical therapy, while a resident with Alzheimer’s disease may need extra guidance by the staff to ensure that the resident does not wander away from the nursing home.

Remember

State law requires every nursing home to make blank copies of their admission contract available to the public at a cost. Before you sign a contract with a nursing home, carefully review the entire document.

Licensing and Certification District Offices:



Bakersfield	(866)	222-1903	San Bernardino	(800)	344-2896
Chico	(800)	554-0350	San Diego North	(800)	824-0613
East Bay	(866)	247-9100	San Diego South	(866)	706-0759
Fresno	(800)	554-0351	San Francisco	(800)	554-0353
Los Angeles	(800)	228-1019	San Jose	(800)	554-0348
Orange County	(800)	228-5234	Santa Rosa/		
Riverside	(888)	354-9203	Redwood Coast	(866)	784-0703
Sacramento	(800)	554-0354	Ventura	(800)	547-8267
