

COVID-19 poses a unique threat to long-term care residents.

If you or your loved one is in a long-term care facility, you may be scared about the virus, the strain it could put on the facility's resources, and what could happen while visitors are not allowed into the building.

The Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program of Legal Aid Chicago* advocates for the rights of residents in long term care facilities.

As of now, we are not entering long-term care facilities, but we are continuing to provide information and assistance to LTC residents and their loved ones. Especially at this time, you can help us do our job by calling us with your concerns, questions, or observations.

If you have a concern about someone in a long-term care facility, information you would like to share, or a question about long-term care facilities and COVID-19, please contact us using the information below.

In addition, official guidance on long-term care facilities and COVID-19 is available from the [CDC, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#), and [Illinois Department of Public Health](#).

If you feel someone is at immediate risk in a long-term care facility, please contact the Illinois Department of Public Health at 1-800-252-4343 or dph.ccr@illinois.gov.

If you are a resident in a long-term care facility, have access to a phone, and would like to speak to a trained counselor about your distress during this difficult time, please call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.

*Our program serves Lake and suburban Cook County, except Evanston. If you live in Evanston, Chicago, or other parts of Illinois, find your regional Ombudsman Program [here](#). We work in skilled nursing facilities, supportive living facilities, assisted living facilities, intermediate care facilities (ICFs and ICF-DDs), and specialized mental health and rehabilitation facilities (SMHRFs).



Call

888.401.8200
Monday-Friday
8am-4:30pm

OR



Email

ombudsman@legalaidchicago.org

The facility is not letting visitors in. Can they do that?

Yes. The state and federal governments have told long-term care facilities not to let any visitors or non-essential personnel into the building. There are some exceptions, such as for residents on hospice or who have dementia and rely on contact with a family member for their wellbeing. If you believe that an exception should be made for you but the nursing home refuses, contact the Ombudsman Program.

The facility is not letting residents out. Can they do that?

Illinois long-term care facilities have been told to stop residents from coming in contact with other community members. However, many facilities are not letting residents go on walks, or even go out of the building onto the grounds. If this is impacting you, contact the Ombudsman Program.

How can I keep in touch with my loved one while they are in a long-term care facility?

Skilled nursing facility residents have the right to private phone calls. If you have been unable to reach your loved one by phone, contact the Ombudsman Program. Many facilities can help with FaceTime or other videoconferencing options. To find out if this is available, try calling the front desk or the activities director at the long-term care facility. We have also heard of family members visiting at residents' windows and sending letters.

Should I take my loved one home?

The congregate living setting of a long-term care facility does put individuals already vulnerable to COVID-19 at greater risk, and you may have additional fears about the facility's readiness to handle this crisis. Before making this decision, think about:

- Will you or other professionals be able to provide the care that is needed?
- Is your house able to accommodate your loved one's physical needs?
- Will the facility readmit your loved one once the crisis has passed? If Medicaid or other insurance is paying for the long-term care facility, could this impact future coverage?
- Was your loved one exposed to COVID-19? Could they expose other vulnerable members of the household?
- Have all members of the receiving household been able to socially distance? If other members of the household have to go out to work, can your loved one be isolated from them?



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With group activities cancelled, how can residents stay busy?

Most facilities should be offering one-to-one activity sessions. We have also heard some creative ideas that you can recommend, such as:

- Bingo over the PA system
- Activities and exercises from room doorways
- Postagram letter writing between residents
- Music/entertainment from the parking lot
- Writing room numbers on windows that families can find their loved ones
- Individualized knitting/painting/ arts and crafts

Is anyone still overseeing the facilities?

Yes. The Illinois Department of Public Health is the agency that regulates most types of long-term care facilities in Illinois. They are not entering facilities as much as usual, but they are still entering to respond to complaints that involve a risk of serious harm. If you believe that abuse or gross neglect is taking place, or if you believe that the long-term care facility is not taking adequate infection control measures, you may wish to make a complaint to the Illinois Department of Public Health. The Ombudsman Program can help you file this complaint.

What can I do as a community member?

Stay home. Even though most facility residents are not going out into the community, staff still are. If you spread the virus to one of these professionals, they could pass it on to a resident.

Show facility residents that they are still part of our community by calling your family member/ friend/neighbor who lives in a facility, having your kids make cards to send to residents, or posting signs where residents can see them from their windows.

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