

# Family Council

## HANDBOOK



*Tools and Resources for  
Starting and Maintaining  
an Effective Family Council*



Advocates for Care Reform

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>WELCOME .....</b>	<b>3</b>
WELCOME FROM THE ADVOCATES FOR CARE REFORM.....	4
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
WHAT IS A FAMILY COUNCIL? .....	6
FACTORS THAT SHAPE A FAMILY COUNCIL.....	6
THE ROLE AND BENEFITS OF A FAMILY COUNCIL .....	6
<b>FAMILY COUNCIL SET-UP AND MAINTENANCE.....</b>	<b>8</b>
ORGANIZING YOUR FAMILY COUNCIL.....	9
FAMILY COUNCIL STRUCTURE .....	11
ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS AND HANDLING FUNDS .....	13
DEVELOPING TERMS OF REFERENCE.....	14
CHALLENGES FAMILIES MAY HAVE WHEN TRYING TO ORGANIZE A FAMILY COUNCIL.....	15
RUNNING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS .....	16
ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN THE FAMILY COUNCIL .....	17
<i>Setting the scene .....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Addressing common problems at meetings .....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Dealing with difficult council members in general .....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Creative techniques for encouraging input from family council members .....</i>	<i>22</i>
MAINTAINING THE FAMILY COUNCIL OVER TIME.....	23
<b>ADVOCACY AND PROCESSING CONCERNS .....</b>	<b>24</b>
EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY AT YOUR FACILITY .....	25
<i>Types of advocacy.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Tips for effective advocacy.....</i>	<i>25</i>
ADVOCATING FOR BROADER CHANGE .....	25
RESIDENT RIGHTS AND CARE CONCERNS .....	26
<i>What governs the rights and standards of care for residents living in residential care facilities in British Columbia? .....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>How can I find out about resident rights?.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>What constitutes abuse and how should it be handled?.....</i>	<i>27</i>
PROCESSING CONCERNS.....	28
<i>Processing concerns through the family council.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Contacting your regional health authority .....</i>	<i>30</i>
<b>FAMILY COUNCIL ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES .....</b>	<b>31</b>
FAMILY COUNCIL ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES .....	32
<i>Buildings and property, safety and security.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Facility practices, procedures and relationships.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Resident quality of life and care.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Education for family members.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>34</b>
APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE FAMILY INTEREST SURVEY.....	35
APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE TERMS OF REFERENCE (1) .....	37
APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE TERMS OF REFERENCE (2) .....	38
APPENDIX 4: SAMPLE LETTER TO NEW FAMILIES.....	40
APPENDIX 5: SAMPLE FAMILY COUNCIL MINUTES TEMPLATE .....	41
APPENDIX 6: SAMPLE POSTER TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION .....	42
APPENDIX 7: BC RESIDENTIAL CARE ACCESS POLICY .....	43
APPENDIX 8: RESOURCES AND CONTACTS .....	44

*Some of the material in this handbook was adapted from information prepared by the Ontario Family Councils Project – with thanks.*

# Welcome



## **Welcome from the Advocates for Care Reform**

The Advocates for Care Reform (ACR) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide you with this Family Council Handbook. The tools and resources included here are intended to give you advice and a step-by-step guide to help you start and maintain an effective family council. ACR also provides family council training workshops throughout the province, access to helpful information and resources, and we have a telephone information line and email address available to answer any questions that may arise along the way. For further details, please visit our website at [www.acrbc.ca](http://www.acrbc.ca).

Family councils provide a valuable mechanism for dialogue, support, education and processing concerns. Our experience is that a family council can provide information and mutual support to family and friends of residents in care to help them better understand and cope with their loved one's experience of living in care, and the care facility environment. It is our belief that a well-functioning family council supports not only the residents and their families and friends, but also helps care staff in delivering high-quality care.

Our ongoing work with family councils includes providing information and resources to family members and friends, as well as care facility staff, to help them recognize the important role an active family council can play in improving the quality of the care environment.

ACR helped develop some of the first family councils in British Columbia in Vancouver. We are pleased that the network of family councils now includes close to 50 family council organizations across the province, and we are delighted to have the opportunity to help you in setting up and running a family council at your loved one's care facility.

If you need further assistance, or have additional questions, or even if you just want to share a family council experience, please contact us. You can visit our website, email us at [info@acrbc.ca](mailto:info@acrbc.ca), or call us at 604 732 7734 – we are here to help.

This Handbook is published and provided by:

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# *Introduction*



## **What is a Family Council?**

A family council is a forum for friends and families of residents in long-term care to share experiences, learn and exchange information. Family councils provide a mechanism for dialogue, support, processing concerns and education.

Made up of relatives and friends of residents living in long-term care, a family council works together as a group to provide members with support and seek solutions to common concerns.

## **Factors that Shape a Family Council**

Each family council is unique. The development of its structure and functions is influenced by such factors as:

- The level of care in the facility;
- The role of the resident council;
- The level of staff support; and,
- The various levels of experience brought to the family council by its members.

Other factors include the age and relationship of the residents' family members or friends; issues related to transportation and distance to the facility; and the extent of each family council member's work, family and social commitments. Individuals who have been involved in other community activities, such as Parent-Teacher Associations, church councils or civic organizations, may bring skills of leadership and group process to contribute to the functioning of a family council. For some people, the family council may represent their first exposure to the dynamics of group process.

## **The Role and Benefits of a Family Council**

Family councils play an important role for residents of care facilities and for their families and friends. They help provide families and friends of residents in care with support and information, and they also provide an opportunity for two-way communication with the care facility. Family councils can play an important role in improving the quality of the care environment.

Specifically, the role of a family council is to:

- Provide a mechanism for families to learn about, gain understanding of and participate in the planning and decision-making regarding care at the facility, in a way that contributes to the overall quality of life for the residents.
- Act as an advocate to improve the quality of life and assure quality of care for all residents.
  - Meeting with other families in the form of a family council enables family members to discuss and consolidate common concerns, come up with ideas to address issues, and focus on purposeful goals. This approach enables families and the facility to focus on common facility-wide concerns and to make improvements for all residents.

- Aid families of current, new and prospective residents by providing information and support.
  - When a new resident is admitted to a facility it is a big adjustment for them and for their family. Through the family council, family members have access to the support and encouragement they need. Sharing with others who are experiencing similar feelings can help family members cope.
- Make recommendations to the care facility administration on matters concerning the well being of all residents.
  - Families visiting the facility have a different perspective than staff. They can often see how even small improvements could enhance the experience of all residents.
- Provide a forum for discussion and decision-making regarding concerns and complaints, and to take action as necessary.
  - When a common concern comes to light it is discussed at the family council meeting. Possible solutions are considered in the discussions, and a plan of action is determined. The focus is on working collaboratively with the facility to address the issue. Often a department head or the facility administrator will be invited to attend the meeting to discuss the concern or to provide information.
- Provide educational opportunities for families to enhance their understanding of the experience of residents in care.
  - The family council provides the opportunity for family members to learn and access educational opportunities. For example, guest speakers are often invited to attend family council meetings. Inviting a guest speaker to make a presentation at a meeting – either a staff member or an individual from outside the facility – is an excellent way to educate families on a variety of subjects, including dementia, depression, and abuse. It is also a good way of introducing new models of service delivery, such as the Eden Alternative.
- Participate in and provide input to accreditation, and the development of policies and special programs.
  - Family council members are often able to provide valuable input to the facility. The facility benefits from dealing directly with families and establishing meaningful lines of communication through the family council, and staff may be able to use the family council as a sounding board for new ideas.
  - Family council members may have the opportunity to participate on standing or ad hoc facility committees, such as a food committee, housekeeping committee, or accreditation committee.

# *Family Council Set-up and Maintenance*





## Organizing your Family Council

In organizing your family council, it may be helpful to consider the questions and thoughts outlined below.

- Is the administration and staff of the facility willing to help the family council get started?
  - If families are organizing themselves into a family council, they should seek the support of the administration and staff at the facility.
  - It is important that facility staff understand the functions and positive role of a family council and that they are not threatened by it.
  - Staff can help develop the family council and spread the word by telling families about the council.
- How can families be introduced to the idea of the family council?
  - Consider having an information meeting and inviting all families.
  - Utilize the facility as a resource to help reach family members; facilities are usually willing to send invitations to families on their mailing list.
  - Notices about the family council should also be posted in the facility since all family members and friends may not be on the mailing list.
- How can families be encouraged to participate?
  - Enlist the help of the Advocates for Care Reform (ACR), or a member of another family council, to attend the information meeting and explain to families the purpose, importance, benefits and role of a family council.
  - Be prepared for the first meeting – an informative and enthusiastic meeting will inspire families and get the family council started on the right path.
  - The family council is an important venue for discussing ideas and sharing information related to the care facility and the care experience for the residents; it is important that the council not be seen merely as another social group.
  - Ask family members how a family council could help them and listen to their needs.
- How should the family council get started?
  - Leverage the interest and enthusiasm generated at the information meeting and choose a date, time, place and topic for the next meeting.
  - Ask the facility to provide a room where the family council meetings can be held.
- When should the family council meet?
  - Most family councils meet monthly.
  - It is a good idea to meet at the same time each month to promote continuity.
  - Choose a time of day/evening that suits the majority of families.
  - New councils may meet more often in the first months in order to develop the structure of the family council and organize all of the necessary details.
  - Extraordinary meetings may be called to address urgent concerns or respond to requests by facility administration for consultation.

- Who will lead the meetings?
  - Ask for volunteers to participate by leading the meetings.
  - Most family councils begin with temporary officers or a committee that serves until elections are held.
  - Temporary leaders should be chosen by family members, rather than by the care facility.
  - Some family councils establish a structure whereby the responsibility of co-chairing the council at the initial stages of development is shared by a family member and the staff liaison from the facility.
- What should the staff liaison/advisor do?
  - (The staff liaison/advisor is the person identified by the facility management to represent the facility and formally liaise with the family council)
  - The staff liaison's role is to facilitate communication and dialogue with the facility, not to run the family council.
  - Staff may agree to help by planning and leading the family council until the family council is better organized and elections among family members can be held. This may be problematic in that family members may be unwilling to take over the necessary tasks after a staff member has been running the family council.
  - It is important to establish that the council is run *by* and *for* families. However, an emphasis on collaborating with the facility should be maintained.
  - Again, it is important to keep in mind that while collaboration and cooperation with the facility should be a focus, the independence of the family council should be maintained.

## Family Council Structure

- Organizational structure
  - Some family councils may develop a formalized organizational structure of elected officers, formal committees and a decision-making process based on Robert's Rules of Order.
  - Other family councils are more informal with a Chairperson, and a Secretary to record minutes. With this type of structure, decision-making is achieved through consensus.
  - For each family council, the type of organizational structure and degree of formalization will depend upon the preference, experience and expectations of the group.
  - The larger the group and the more complex its functions and activities, the greater the need for a formalized structure.
- Degree of facility staff involvement
  - For some councils, a staff person may play an active role in the formation of a family council planning committee, in organizing the family council, and in identifying the council's purpose and functions.
  - Some family councils may wish to have a staff liaison attend every meeting; others may choose to invite a staff member with the required expertise to specific meetings to provide information or respond to concerns.
  - The staff liaison can advise families on facility changes and decisions; explain facility policies and procedures; help facilitate an awareness of the family council and its importance among other staff members at the facility; and help the council communicate its questions and ideas to, and receive responses from, the appropriate staff and facility administration.
- Link to facility administrator
  - The degree of involvement by the facility administrator will vary for each family council and will depend upon the organizational structure of the council.
  - A mechanism should exist for the family council to provide feedback and input to the facility administrator, and it is recommended that the minutes of family council meetings be shared with the administrator.
  - Under some circumstances, a family council member may be appointed to an administrative committee within the care facility, such as a food committee, housekeeping committee or accreditation committee. In this way, the facility is able to include the perspectives of family members in setting policies and making decisions.
- Relationship to resident council
  - If there is a resident council, it is important that the family council works with this group to complement rather than overshadow or substitute its efforts.
  - Establishing a system of regular communication, such as through the sharing of minutes and/or regular meetings between representatives of the resident council and family council, can be beneficial.
  - It may be desirable to routinely include a resident council representative in family council meetings and/or have the same staff liaison from the facility for both groups.

- Communication with staff and other families
  - Not all families will be active participants in the family council, yet all need to be kept informed of council activities. This can be accomplished, for example, by posting information on a designated family council bulletin board in the facility.
  - It is important to keep staff informed of council goals and activities and of the members' interest in improving the quality of life in the care facility. The staff liaison plays an important role in this respect.
- Relationship to community groups and advocacy organizations
  - The family council provides a natural link between the facility and the greater community.
  - Family council members involved in other community organizations can educate and inform members of these organizations in order to gather support around specific topics, for example in relation to changes in care facility regulations.
  - As family councils become more prevalent, groups comprised of representatives from a number of different family councils can be established to address common issues and use their collective knowledge, experience and strength to bring about positive change.



## **Administrative Items and Handling Funds**

Not all family councils will need to deal with the issues of administrative needs and handling funds. Depending upon the activities and projects the family council chooses to undertake, these issues may warrant some attention.

### ***Administrative items***

Typically the care facility will provide the use of a meeting room, any equipment needed (overhead projector, flip charts, etc.), normal office supplies (paper, photocopying), and a designated bulletin board for posting family council information. In some cases, the facility will arrange for meeting minutes to be prepared and circulated by email or by hard copy and to be available at the reception desk or at nursing stations. A mailbox for the family council may also be made available as well as a storage area for family council supplies, such as Christmas decorations.

### ***Handling funds***

Some family councils may receive donations, or funds may be raised through fundraising activities. Donations may be general, or they may be designated for a specific initiative, such as an entertainment event, or a Strawberry Tea. The family council may wish to set up a bank account to handle these funds.

Every family council will be different in how they choose to handle funds. Just be sure to learn about required practices for 'groups' and follow them (e.g. two signatures required for all bank account withdrawals), keep good records, and have regular reports on the financial situation at all family council meetings.

## Developing Terms of Reference

- What are Terms of Reference?
  - Terms of Reference are the basic operating procedures of a family council.
  - Terms of Reference ensure that there are standard procedures in place that apply to the running of the family council and that everyone follows. Without Terms of Reference, conflicts can arise among council members over procedures. For example, if there are no Terms of Reference to specify when and how elections will be held, leaders may end up serving indefinitely. Potential conflicts can also arise when individuals who may not benefit the council want to join. Including a statement in the Terms of Reference regarding who shall sit on the council will avoid this difficult situation.
  - Terms of Reference can be amended as the needs of the family council change.
- What information should be included in the Terms of Reference?
  - The Terms of Reference should include the following information about the group:
    - Name
    - Mission statement/philosophy
    - Purpose/goals

The following topic areas should also be covered in the Terms of Reference:

  - Membership
  - Officers and their duties
  - Elections
  - Meetings
  - Amendments
- Drawing up Terms of Reference
  - Each family council is unique and the Terms of Reference should be tailored to fit the individual council. Only those items that are appropriate for your council should be included in your Terms of Reference.
  - Keep the language clear and simple. Terms of Reference are not very useful if they are difficult to understand and therefore cannot be put into practice.
  - Each article of the Terms of Reference should concern only one idea.
  - Instructions for making future amendments to the Terms of Reference should always be included.
  - The Terms of Reference should be given to the facility administrator and the staff liaison. They should also be posted on the family council bulletin board if there is one available in the facility.
- Please see Appendices 2 and 3 for sample Terms of Reference.

## **Challenges Families May Have When Trying to Organize a Family Council**

Family members may face some challenges when trying to organize a family council. It is helpful to anticipate and expect these, so as to be prepared to address and deal with them. The following challenges may arise:

- Family members don't feel they have the time
  - Family members have jobs and children, and visiting also takes up their time.
  - An hour or two once a month is all the time commitment needed to contribute to a successful family council.
  - Try to schedule meetings so that families don't need to make a separate trip to the facility to attend the meeting. For example, schedule the meeting for immediately after dinner so they can share a meal with their loved one and then go directly to the meeting.
- Family members fear retaliation
  - Unfortunately, a common fear among some family members is that if they complain, staff at the facility will take it out on their loved one.
  - A family council provides a safe environment for families to voice their concerns and opinions. The family council is also much more than a complaint mechanism – it is an opportunity for family members to meet, share and exchange information, learn and support each other.
  - It is important to keep in mind that the most effective family councils emphasize collaboration with the facility and actively and purposefully encourage and support dialogue, i.e. two-way communication with the facility. Family councils are beneficial for facilities too – through the family council, the facility has access to family members to provide them with important information, feedback and observations on issues and concerns.
- Family members feel discouraged
  - Family members may be discouraged because they have tried to voice their concerns and nothing has been done.
  - The family council provides representation for family members as a group, and therefore facilitates the collective support and strength of the group as a whole.
- Family members and facility staff lack information and understanding about family councils
  - Sometimes challenges arise because family members and facility staff are not informed and lack understanding about the role and benefits of a family council.
  - ACR provides information and resources to help families and staff members understand and recognize the important role a family council can play in improving the quality of the care environment.
  - Not all administrations welcome input from families and there may be resistance from the facility to setting up a family council. Such resistance is often because the purpose and intention of the family council is not understood. It is important to work collaboratively with the facility in setting up the family council and to make sure that the facility has a clear understanding of the role and benefit of the council in supporting and educating families.

## Running Effective Meetings

If meetings are run effectively, family members will be encouraged to continue to attend and participate in the family council, and it will also be easier to recruit new members. The following checklist may be helpful when planning your meetings.

- Locate and reserve the meeting room
  - Discuss the amount of meeting space needed
  - Choose space that meets the needs of the group
  - Arrange any needed equipment, such as flipcharts, overhead projectors, or other audio/visual materials
- Plan the agenda
  - Decide on the meeting format
  - Identify issues for discussion and determine meeting topics
  - Assign meeting responsibilities to council members
- Notify participants
  - Use various communication tools to inform participants of the meeting at least one week before the meeting. Newsletters, personal phone calls, emails, and posters in elevators and on bulletin boards might be used to notify participants
  - Ask facility staff to remind and encourage families to attend
- Gather resources
  - Contact speakers and others who have a role to play in the meeting and provide any information or equipment they might need
  - Secure needed written materials and prepare any copies to be distributed at the meeting
- Tasks to be handled at the meeting:
  - Arrange for refreshments, including water for speakers, etc.
  - Distribute the agenda or other handouts
  - Discuss items for the next meeting's agenda
- Tasks to be handled after the meeting:
  - Send thank you notes to the appropriate people, for example speakers, meeting hosts, special guest, etc.
  - Follow-up on the discussions held and the decisions made at the meeting with any necessary letters and phone calls
  - Prepare and distribute the minutes
  - Begin planning the next meeting



## **Encouraging Participation in the Family Council**

The most effective family council is one that has active participation from its members. The tips below may help in setting the scene for encouraging participation at family council meetings.

### ***Setting the scene***

- At the start of a meeting, remind attendees of the purpose of the family council. Make sure that everyone agrees to and understands the number one ground rule: that confidentiality must be respected. This means that any names or personal information shared at the meeting will not be discussed outside the meeting room
- Allow time for introductions of those present at the meeting. Use nametags to help everyone learn each other's names
- Make sure that common courtesies are established and extended throughout the meeting and that meetings are run with a focus on respectful communication. For example, members should be expected to observe the following:
  - Alerting the Chair of agenda items to be added and asking for permission to add items
  - One person speaking at a time. The Chair may indicate an order of speakers, which will ensure there is one discussion taking place at a time with no 'side-discussions'
  - Balancing 'air time' to make sure there is equal opportunity for all members to speak and be heard
  - Listening to what others have to say
  - Seeking clarification to ensure understanding
- Adherence to the agenda and time limits is important
  - Members should have an opportunity to review and add to the agenda prior to the meeting. Other additions may be made at the beginning of the meeting, subject to time constraints and/or relevance or urgency
  - Ensure that the agenda is balanced between concerns and other possible topics and activities. Time should be allowed to encourage and include opportunities for members to provide positive feedback and identify what is working well
- The Chair may need to summarize a member's thoughts and concerns to ensure clarity and understanding among the group as a whole
- The Chair may find it useful to check-in with the family council members during the meeting to keep the meeting on track and on time, check whether there are concerns about how the meeting is going, and/or to get concurrence on next steps (such as setting up a committee to explore an issue further and report back, setting aside a topic for the next meeting, or taking a decision on an action). It may also be useful for the Chair to periodically solicit feedback from members regarding what is working well and what isn't working quite so well with the family council (for example the date/time and length of meetings, and agenda items discussed) and request suggestions for improvement.

## ***Addressing common problems at meetings***

### ***Family council members do not speak up***

For some members, participating in meetings and groups may be a new experience that causes them some anxiety.

These members may be:

- Uncertain about their role and rights as a family member
- Reluctant to speak in a group or to voice opinions others do not share
- Fearful of criticism or ridicule from other members
- Under the impression that speaking up is not polite and that it is not proper to express complaints or disagree in public
- Reluctant to offend the staff or other family council members
- Fearful of retaliation toward their family member/friend or themselves if they speak up
- Uncertain about their ability to articulate their ideas or express themselves verbally
- Uncomfortable speaking in English

Possible solutions:

- Ensure that the family council is and is seen to be a welcoming and safe place
- Gently encourage participation; do not force it or make participants uncomfortable by drawing attention to them. While individuals become comfortable, allow for their presence without their active participation. Recognize that everyone has a different comfort level
- Use the agenda to provide the format and structure for the meeting, but allow for some flexibility so members can speak when they feel comfortable, rather than only during one designated time period in the meeting
- Keep the very active members in check – they can quickly intimidate and overwhelm the others
- Make use of smaller committees for projects and initiatives; a smaller group may be a more comfortable place for some members to participate
- Have the Chair or someone else speak privately with the quieter members to ask whether they find the family council valuable and if they have any suggestions or ideas on how they might like to participate. Approach this gently; don't interrogate
- Ensure members of confidentiality and safety at the meetings. Emphasize that concerns of an individual nature that are raised are kept at the family council meeting and not broadcast around the facility. Also ensure members understand that if the family council takes on a concern, it will be taken on as a 'general' concern on behalf of the group, without identifying any one individual

*"All council members do is complain!"*

An early task of most new family councils is processing concerns – likely concerns that have been accumulating for some time. Often it is because of concern about care issues in a facility that residents and family members become interested in the family council.

When complaints are persistent, certain questions should be considered. For example, do complaints stem from the fact that expectations among family members are unrealistic? The family council can be used as a venue for educating families so that they better understand the realities and limitations of the care environment. It is also worth considering whether there really is a problem with chronic complaining, or whether the family council is not being used effectively to process concerns and help resolve matters, either by directing members appropriately or by identifying 'global' concerns that are within the scope of family council action.

If complaining seems to dominate meetings, consider:

- Adhering to an agenda and time limits
  - Construct the agenda purposefully. The agenda should be balanced and include opportunities to identify what is working well and provide positive feedback. It can be helpful to have a guest speaker address a topic of interest and provide an opportunity for family council members to enhance their knowledge and understanding of matters that affect them and their family member. Advocacy is more effective from a place of knowledge and information
- Ensuring that the family council has experienced and skilled leadership to run the meeting effectively without getting bogged down by complaints
  - If the council Chair is not experienced in running meetings, it may be helpful to seek help through courses on conducting meetings. These are often offered through Community Colleges and night schools, or available through videos borrowed from public libraries
- Spending time to help members process concerns effectively and celebrating successes
  - Success will ease frustration and lead to greater cooperation with the facility. Be sure to acknowledge successes!

Other suggestions:

- Use questions that help reframe and focus discussion when a council meeting is going in circles. For example, asking the following questions may be helpful: "What is the main issue here?" "What would you like to see achieved?" "What do we do next?" "How can the family council make a positive difference?"
- Encourage members to use their imagination and express their ideas. Help them to discover that working to solve a problem can be more interesting and fulfilling than just complaining about it. Remember the old saying, "If you are not a part of the solution, you are a part of the problem"
- Remind members that they *can* make a difference. Focus on successes, however small, and actively look for ways to counter the frustration of past failures. Remind members that the past is gone and that the family council is moving forward
- Emphasize the importance of the family council seeking opportunities for and achieving success – build on small successes. Reassure members that the skills and knowledge gained through small accomplishments will help in tackling larger challenges

### *Dealing with difficult behaviours and attitudes*

Unfortunately, there are sometimes family council members who disrupt meetings, ignore procedures, create disputes or dampen the spirit and enthusiasm of the family council as a whole. These individuals can seriously diminish the effectiveness of the family council. Strong leadership and fair procedures are important. Members must be encouraged and willing to honour these, and to respect the rights of others.

Below is a list of potential difficult behaviours, along with some ideas on how to deal with them. In your involvement with the family council, you may come across:

- **'Nothing-will-work' members**, who are convinced nothing will change. Often past failures have made them defeatists.

***Try:** Acknowledging their feelings of disappointment (not failure) over lack of success in the past, and remind them that the past is over and the family council is moving forward. Counter their negative outlook by emphasizing concrete examples of successes.*

- **Members who see no problems** and who will avoid disagreements or confrontations at any cost. They may consider it impolite to argue or feel that only professionals are qualified to have an opinion on matters related to health care.

***Try:** Acknowledging their perspective and indicating that others see things differently. Emphasize that everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, and that disagreement is not necessarily negative. Encourage members to recognize that problems are common and that they can be seen as challenges to be resolved successfully. Remind them that concerns can often be addressed effectively without confrontation. Also remind them that while professionals do have specific education or training in a particular field, family members have specific knowledge and expertise about their loved one.*

- **Members you dare not disagree with**, who become angry or upset if others disagree with them. Often members will agree with these individuals just to avoid a scene.

***Try:** Acknowledging that you understand that they feel strongly about their opinion. Reiterate that perspectives on matters vary, that diverse opinions are to be expected, and that different viewpoints can be helpful in formulating better solutions. Emphasize that the family council will benefit from hearing a variety of opinions. Reinforce the 'respectful communication' guidelines for the family council and limit the airtime these members have – don't let them take over.*

*In extreme circumstances, it may be necessary to speak with the person privately to remind them that their opinion – as well as the opinion of other members – is valuable, and to provide feedback on your concerns about the adverse impact of their behaviour on the willingness of others to express their different opinions. Request a change in their behaviour so that the family council can benefit from the diversity of opinions among the group.*



- **'Broken-record' members**, who repeatedly raise the same topic over and over, even if others disagree. These individuals get their way by wearing others down. Often they feel no one is hearing their point of view.

***Try:** Ensuring that they feel heard by summarizing their view on the topic and getting their concurrence on your summary of their opinion. This will reinforce that they have indeed been heard. Then, move on to asking others for their viewpoint. If they interrupt, remind them that you appreciate their contribution and now need to hear from others.*

- **'All-or-nothing' members**, who insist that *all* problems be solved now. These members may prevent the council from setting priorities, and often demand immediate changes, refusing to wait a reasonable time or to compromise.

***Try:** Acknowledging their strong feelings and concerns about achieving a quick resolution. Show agreement with the need for resolution. Indicate that there are other matters of importance that require the attention of the family council, and that appropriately and effectively handling these necessitates the setting of priorities. To show that action is being taken, it may be useful to establish a small committee to investigate the issue and report back to the family council. Emphasize the importance of dealing with the issue effectively, which involves getting all the facts, identifying possible solutions and persons to approach, as well as an appropriate strategy. Indicate that this process may take time and that moving too quickly may mean that it takes longer to reach an effective resolution in the end. Make it clear that there is always the opportunity of calling an extraordinary meeting if the matter is urgent, critical or time sensitive and if there is a need for the family council to take action before the next scheduled meeting.*

### **Dealing with difficult council members in general**

- Try to meet their needs. Consider the following questions:
  - Are they feeling heard?
  - What do they fear?
  - Can they be reassured?
  - Are they fearful that action or non-action will adversely affect their family member?
  - Might there be an interim solution for their particular situation?
  - Can they be referred to the person or organization most able to address their specific concerns – for example a social worker, the facility administrator, or the regional health authority?
- Try to channel negative energy into positive action. Identify positive attributes that the person has to contribute in an effort to encourage them to be a positive participant. Find a task, project or committee that matches their interests and attributes and that will benefit from their enthusiasm and energy.
- Reassure all members that they are being heard and that all opinions are sought, even when the majority may disagree. Make it understood that there is no 'right' or 'best' opinion, but rather that the family council needs to establish the majority opinion. Emphasize that raising a contrary or alternate opinion may encourage all members to think differently – more widely, and more creatively – and that everyone will benefit from hearing different points of view.
- Reiterate the requirement for respectful behaviour. For example, if members are interrupting each other, remind them that having one person speak at a time will enable

the group to hear from everyone. Frame this in positive terms – rather than scolding the person who is interrupting, try using language like, “Let’s have one person speak at a time - I don’t believe Mary was finished; thank you George, we’d like to hear from Susan now.” Address disruptive behaviour and be firm with disruptive members. Don't allow the negative attitudes or actions of a few to dominate the council as a whole.

- Help members to understand the principles behind a democratic organization – the minority has a right to be heard and the majority has a right to prevail.

***Creative techniques for encouraging input from family council members***

- Ask people to list three concerns on an index card and compile a group list, then prioritize and brainstorm some solutions. Or divide into smaller groups, each with a concern to address, then bring solutions back to the larger group.
- Use a flip chart to list shared concerns and possible solutions during brainstorming sessions. Do not critique at the brainstorming stage; let the ideas flow initially, and then review and select the ideas which are worthy of further consideration.
- Appoint a timekeeper. Ask each person to limit his or her comments to a certain number of minutes and give each person the same amount of time so that everyone has an opportunity to contribute.
- Ask everyone to identify the one thing that might improve the quality of life for all residents. Then arrive at consensus for one or two potentially do-able items and see if the family council can initiate some positive action in these areas.
- Keep a ‘parking lot’ list of matters that come up during a meeting but that cannot be addressed at the time. Designate a date to go back to these and re-assess them for consideration and action.
- Make good and creative use of ad hoc and standing committees to deal with specific topics or issues.

## Maintaining the Family Council Over Time

Once your family council has been established, it is important to think about maintaining the family council over time. The ideas and questions below may provide some helpful assistance in this regard.

In thinking about maintaining the council over time:

- Remember that family councils need to continue to develop and grow
  - Initially the council may be dealing with problems and concerns that have built up over time
  - Eventually most of these issues will be resolved, although some may be ongoing
  - The council can move beyond dealing primarily with concerns and turn its attention to proactively initiating projects that will benefit the residents and their families
- Consider whether goals are being met
  - If a council is continually discussing the same issues then perhaps goals are not being met
  - Remember that nothing happens overnight, and that patience and persistence are key
  - Take time to celebrate successes; even small changes can benefit everyone
- Consider whether members are benefiting from the family council
  - Peer support is often the greatest benefit, especially for families of new residents
  - Ensure that family members have an opportunity to contribute their talents and creativity
- Consider whether residents are benefiting from the family council
  - If issues are being resolved and the quality of life of the residents has improved, then residents are definitely benefiting from the family council
- Ensure that new families are encouraged to join the family council
  - Family council information should be included in the facility admissions package
  - Consider making a phone call a few weeks after admission to introduce the family council and encourage participation
  - Enlist the help of facility staff to encourage participation among families
  - Try to advertise family council activities and post minutes from family council meetings on a bulletin board in the facility
  - Develop a family council brochure and make sure it is readily available for families visiting the facility; for example, leave copies at the front desk
  - Hold a yearly 'Open House' or information meeting for new families
- Consider what the target numbers are for membership
  - Membership fluctuates as should be expected
  - Experience has shown that membership is usually about 10% of the resident population
  - Keep in mind that it is not necessary to have large membership numbers to have a strong and effective voice

# Advocacy and Processing Concerns





## Effective Advocacy at your Facility

*"An advocate is someone who speaks or writes in favour of; defends. Someone who pleads the cause of another – someone who cares."*

Advocacy is an important tool in the work of family councils as they strive to improve and enhance the quality of life and care for residents in long-term care homes. The information below may be helpful for family council members to be effective advocates.

### **Types of advocacy**

- *Individual advocacy*: advocacy on a one-on-one basis, whereby the rights or interests of an individual are represented by another
  - Keep in mind that it is not the family council's place to advocate solely for an individual person, however families may come to the family council for advice and direction regarding issues or concerns affecting individuals
- *Group advocacy*: advocacy on behalf of a group with common concerns, whereby the aim is to create positive change which will have an impact for the group as a whole
  - When a collective issue or common concern is identified within a facility, the family council can work to effect positive change

### **Tips for effective advocacy**

- Be well organized
- Decide on goals
- Form a plan of action
- Listen, understand and be prepared to compromise
- Recruit support
- Do your research
- Be aware of alternative approaches
- Be aware of potential problems
- Know who to approach
- Do not be intimidated
- Present only factual material
- Be brief and to the point

## Advocating for Broader Change

Advocacy is also an important tool in the work of ACR as we strive to accomplish broader, system-wide change related to long-term care in British Columbia.

This involves such activities as advocating for best practices, policy reviews and regulatory reviews, towards enhancing care and quality of life in long-term care facilities.

For more information about ACR's advocacy role, please visit our website at [www.acrbc.ca](http://www.acrbc.ca).

## **Resident Rights and Care Concerns**

### ***What governs the rights and standards of care for residents living in residential care facilities in British Columbia?***

- Various provincial legislation and regulations provide the framework that determines the rights and standards of care for those living in residential care facilities in British Columbia. In addition, there are rights that flow from municipal and federal laws and regulations, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and contracts between residents and their care facility, as well as contracts that the care facility may have signed with the government.
- Some of the sources that govern and provide for standards of care and resident rights in BC include:
  - Community Care and Assisted Living Act
  - Adult Guardianship Act – Part 3
  - Health Care (Consent) and Care Facility (Admission) Act
  - BC Human Rights Code
  - BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Act
  - BC Representation Agreement Act
  - Standards for Nursing and Medical Practices in British Columbia
  - Charter of Rights and Freedoms
  - Criminal Code of Canada
  - Residential Care Access Policy (For more information, please see Appendix 7)

### ***How can I find out about resident rights?***

- The Gerontology Research Program at Simon Fraser University has published a helpful booklet entitled, *"Respecting Your Rights – A Guide to the Rights of People Living in British Columbia Long-term Care Facilities."*
  - Published in 2003, this booklet provides a comprehensive overview of the rights afforded to residents of long-term care facilities in British Columbia. Hard copies of the booklet are no longer available, however copies may be available from your local public library. The booklet is also accessible on the Internet for viewing or downloading at [www.canadianelderlaw.ca](http://www.canadianelderlaw.ca).
- Additional information about resident rights is available from the People's Law School, which provides a number of resources and also conducts courses on a variety of topics relevant to those living in residential care facilities in British Columbia. For contact information, please see the Resources and Contacts section in Appendix 8.

### ***What constitutes abuse and how should it be handled?***

- It is a good idea to have an understanding of what constitutes abuse, and how it can be defined. In addition to the information in the "*Respecting Your Rights*" document referenced above, there is a fact sheet on the definition of abuse, which is available from the Department of Justice Canada. "*Abuse of Older Adults: A Fact Sheet From the Department of Justice Canada*" can be accessed at the following website:  
<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/adultsfs.html#head1>
- For reports of suspected abuse:
  - Contact the health authority in your area and ask for the Chief Licensing Officer. The Licensing Officer must respond to all complaints that allege a licensed care facility has breached its health or safety obligations. All long-term care facilities in British Columbia that care for three or more people must be licensed.
  - Make sure the alleged abuse is reported to the police. Care facilities have a responsibility to report crimes to the police, and you can also report suspected abuse and crimes directly to the police.
  - You can also contact the Community Care Liaison Officer at your regional health authority, who, along with the Licensing Officer, is responsible for looking into reports of abuse or neglect in residential care facilities.
  - The Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia (RNABC) will intervene when the actions of RNs are unacceptable.
  - Other organizations that may be helpful in relation to handling incidents or situations of suspected neglect or abuse include those listed below:
    - The BC Ombudsman Office receives inquiries and complaints about practices and services provided by public bodies such as a hospital or regional health authority;
    - The BC Human Rights Tribunal deals with human rights complaints under the BC Human Rights Code;
    - The Public Guardian and Trustee takes referrals and reviews allegations of abuse of vulnerable adults in the community to determine if formal authority is required;
    - The BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors has an information and referral service and a legal information advocate available by phone; and,
    - The BC Coalition of People with Disabilities is particularly involved in advocacy around the issue of restraints.
- Please refer to the Resources and Contacts section of this Handbook in Appendix 8 for the contact information for the organizations listed above.

## Processing Concerns

### ***Processing concerns through the family council***

Family councils can be a valuable resource for processing concerns. They offer families an opportunity to have a voice in the care facility policies and decisions that affect them and their loved ones.

Through the family council, families can share concerns with each other. Individuals often find they have the same concerns as others, and that processing concerns in a group is very effective for a number of reasons. The voice of the collective is more powerful than the voice of the individual, thus the concern of several people generally receives a quicker response than the concern of one person. When concerns are presented on behalf of the family council, positive action to address the matter often follows. Also, the time and energy required to address a matter or problem can be shared by the group rather than taken on by individuals separately.

The family council is also beneficial for the facility administrator and staff, providing the opportunity for them to:

- Hear the constructive input of families;
- Keep families informed of changes and issues affecting the facility;
- Provide information to families to help them better understand the care environment;
- Address small concerns before they become major problems; and,
- Seek family support on issues affecting both the facility and its residents.

The steps below may provide some assistance in processing concerns through the family council:

- 1) Allow the family member to briefly explain their concern. Encourage them to be as clear and specific as possible.
- 2) Determine if other members share the same concern. If the concern affects only one resident, the family member who raised the concern should be referred to an appropriate staff member to help them deal with the issue. Many facilities have an internal process for problem resolution. This process may be referred to under a variety of names such as 'Quality Improvement', 'Problem Resolution' or 'Care Issues Resolution'. The facility may also have a second-stage review if resolution is not successful after the initial step. This may take the form of a 'Patient Advocate' or 'Ombudsman Office' or may simply involve referral to a higher management level.
- 3) If other family council members share the concern and feel there is an issue they would like to pursue, it should be determined if all of the relevant information is available and whether there is time to discuss the issue at the meeting. Alternatively, members may decide to wait until a future meeting to pursue the matter, or to strike a small committee to investigate further.
- 4) In some cases, additional information may be required. This can often be provided by the administrator or by another staff person at the facility, who may be invited to speak to the group. An outside speaker may be in a position to offer needed insight and information on a particular topic related to the concern. It is important to make sure all applicable regulations and requirements are understood, and that all of the necessary information is available so that informed decisions can be made.

- 5) When discussing the issue, encourage family council members to make creative suggestions and seek possible alternative solutions for addressing the problem or concern.
- 6) Once adequate discussion has taken place among the group, the concern should be formally presented in written form to the administrator and to appropriate staff. Include the following information in the written submission:
  - The specific nature of the issue
  - To whom the issue is addressed
  - Suggestions for possible solutions
  - The date of a requested response

Although this is the recommended system for presenting a concern to the facility, each family council should set up a system that is most effective for them and meets the needs of both the council and the facility.

- 7) Allow adequate time for the facility to respond and take action. Refrain from unreasonable demands. The facility may have an established process for the resolution of concerns and it may take some time for the various necessary steps to be followed.
- 8) Once a response has been received from facility staff, allow the family council to discuss it. If the council is satisfied with the response, the council's satisfaction should be reported to the facility administrator or appropriate staff person. If the council is unsatisfied, this should be communicated in written form through a letter addressed to the facility administrator or appropriate staff person. It may be necessary to set up a meeting with the facility to discuss the matter further.
- 9) When the issue is resolved, be sure to thank those involved in achieving the resolution from both the family council and the facility. Remember to communicate the success to residents and families. This can be accomplished through a mention in the family council meeting minutes, an announcement posted on the family council bulletin board, or an item in the facility newsletter, if available.
- 10) Build goodwill! Always remember to take time to identify and show appreciation for the many things that are going well at the facility; be sure not to focus only on the negative.

*What kinds of concerns might the family council take on?*

Every facility is different and the care concerns affecting individual facilities will vary. Through the family council, advocacy can be tailored around specific concerns affecting a facility.

Family councils have been effective in advocating for a variety of improvements to the quality of life and care for residents at care facilities in BC. For example, family councils have advocated successfully for:

- Improved wheelchair access to the building for residents and family members
- The installation of 'wandering alert' systems to allow residents freedom within the facility while preventing them from exiting to unsafe areas
- Changes and improvements to facility menus
- The installation of air conditioning
- Changes to in-service training in care areas deemed deficient (such as dementia care)

The family council may also have a role to play in relation to more global care concerns. Some family councils have advocated for improvement in care through meetings with their local MLAs, and letter campaigns to politicians or health authorities concerning matters such as funding, outsourcing of services, the closure of care facilities, and care placement policies, among others.

In all situations of advocacy, the basic principles remain: do your homework, use a positive approach, attempt resolution at the 'local' level first, follow the process, and be prepared to compromise and consider alternative solutions. Please see the "Effective Advocacy..." section for further information.

### ***Contacting your regional health authority***

If the family council or an individual family has a concern about care that they feel has not been resolved through the family council or at the facility level, they may consider contacting the regional health authority. The information below provides some useful assistance in this regard.

- Every regional health authority has a Community Care Liaison Officer who is responsible for dealing with concerns in government-funded or subsidized long-term care facilities. The liaison officer may help you resolve problems related to quality of care issues (for example, if a resident is not getting the medications he or she needs), as well as health and safety matters.
- When considering which department to contact, keep in mind that the different health authorities may use slightly different names for the same type of department or contact person. Some regions use the phrase "community care facility," while others use the phrase "long-term care facility."

The contact information for the regional health authorities can be found in the Resources and Contacts section of this Handbook in Appendix 8, and in the blue government pages of your local telephone directory.

# *Family Council Activities and Initiatives*





## **Family Council Activities and Initiatives**

New and sometimes existing family councils often wonder about the kinds of activities or initiatives they can undertake to support their care facility and enhance the quality of life and care for residents at the facility.

Below are some examples of activities and projects initiated by family councils. These examples may help you start to identify how and where your family council may get involved in your care facility, and will give you an indication of the types of activities that have been initiated by other family councils. Keep in mind that every facility and family council is different and that what may be an appropriate activity for one facility may not work in another.

These examples represent just a few ideas. We would be pleased to hear from you about what your family council has done, so we can add to these examples and share your ideas with other family councils.

For ease of reference, the activities below are grouped under general headings.

### ***Buildings and property, safety and security***

Examples of family council activities:

- Representatives from the council worked with the planning committee regarding the building of a new facility and helped design the new resident rooms by providing input to the furniture placement, and the choice of paint colours and curtains
- Council members approached the city to get a wheelchair ramp placed in the sidewalk at the entrance to the facility
- Council members advocated for the replacement of the doors in the Alzheimer unit to ensure safety at the facility
- Family council members recommended that air conditioning be installed in an area of the facility
- Council members advocated for a 'wander alert' system to alert staff when high risk residents entered 'exit' areas of the facility
- In response to some unsettling incidents, family council members advocated for a security review to be conducted by the local community police office and corporate security. They also advocated for repositioning the vehicle used by the contracted security company during the change between the evening/night shift to better monitor the security of staff entering and leaving the building

### ***Facility practices, procedures and relationships***

Examples of family council activities:

- Family council members initiated the use of large print nametags worn by staff so that residents could read the nametags and call staff by name. They also recommended and implemented the use of an "in-and-out board" to make it easy to identify the staff on duty on each floor
- Members initiated the use of an "Activities of Daily Living" sheet in each resident's room so that casual and part-time staff would have easy reference to the individual needs and preferences of each resident
- Family council members initiated an "Appreciation Week" to highlight the attributes and values of care (such as compassion and respect) appreciated by families. Each day a different attribute or value was highlighted. Throughout the week and for all shifts,

family council volunteers provided treats to all caregivers associated with the facility, including staff, contractors, companions, and volunteers

- Members of the family council advocated for and recommended the use of colour-coded clothing labels to identify clothing laundered by family and to decrease the incidence of these articles being mistakenly delivered to the facility laundry

### ***Resident quality of life and care***

Examples of family council activities:

- Council members initiated a program to donate clothing for residents in need
- Family council members initiated a gift-giving program to provide gift bags at Christmas time for those residents without families
- Members purchased outdoor lights to decorate the garden area at Christmas time
- The members planned, funded and organized monthly weekend entertainment events for the residents
- Council members worked together to plan and organize a Canada Day barbecue for residents, families and friends
- Members of the council planned and organized a monthly 'Sunday Family Tea' for residents and their families
- The members planned and organized annual events such as a 'Strawberry Tea'

### ***Education for family members***

Family councils have been successful in educating family members about:

- The experience of living in care
- What to expect from the care facility
- Disease progression awareness
- How to cope with different illnesses
- End-of-life preparation and planning
- Estate planning

# Appendices



## Appendix 1: Sample Family Interest Survey

*A family council is a group of relatives and supportive friends of persons living in a care facility. Meeting together on a regular basis, they explore common concerns, share ideas, provide each other with support, and act on issues that relate to the needs of the residents.*

### 1. Do you feel you understand the role and benefits of a family council?

- ☐ Yes ☐ Somewhat  
☐ Not at all

### 2. Have you attended family council meetings?

- ☐ No ☐ Once  
☐ Occasionally ☐ Regularly

### 3. What would encourage you to attend family council meetings?

- ☐ More information on the council ☐ Transportation  
☐ More convenient meeting day or time. ☐ Parking  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. What is your preferred meeting time?

- ☐ Weekday ☐ Weekend  
☐ Day meeting ☐ Evening meeting

### 5. Check topics or projects that interest you.

- ☐ Learning about the long-term health care system  
☐ Standards and Regulations ☐ Legislative issues  
☐ Accreditation ☐ The Eden Alternative  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**6. I would like to learn more about the operation of the facility including:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administration     | <input type="checkbox"/> Policies and Procedures  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursing care       | <input type="checkbox"/> Dietary and food service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physician services | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Service           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy services  | <input type="checkbox"/> Security                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Activities         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____              |

**7. I would like to know how families can get involved in:**

- ☐ Providing special activities or services for residents
- ☐ Visiting residents without families
- ☐ Joint resident and family activities and events
- ☐ Opportunities to share concerns and ideas with other families
- ☐ Working with other families to give input on policies, procedures, problems and solutions
- ☐ Participating in a Welcoming Committee that supports the families of new residents
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Please list, in the order of their importance to you, three improvements you would like to see at the facility:**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE NUMBER** \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SHORT SURVEY.  
IT MAY BE RETURNED TO THE FLOOR NURSE OR TO RECEPTION.**

**If you have any questions please contact:**  
*Enter contact name and number*

## Appendix 2: Sample Terms of Reference (1)

### (FACILITY NAME) FAMILY COUNCIL TERMS OF REFERENCE

#### PHILOSOPHY

We believe in and agree to provide respectful and caring support for families and friends of residents of \_\_\_\_\_ and to provide a safe environment and knowledgeable forum for families.

Throughout this document the word family/families will be used to describe any person involved in a supportive relationship with a resident of \_\_\_\_\_.

#### PURPOSE

- To work to improve quality of life of all residents
- To act as advocates to assure quality of care of all residents
- To provide support for families of residents
- To provide a forum for discussion and decision making regarding concerns and complaints and take action as necessary, maintaining confidentiality at all times
- To make recommendations to Administration on matters concerning the well being of all residents
- To provide educational opportunities for families to enhance the understanding of the experience of residents in care
- To participate and provide input on development of policies, accreditation, and special programs when asked by Administration
- To act as a source of information and referral for families
- To promote a positive attitude toward aging and the role of residents' families.

#### MEMBERSHIP

- Membership is open to all family members, friends and residents' representatives who wish to participate in the decision making process on matters affecting the daily lives of residents. The family council will liaise with the administration of \_\_\_\_\_ who will act as a resource at the request of the family council.
- Eligibility for membership requires that a person be actively involved in a supportive role of a resident of \_\_\_\_\_

#### ELECTION OF OFFICERS

- Election of the \_\_\_\_\_ (chair/president) and \_\_\_\_\_ (vice chair/president) will take place on an annual basis in \_\_\_\_\_. If a situation arises where one of the officers resigns or can no longer fill his/her position an interim officer will be appointed for the balance of the term of office.
- Each member will be entitled to one (1) vote for the purpose of decision-making.
- No elected officer shall hold office for more than two consecutive terms of office.

#### MEETINGS

- Meetings will be held on the \_\_\_\_\_ of every month from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Subcommittee meetings shall be held as deemed necessary by council members.

#### AMENDMENTS

- Amendments may be made to these Terms of Reference at any regular meeting of the Council, by a 2/3 vote providing the suggested changes have been read at the previous meeting.

## **Appendix 3: Sample Terms of Reference (2)**

**(NAME OF FACILITY)**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### ***Mission Statement***

To improve the quality of life, well-being and happiness of all residents of \_\_\_\_\_ by promoting an atmosphere of caring and trust among residents, staff, families and friends of residents.

#### ***Purpose and Goals***

1. To advocate on behalf of residents through
  - (a) issue identification and discussion;
  - (b) recommending change within \_\_\_\_\_; and
  - (c) when appropriate, being heard on proposed changes in policy and practice affecting the well-being of residents.
2. As a means of achieving (1), to develop meaningful two-way communication between families and the Site/Operations Leader.
3. To inform and educate families and friends of residents by
  - (a) inviting staff and guests from outside \_\_\_\_\_ to speak at family council meetings on specific and general issues related to elder care, and
  - (b) publishing a family council newsletter.
4. To welcome families of new residents and offer assistance and support consistent with the mandate of family council.
5. To sponsor social events and entertainment for residents, families and friends of residents.
6. To promote mutual support for families through sharing of experiences and information.

### **Organization and Structure**

#### ***Membership***

Membership is open to any member of a resident's family, or to any person (friend) in a supportive relationship with a resident. Membership is established by attendance. Voting privileges are extended to members who have attended at least three meetings, including the meeting at which a vote is held.

In the event a member of family council no longer has a family member resident at \_\_\_\_\_, the member of Council will be invited to become a friend of family council. Friends of family council are called upon to attend and assist at special occasions and functions, thereby availing \_\_\_\_\_ of their continued support and interest.



***Support and Liaison***

The Site/Operations Leader and staff Social Worker provide support and liaison to family council. They attend and participate in meetings of Council, but do not vote.

***Officers***

The following officers will be elected for a two-year term, beginning April 1:

- Chair
- Vice chair
- Treasurer
- Corresponding secretary
- Entertainment convenor

***Recorder***

A recorder (recording secretary) will be appointed on the approval of the family council. The term of the recorder will be the same as that of officers.

***Meetings***

Meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of each month.

***Quorum***

Quorum will consist of five members eligible to vote, representing a minimum of four residents.

***Minutes and Agenda***

Minutes, along with the agenda for the next meeting, will be distributed to all members who have attended any one of the four most recent meetings of family council. They will also be available at the family council literature rack, located at nursing stations.

***Amendment of Terms of Reference***

Amendments may be made at any regular meeting of family council by a two-thirds vote, providing the proposed changes have been circulated at the previous meeting.

## Appendix 4: Sample Letter to New Families

### (FACILITY NAME) FAMILY COUNCIL

To the family and friends of new residents,

We are a group of family members and friends of the residents of \_\_\_\_\_ facility name \_\_\_\_\_ who meet once a month. Our function is to address any problems or concerns that may arise for any resident, provide a safe and friendly environment for family members to discuss these concerns and to help find a solution. We also provide support for families through informal discussions and shared experiences, and opportunities to learn more about the care environment.

When a new resident first arrives at \_\_\_\_\_ there is a period of adjustment not only for them but for the families as well. Most of your questions will be addressed to the nurse on the floor as your relative or friend settles into life at \_\_\_\_\_. Gradually you may have other concerns or questions but may not be sure who to approach with them. The family council not only acts as a source of information and referral for you, but also provides an opportunity to meet other families and join in making a difference in the quality of life of all residents.

Our group meets on \_\_\_\_\_ date, time & place \_\_\_\_\_. If you would like more information please call:

\_\_\_\_\_ or  
\_\_\_\_\_

We hope to see you at our next meeting.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Family Council Chair

**Appendix 5: Sample Family Council Minutes Template**

**Meeting Date:**  
**Location:**  
**Time:**  
**Present:**

Topic	Discussion	Action/Follow-up	Responsibility

**Next meeting:**

## **Appendix 6: Sample Poster to Encourage Participation**

### **FAMILY COUNCIL**

#### **EIGHT GOOD REASONS FOR GETTING INVOLVED**

- 1) Keeps you informed of what is going on at the facility.
- 2) Gives you input into decisions and changes in the facility that may affect your family member.
- 3) Enables you to identify residents' needs that can be met through organized effort.
- 4) Gives you an opportunity to voice your concerns and become a more informed and effective advocate.
- 5) Gives you an opportunity to meet other families.
- 6) Gives you support and understanding through shared experiences with other families.
- 7) Provides education through guest speakers and films and the opportunity to learn more about the care environment.
- 8) Gives you an opportunity to use your experience, skills, interests and talents to benefit all residents.

#### **HOW MUCH TIME WOULD I HAVE TO COMMIT?**

A family council usually meets once a month for 1 – 2 hours. Most of what a family council does is accomplished during the regular meetings through discussions and planning. Individual members may take on added tasks that interest them or are a part of a special project.

Membership in the family council fluctuates and changes, as would be expected, which means that there is always a need for participation from new families.

## **Appendix 7: BC Residential Care Access Policy**

## **B.C.'s New Residential Care Access Policy**

### **What is residential care?**

Residential care is for people whose care requirements cannot be adequately met in their own home or another setting, such as supported housing, assisted living, a family care home or group home. It provides 24-hour professional nursing care, along with room, board and recreational programs.

### **What is the access policy?**

The residential care access policy ensures the right care is provided in the right setting. It helps to keep the future home and community care system flexible and responsive by setting out which clients are best suited to residential care and which clients would be better served at home with some support or in a community setting, like an assisted living residence.

### **What changes have occurred with the residential care access policy?**

On April 1, 2002, the Ministry of Health Services moved to needs-based access for residential care. Access is determined based on a client's care needs and urgency.

The goal of needs-based access is to ensure clients obtain the care they need, when they need it. Clients with the highest need and urgency, whose care needs cannot be met with home support or other supportive care, have priority access for the first available, appropriate bed.

Health authorities manage access to residential care beds.

Clients continue to have access to a bed anywhere in the province. They can request a move to their preferred facility once they are in residential care.

### **Who is eligible for residential care?**

Seniors and people with disabilities are eligible for residential care if:

- they have complex care needs that cannot be adequately met in their home or a supportive living environment.

And:

- are 19 years of age or older;
- have been living in British Columbia for the required period; and
- are a Canadian citizen or have permanent resident status.

Clients who have not been in British Columbia or Canada long enough to qualify for residential care but who need urgent care can also request an assessment. Depending on the outcome, the client may be admitted, provided no other urgent clients who meet all of the criteria are waiting to be admitted to health authority funded care facilities. The client must pay the full cost of care until they have satisfied the residency requirement.

**How is need and urgency determined?**

Health authority staff determine need and urgency through a rigorous and standardized assessment of the client's needs and risk level. The assessment takes into account the family caregiver's ability to continue providing care and support. It also considers what home and community care services have been or could be provided to continue supporting the client and/or their caregiver in their home or supportive living environment.

**Does the residential access policy apply to publicly funded supportive or assisted living residences?**

No. However, clients residing in a supportive or assisted living residence who are believed to require residential care because their health has declined, will be assessed and approved for residential care in the same way as any other eligible client.

**What about people who choose to move into a private care facility until a residential care bed is available?**

They are assessed for publicly-funded residential care beds in the same way as other applicants. If the person is approved for residential care, they will be expected to accept the next available, appropriate bed when it is offered.

**Can clients get into any facility of their choice?**

Provided it is appropriate to their care needs, clients can state a preference for a particular facility. If a bed in their preferred facility is not available when they enter residential care, they can request a transfer when one becomes available. It is expected clients who apply for residential care have an immediate need for a care bed and will accept the first available, appropriate bed regardless of whether it is in their preferred facility.

**What if a client wants to relocate to a care facility in another region?**

If possible, the health authority will accommodate this request when the client is admitted to a residential care facility or when a bed in the other facility becomes available.

**What if the first available bed is not where the client wants to go and they refuse it?**

While health authorities would like to admit clients to their preferred facility, sometimes there is no vacancy at the preferred facility when the client needs care. Clients can request a move to a preferred facility once they are in residential care. If the first available bed is turned down, the health authority will assume a client's need is not urgent and move their name off the priority access list. The client will have the option of applying to a private care facility or may be eligible for home support and other community resources.

**Can a health authority's decision that a client is not eligible for residential care be appealed?**

Clients are offered an available, appropriate bed based on their need and urgency. A client who feels the access policy was not applied consistently, fairly or equitably can request an appeal of the health authority's decision through the health authority.



**Does complex care replace the care levels – Intermediate 1, 2 and 3?**

No. Complex care is a way of describing clients who need the 24-hour professional care of a residential care facility. It is an assessment guide for case managers that ensures all health authorities use the same access criteria.

## Appendix 8: Resources and Contacts

### **GOVERNMENT RESOURCES**

To find a particular government department in your region or another region, contact **Enquiries BC** at 604-660-2421. Dial 1-800-663-7867 if you are calling outside of Greater Vancouver.

The **health authority** in your area can assist you in contacting the provincial program or service that you need. Under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act, the Medical Officer of Health is responsible for ensuring that care facilities meet the adult care regulations. This includes things such as:

- The regulation of residents' care;
- The regulation of staff;
- The safety of the care facility; and,
- The investigation of complaints.

#### **Fraser Health Authority**

300-10233 153rd Street,  
Surrey, BC V3R 0Z7  
Phone: 604-587-4600  
Fax: 604-587-4666  
Website: [www.fraserhealth.ca](http://www.fraserhealth.ca)

**Community Care Facility Liaison Officer:** Contact "Home Health" (Long-term Care), which can be found under the health authority heading in the Blue Pages of the telephone book.

**Licensing Officer:** Fraser Health Authority is divided into three areas (Fraser North, Fraser East, and Fraser South). Depending on your community, the Licensing Office may be found under one of these Fraser Health Authority headings:

- "Public Health Protection/Licensing",
- "Home Health Facilities- Licensing", or
- Health Unit, ["Environmental Health - CCF Licensing"].

CCF is the abbreviation for Community Care Facility.

#### **Interior Health Authority**

2180 Ethel Street,  
Kelowna, BC V1Y 3A1  
Phone: 250-862-4200 [Corporate Office]  
Fax: 250-862-4201  
Website: [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca)

**Community Care Facility Liaison Officer:** Ask for the "Community Care Program's facility liaison".

**Licensing Officer:** The phone number can be found in the Blue Pages under the Interior Health Authority heading "Public Health". Ask for the "community care facility licensing program".

### **Northern Health Authority**

2000 15th Avenue, Prince George, BC V2M 1S2  
Phone: 250-565-2649 [Corporate Office]  
Toll free: 1-866-565-2999.  
Fax: 250-565-2640  
Website: [www.northernhealth.ca](http://www.northernhealth.ca)

**Community Care Facility Liaison Officer:** You can reach the officer for your particular facility, by contacting the Health Unit in your area.

**Licensing Officer:** Ask for "Public Health Protection" to get in touch with the Licensing Officer for a particular facility.

### **Vancouver Coastal Health Authority**

Suite 200, 520–West 6th Ave.  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 4H5  
Phone: 604-875-4252 [Corporate Office]  
Fax: 604-874-5729  
General Inquiries: 604-736-2033  
Toll Free 1-866-884-0888  
TTY: 604-736-6259  
Website: [www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)

**Community Care Facility Liaison Officer:** To contact a liaison officer, ask for "Continuing Care; Long-term Care." The Chief Liaison Officer can be found in the "Priority Access Office of Continuing Care."

**Licensing Officer:** The Care Facility Licensing office number can be found under the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority heading of "Environmental Health" [Community Care Facility Licensing].

### **Vancouver Island Health Authority**

2101 Richmond Avenue,  
Victoria, BC V8R 4R7  
Phone: 250-370-8699 (Administration)  
Fax: 250-370-8750  
Website: [www.viha.ca](http://www.viha.ca)

The General Inquiries line for the Vancouver Island Health Authority is 1-888-533-2273. They can give you the phone number for the Licensing Officer for a long-term care facility in your particular area, as well as the phone number for the Community Care Liaison Officer for your facility. Sometimes, you may have to leave a message and they will get back in touch with you.

For example in Victoria, the Licensing Officer can be reached at 250-475-2235.

### **Provincial Health Services Authority**

#300 – 1195 West Broadway,  
Vancouver BC V6H  
Phone: 604-660-4089  
Website: [www.phsa.ca](http://www.phsa.ca)

This health authority is responsible for, among other things, the BC Centre for Disease Control.

### **BC Human Rights Tribunal**

BC Human Rights Tribunal deals with human rights complaints that are covered by the Human Rights Code. The Tribunal screens, mediates, and makes legal decisions on human rights complaints. The Tribunal gives people the opportunity to try to resolve the complaint through mediation. If the parties don't resolve the complaint, the Tribunal holds a hearing.

1170 – 605 Robson Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6B 5J3  
Phone: 604-775-2000  
Fax: 604-775-2020  
TTY: 604-775-2021  
Toll Free: 1-888-440-8844  
Website: [www.bchrt.bc.ca](http://www.bchrt.bc.ca)

### **BC Ombudsman Office**

BC Ombudsman Office receives inquiries and complaints about practices and services provided by public bodies such as hospitals or a regional health authority. They may investigate complaints to determine if the public body has been fair to the people it serves.

Free telephone access:  
1-800-567-3247 (all of BC) 1-800-667-1303 (TTY)

#### ***Vancouver***

BC Ombudsman Office,  
Suite 200–1111 Melville Street  
Vancouver, BC V6E 3V6  
Fax: 604-660-1691

#### ***Victoria***

Third Floor  
931 Fort Street  
Victoria, BC V8V 3K3  
Fax: 250-387-0198

Website: [www.ombud.gov.bc.ca](http://www.ombud.gov.bc.ca)

## **Public Guardian and Trustee**

The Assessment and Investigation Services department takes referrals and reviews allegations of abuse of vulnerable adults in the community to determine if formal authority is required.

You can find more information about Representation Agreements from the care facility where you live or by contacting:

Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia  
700-808 West Hastings Street,  
Vancouver, BC V6C 3L3

Phone: 604-775-0202 (Investigative services)

Phone: 604-660-4444 (Main office)

Fax: 604-660-0374

Email: [mail@trustee.bc.ca](mailto:mail@trustee.bc.ca)

Website: [www.trustee.bc.ca](http://www.trustee.bc.ca)

## **COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

### **Association of the Advocates for Care Reform (ACR)**

The Advocates for Care Reform is a volunteer organization that advocates for improved quality of life and care for residents of long-term care homes and establishes and supports family councils in long-term care facilities in BC.

3348 West Broadway  
Vancouver, BC V6R 2B2  
Phone: 604-732-7734  
E-Mail: [info@acrbc.ca](mailto:info@acrbc.ca)  
Website: [www.acrbc.ca](http://www.acrbc.ca)

### **Alzheimer Society of British Columbia**

The Alzheimer Society of BC provides support and information to caregivers. Caregivers are family, friends or professionals who provide care and support to people with Alzheimer disease.

The Society runs nearly 100 support groups across BC, and also has Resource Centres in many communities in the province to help you find the appropriate government contact in your community and other resources.

#### ***Provincial Office***

#300-828 West 8th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1E2  
Phone: 604-681-6530  
Toll-free: 1-800-667-3742  
Fax: 604-669-6907  
Email: [info@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:info@alzheimerbc.org)  
Website: [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org)

### **BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors (BCCEAS)**

The BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors (BCCEAS) has an information and referral service for seniors experiencing abuse or mistreatment. A legal information advocate is available by phone.

#304–5050 Kingsway Street  
Burnaby, BC  
Phone 604-437-1940  
Fax: 604-437-1929  
Email: [ceas@telus.net](mailto:ceas@telus.net)  
Website: [www.bcceas.ca](http://www.bcceas.ca)

### **BC Coalition of People with Disabilities**

BC Coalition of People with Disabilities provides information and support for people with disabilities. They are particularly involved in raising awareness and advocacy around the issues of restraints.

#204–456 West Broadway  
Phone: 604-875-0188  
Vancouver, BC V5Y 1R3  
Website: [www.bccpd.bc.ca](http://www.bccpd.bc.ca)

### **BC Human Rights Coalition**

BC Human Rights Coalition provides legal advice and support for people who have experienced discrimination. They also provide technical assistance for people who are filing a human rights complaint.

“Age discrimination” under the Human Rights Code in British Columbia only covers people aged 19 to 64, but a resident in a care facility may still be protected on another basis, such as physical or mental disability.

#### ***Vancouver***

#1202–150 West Hastings Street,  
Vancouver, BC V6B 1L8  
Phone: 604-689-8474  
Toll-Free: 1-877-689-8474  
Fax: 604-689-7511  
Website: [www.BCHRCoalition.org](http://www.BCHRCoalition.org)  
Email: [info@bchrcoalition.org](mailto:info@bchrcoalition.org)

### **Vancouver Island Human Rights Coalition**

# 418–620 View Street,  
Victoria, BC V8W 1J8  
Phone: 250-382-3012  
Email: [vihrc@telus.net](mailto:vihrc@telus.net)

### **UBC Law Students' Legal Advice Program (LSLAP)**

Law Students' Legal Advice Program (LSLAP) offers free legal advice and representation to people in the Greater Vancouver Regional District who cannot afford a lawyer. They are law students at the University of British Columbia and are assisted by accredited members of the bar who provide them with legal advice and guidance for each client.

The Law Centre is a similar service provided by the University of Victoria, Faculty of Law. Both services deal with several types of matters, including human rights.

They do not provide advice over the phone. The University of Victoria program students will visit a person in a hospital or a care facility to obtain instructions from them.

University of British Columbia  
Faculty of Law, Room 158  
1822 East Mall  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1  
Phone: 604-822-5791  
Fax: 604-822-1661  
Website: [www.lslap.bc.ca](http://www.lslap.bc.ca)

### **The Law Centre**

1221 Broad Street  
Victoria, BC V8W2A4  
Phone: 250-385-1221  
Fax: 250-385-1226  
Email: [reception@thelawcentre.ca](mailto:reception@thelawcentre.ca)  
Website: [www.thelawcentre.ca](http://www.thelawcentre.ca)

### **Canadian Centre for Elder Studies**

The Canadian Centre for Elder Law Studies was created by and operates under the auspices of the British Columbia Law Institute.

The objectives of the Centre are: to enrich and inform the lives of older adults in their relationship with the law; to meet the increasing need for legal education and research in relation to legal issues having particular significance for older adults ("Elder Law") and to serve as a national focal point for this emerging field.

Canadian Centre for Elder Law Studies  
1822 East Mall, University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z1  
Phone: 604-822-0142  
Fax: 604-822-0144  
Email: [ccels@bcli.org](mailto:ccels@bcli.org)  
Website: [www.ccels.ca](http://www.ccels.ca)



### **People's Law School**

People's Law School provides legal information on a variety of topics as well as speakers and courses. The information is in plain language and available to the people of British Columbia. You can find the publication "Take Charge- It's Your Life (Make a Representation Agreement)" on the People's Law School Website at:  
[www.publiclegaled.bc.ca/representation/index.htm](http://www.publiclegaled.bc.ca/representation/index.htm)

People's Law School  
150-900 Howe Street  
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2M4  
Phone: 604-331-5400  
Fax: 604-331-5401  
Email: [staff@publiclegaled.bc.ca](mailto:staff@publiclegaled.bc.ca)  
Website: [www.publiclegaled.bc.ca](http://www.publiclegaled.bc.ca)

### **Representation Agreement Resource Centre**

Representation Agreement Resource Centre (RARC) is a non-profit society that provides information about the legal tools that allow you to make your own plans in the case of injury, accident, or disability: the power of attorney and the representation agreement.

Their website answers questions about both documents, including how to make them and where to register them. Helpful booklets and documents are available online.

411 Dunsmuir St.  
Vancouver, BC V6B 1X4  
Phone: 604-408-7414  
Fax: 604-801-5506  
Website: [www.rarc.ca](http://www.rarc.ca)

### **Registered Nurses Association of BC**

2855 Arbutus Street  
Vancouver, BC  
V6J 3Y8  
604-736-7331 or 1-800-565-6505  
Fax: 604-738-2272  
Web: [www.rnabc.bc.ca](http://www.rnabc.bc.ca)

Regulatory association responsible for ensuring the safe, competent, and ethical practice of registered and licensed graduate nurses. Establishes standards for basic education and registration; develops, monitors, and promotes standards of practice; and intervenes when the actions of registered nurses are unacceptable. Office hours are 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday to Friday. Library hours are 9:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday to Friday.