



The mission of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is to improve the quality of care and quality of life for all long-term care consumers through advocacy for individual recipients of long-term care services and advocacy for public policy to benefit consumers. The Office of the State Ombudsman is made up of the State Ombudsman and staff at the state level and 12 regional programs serving 88 counties.

Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Fact Sheet: Volunteer Ombudsman Associates

- **What is an Ombudsman Associate?**

Ombudsman Associates are volunteer advocates for long-term care consumers, primarily in nursing homes.

- **What do Ombudsman Associates do?**

Ombudsman Associates provide a voice for the concerns of consumers of long-term care, primarily in the nursing home setting. Ombudsman Associates are certified at two levels:

Ombudsman Associates make regular visits to facilities to talk with residents, provide information to nursing home residents, family, and staff about the Ombudsman program and residents' rights, and assist in resolving uncomplicated resident problems in the nursing home with the help of an Ombudsman staff member or alone. Associates may assist in resolving complicated complaints about the quality of care and quality of life for long-term care consumers with the guidance of an Ombudsman staff member.

- **What do Ombudsman Associates do on their visits?**

Ombudsman Associates make regular visits to their assigned nursing homes. During those visits, they are asked to visit and engage them in conversation. Associates also make observations about the facility. During the course of the conversations, Ombudsman Associates inquire about any problems or concerns that the residents may be having regarding care and services provided at the facility. The ultimate goal of Ombudsman Associates is to make the residents feel comfortable talking to you so they know they have an advocate if they need help with a problem. Associates are an essential link between the Ombudsman staff and consumers.

- **What do Ombudsman Associates do if the resident has a problem?**

During visits or conversations with residents, a concern may arise: take note on your ombudsman reporting form and, if the problem is uncomplicated, see what you can do to help, ask the resident's permission to help, call a staff ombudsman, and return your report as soon as possible to your regional program to expedite the process of resolving the complaint. Ombudsman Associates must make sure that they have the resident's permission to help with their concern. In some cases the residents may not want any action taken and the Ombudsman Associate must honor that wish, even after you have explained that you are only there to help.

- **How can I become an Ombudsman Associate?**

After the application process, a potential volunteer is screened by the appropriate regional program and, in some programs, must agree to a criminal background check. Each regional program ensures that their volunteers are adequately trained, comfortable and prepared to enter nursing facilities. Volunteers take part in 10-14 hours of training, including 2 hours in a nursing facility, and a simple certification exam. Once certified, volunteers are assigned to a facility.

- **How often do I need to go to the nursing homes?**

Most regional programs require their volunteers to visit the nursing homes at least twice per month for approximately 2-4 hours. Many volunteers find it more rewarding to visit their homes more often.

- **What type of reporting do I need to do and how often do I need to do it?**

Some regional programs require their associates to submit a form after each of their visits. Other regional programs ask their volunteers to send in all of their reports once per month. The form usually requires you to describe what you did during your visit and whether or not there are any problems that need to be handled by an Ombudsman staff member. However, if there is a serious problem that needs to be handled by an Ombudsman staff member, the regional program needs to be notified by phone immediately, if possible, and your report should be sent in as soon as possible after the completion of your visit. Reports are critical for a number of reasons, including providing information to help individual residents and providing information about trends that the regional Ombudsmen and State Ombudsman can use for policy advocacy.

- **What else is expected of me as an Ombudsman Associate?**

All certified Ombudsmen are required to take part in continuing education sessions about long-term care issues to maintain their certification. Ombudsman Associates certified at Level I are required to have five clock hours of continuing education annually. Ombudsman Associates Certified at Level II are required to have six clock hours of continuing education annually. The regional programs and the State Office provide continuing education sessions regularly.

Current volunteers have shared the following remarks about their experiences as an Associate Ombudsman:

- "I feel I have already started to make a difference and I've only visited four times."
- "I am proud to know that I helped make it better for the clients."
- "When I leave, I have such a happy heart."
- "It seems we often get more out of it than we give."
- "The residents know me, trust me, and know everything they tell me is in confidence."
- "I'm proud of the respect I get during visits. Staff will stop and listen to me."