

LONG-TERM CARE

Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program was established in 1979 as a requirement of the Federal **Older Americans Act** to improve the quality of care in America's long-term care facilities. The program serves as a focal point whereby complaints, made by or on behalf of older persons in long-term facilities or those receiving long-term care services in the community, can be received, investigated and resolved. Additionally, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program identifies problems and concerns of older persons receiving long-term services and recommends changes in the long-term care system that will benefit these individual consumers.

A major component of the program includes educating consumers of long-term care services about their rights and how to advocate on their own behalf when they have a problem or concern. The program is also a resource for information and counseling regarding long-term care services and aging-related issues. The ombudsman program disseminates information about long-term care services, including options for paying for services, how to choose a long-term care provider and consumer rights.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program works closely with other consumer advocacy programs, regulatory agencies and providers to promote the empowerment and autonomy of older persons and the resolution of complaints. The goal of this coordination is to help people understand their rights, exercise choices and ensure quality long-term care services.

The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is operated by the Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging. Its mission is to serve as an advocate for older persons who receive long-term care services.

Originally established in 1979, the Virginia program was expanded in 1983 by the General Assembly to include community-based long-term care services, as well. Currently, there are 20 local ombudsman programs in Area Agencies on the Aging throughout the Commonwealth. These local ombudsman programs provide an advocacy presence in their communities which can efficiently respond to consumers' requests for information and concerns about quality of care. (See "**Helpful Contacts**" section for listing.)

The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is located at 24 East Cary Street, 1st Floor, Richmond, VA 23219-3796; telephone: (804) 565-1600 or (800) 552-3402 (Joani Latimer, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman).

Assisted Living Facilities

Introduction

The term "assisted living" is used to describe a group residential program of four or more persons that is not licensed as a nursing home and that provides personal care and support services to people who need help with daily living activities as a result of physical or cognitive disability. Support services provided may include general oversight and assistance with activities of daily living and instrumental activities of daily living.

Generally, assisted living combines housing, personal services, and light medical care. The facilities provide support to those individuals too frail to live alone, but too healthy to utilize most of the medical services provided in a nursing facility.

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Design

Assisted living facilities may be free-standing, near or integrated with nursing homes, as components of continuing care retirement communities, or at independent housing complexes. Assisted living options may range from one-bedroom apartment units to free-standing two-story homes.

Regulation

Assisted living facilities, unlike nursing homes, are not regulated by the federal government. Consequently, services and levels of care at these facilities vary according to state laws. The Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Programs regulates Virginia's assisted living facilities. Regulations can be found in the *Code of Virginia* (§§ 63.2-1800 through 63.2-1819).

Paying for Assisted Living

Private funds pay for about 80% of assisted living services. For persons meeting certain financial needs criteria, some assisted living services may be paid by auxiliary grants, administered by local departments of social services. Long-term care insurance policies may, in some cases, cover assisted living as an "alternative care benefit." Medicare does not cover assisted living expenses under any circumstances.

Choosing an Assisted Living Facility

Choosing an assisted living facility can be a difficult decision. It is important to visit several communities and to talk with residents and staff. (An unannounced visit may be very helpful.) A careful comparison should be made of fees and services offered by different facilities. Ed Zetlin's *Consumer's Guide: Assisted Living in Virginia* has excellent information on what you should know before signing an ALF contract. Also, the Citizens' Consortium on Assisted Living (CCAL) at www.ccal.org, as well as AARP, may have helpful information. *Long-Term Care: A Consumer's Guide* may be helpful and is available from the Virginia Department for the Aging. Also, information about licensed assisted living facilities is available on the Department of Social Services Web site at www.dss.state.va.us/facility/search/alf.cgi.

Adult Day Care

Introduction

Adult day care programs provide a variety of daytime services for impaired older adults. Individuals who participate in adult day care programs attend on a regular, planned basis. Most adult day care centers are open 8-10 hours a day on weekdays and there is a trend toward weekend service as well. Adult day care centers work to assist the older adult to remain living in the community at the highest level of independence possible. Many participants and their family caregivers are able to delay or avoid use of more costly in-home and nursing home care by using adult day care. Admission requirements and procedures vary somewhat across centers, but all require that the applicant have a personal physician or clinic with whom care can be coordinated.