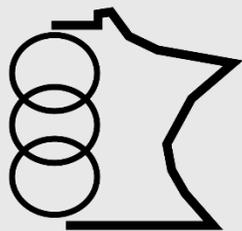




Honoring Voices & Experiences: Learning from Those in Long-Term Care Settings Affected by the Pandemic



**Office of
Ombudsman for
Long-Term Care**

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Office of Ombudsman for Long-Term Care



Mission and Vision of OOLTC

Mission

- To empower, educate, and advocate alongside Minnesotans who are receiving long-term care services and supports to ensure their rights are upheld.

Vision

- All Minnesotans seeking or receiving long-term care services and supports have a high quality of life and high quality of care with a person-centered focus.
- The OOLTC empowers and advocates alongside residents in individual cases to help them achieve their best life.
- The OOLTC is a leading voice influencing public policy to systemically improve long-term care in Minnesota.

Who We Are

- A program of the Older Americans Act
- 1978 amendment enshrined ombudsman program into statute
- Administered through the Minnesota Board on Aging since 1980
- Central office in St. Paul, Regional offices throughout Minnesota
- 25 Regional Ombudsmen throughout Minnesota advocate on behalf of clients
- Self Advocacy Services, Resident and Family Council Education
- Legislative and policy work

Who We Serve

- Residents of nursing homes and boarding care homes
- Residents of assisted livings and residential care homes
- Persons receiving home care services, waived services and hospice services
- Medicare beneficiaries with hospital access or discharge concerns
- Anyone seeking consultation about long-term care services



What We Do

We work to resolve long-term care issues:

- Quality of care/services
- Quality of life
- Rights violations
- Access to services
- Service termination
- Discharge or eviction
- Public benefit programs



Who Contacts Us

- Family/friends
- Residents/Consumers
- Providers/staff
- Social services staff/others
- Anonymous



Complaints Over Pandemic – FFY 2020

Highest Complaint Categories in FFY 2020 (Oct 1, 2019 through Sept 30, 2020)

- Autonomy/choice
- Care
- Discharge
- Facility policies/procedures/practices

Complaints Over Pandemic – FFY 2021

Highest Complaint Categories in FFY 2021 (Oct 1, 2020 through Sept 30, 2021)

- Visitation
- Staffing
- Resident Rights
- Residents treated with rudeness/indifference/insensitivity

Access to Regional Ombudsmen through Pandemic

- March 17, 2020 - State Ombudsman, Cheryl Hennen made the difficult decision to convert to a virtual presence. Regional Ombudsmen visits are suspended.
- October 8, 2020 - Regional Ombudsmen received PPE, begin outdoor/window visits.
- January 11, 2021 - Access to weekly COVID testing and vaccination results in Regional Ombudsmen returning to limited number of indoor visits & facilities per week.
- May 1, 2021 - Regional Ombudsmen expand in person visits, begin attending in person meetings, closures, surveys, unannounced visits based on provider outbreak status.
- October 5, 2021 - Expansion of unannounced visits and resumption of quarterly non-complaint visits based on provider outbreak status.
- April 22, 2022 - Regional Ombudsmen return to pre-pandemic operations.



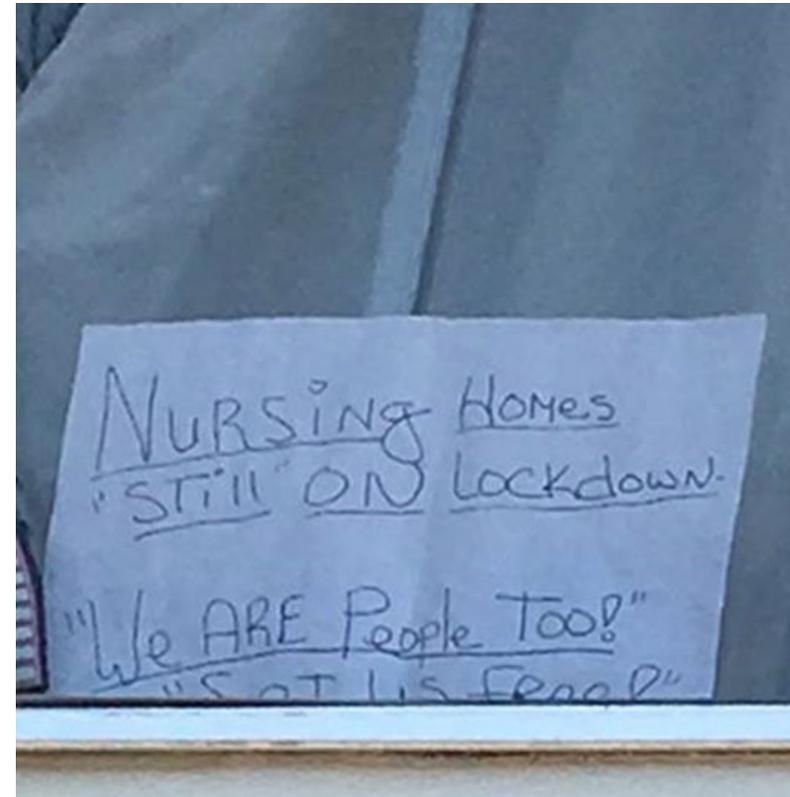
The Regional Ombudsman (RO) Experience

- Access to hand sanitizer – March 2020
- Week of March 9, 2020, last in person visits to facilities by ROs
- Week of March 16, 2020 residents begin isolation
- ROs, unable to access facilities themselves, field frantic calls from families asking for help accessing residents in long-term care (LTC)
- ROs have personal experiences in LTC, including loss of loved ones due to COVID



Resident & Family Experiences- Consults

- Consult with family on situation involving resident who cracked window attempting to get to family member during window visit
- Provider refused to readmit resident after hospital stay
- Provided info/empowered family to advocate for readmission
- Resident was readmitted to facility



Resident Experiences - Casework

- Couple married for 65 years, separated in long-term care by one floor. The last several months are described as the “worst of their lives”
- Unable to visit for several months even though staff worked between floors
- One resident was Essential Caregiver (ECG) for the other and was eventually allowed one night per week
- Frequent 14 day visitation restrictions due to positive Covid tests
- After meeting with the facility management, additional time for visitation was provided

Family Experiences - Casework

- Compassionate Care visits not allowed at beginning of the pandemic
- Families not allowed access to loved ones at end of life
- Limited resources for virtual visits
- RO unable to convince provider to change policy
- RO able to increase sources of technology and training for staff on virtual visits
- MAARC report filed on lack of Compassionate Care visits
- MN Dept of Health intervened and policy on compassionate care visits changed

Visitation Themes

Early Stages of COVID Pandemic

- OOLTC received numerous complaints related to visitation throughout the pandemic
- Compassionate care defined initially as visitation for 'end of life'
- In some cases related to lack of visitation, OOLTC provided information to Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)

Visitation Access as Pandemic Continues

- Compassionate care visits and essential caregiver visits allow families to access residents
- ROs had many conversations about meaning of “compassionate care” visits
- Reports from visitors confirm tasks related to hygiene and activities of daily living not always occurring
- Families allowed to visit loved ones in their rooms but with limited to no physical contact, only 1-2 people at a time, children not always allowed

Loss of Human Connection Themes

Spousal Separation

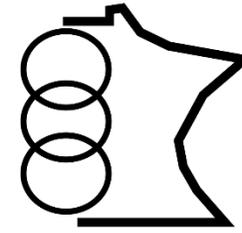
- Unable to provide personal care, socialization, love, companionship
- Decreased nutrition/appetite
- Loneliness/depression
- Hygiene/incontinence
- Cognition decline/increase in falls
- Failure to thrive/broken heart syndrome
- Loss of memories, missing anniversaries, birthdays
- Agitation, aggression, anger, sadness

Resident Experience

- “I married till death do us part and I have not parted yet”
- “The only woman to touch me in the past two years was a stranger-not my wife”
- “Please take the chains off me”
- “I sometimes hold her hand when no one is looking”
- “I don’t want to live this way”
- “I would rather be dead”

Anecdotal Lessons Learned

- Isolation is deadly (MN news reports related to cause of death as “COVID-19 social isolation”)
- Isolation results in increased poor outcomes for elders/people with disabilities
- Secondary Trauma for Families/Friends, Providers, ROs
- Residents say “We won’t go back (to isolation)”
- Need for “visits for all residents at all times” See QSO-20-39 NH Revised 3/10/22; LTC Indoor Visitation for SNF/AL Settings 12/29/21
- OOLTC continues support for essential caregiver legislation



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Thank You!

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