

SENIOR INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

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Choosing a Nursing Home

Nursing Home Placement

Nursing homes, often referred to as skilled nursing facilities (SNF), offer the most intensive level of institutional care outside of a hospital. Skilled nursing facilities provide rehabilitative services as well as long-term custodial care, and may be appropriate for people who need 24-hour supervision. However, you may also want to consider alternatives such as assisted living or adult family homes.

Levels of Care & Staffing

These facilities are licensed through the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to provide 24-hour care. Nursing homes provide various levels of care depending on the resident's needs. Care can include therapy services, restorative care, nursing assistance, and custodial care. Staff who provide direct care includes registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants, and in some situations physical therapists, occupational therapists, or speech therapists.

Financial Considerations

Skilled nursing care is usually the most costly of the long-term care options. Payment for nursing home care may be private, long-term care insurance, Medicaid, and in some cases, Medicare.

Medicare may cover the cost of nursing home care after a 3-day qualifying stay at a hospital. Coverage is limited to skilled rehabilitation. If you qualify for Medicare coverage the first 20 days may be covered 100%. There is a co-payment for days 21-100 if you continue to be qualified for Medicare coverage.

Medicaid is a program available through DSHS for those who meet financial eligibility. See "Q&A on Medicaid for Nursing Home Care" available online at www.washingtonlawhelp.org (click on "Aging & Elder Law", then on "Long term Care Assistance") or from Senior Information & Assistance.

Finding the right one

Tour the various facilities to determine which facility is the most appropriate for your needs. You can obtain a listing of nursing homes from Home & Community Services (HCS), a division of DSHS:

Skagit: (360) 416-7289 **Whatcom:** (360) 756-5750

Or contact Senior Information & Assistance:

Skagit: (360) 428-1301 **Whatcom:** (360) 738-2500

DSHS licenses nursing homes, and they also inspect each nursing home annually. Those inspection reports are posted in the facility. This information is also available on the Internet at www.medicare.gov – click on "Nursing Homes" at the bottom of the page under "Resource Locator".

Points to Consider

Availability of beds

If your first choice of nursing home does not have an immediate vacancy, placement on a waiting list may be an option. Most facilities offer private or semi-private rooms. Some facilities designate certain sections of the facility for Medicare or Medicaid patients. Transfers from room to room may occur if there is a change in payment source. Also, you can usually transfer from one facility to another.

Admission Requirements

The nursing home you have chosen will provide you with information about what is required for admission. In general this will include: **1) Medical** - a current medical history and physician's orders. **2) Financial** - method of payment is established at time of admission. Be prepared to provide Medicare, Medicaid or insurance information. **3) Funeral Home** – a funeral home preference is usually indicated at time of admission. **4) CPR Directive or POLST** – each facility has a form for residents to indicate what they would want done in the event of needing CPR. These forms are required even if other advance directives are in place. **5) Clothing** – the nursing home may provide a list of suggested items and require them to be labeled with your name. An inventory of clothing and personal belongings should be made at this time. **6) TV and Phone** – facilities have a TV and phone available in common areas, or residents may have the option of providing and paying for their own private TV and phone in their room.

Admission Agreement

The admission agreement is a written agreement or contract that specifies the conditions under which the resident is admitted. It must be signed before admission can take place. Admission agreements should contain the following:

- 1) Financial agreements (room rates, charges for ancillary services)
- 2) The date of admission
- 3) The services available
- 4) Resident's rights and responsibilities

Visitation

Ask about visitation policies. Visitors should always be welcome at the facility. Will you be able to visit your family member at any time during the day? Does the facility have suggested visiting hours, and are they flexible? Are you welcome at mealtime?

Resident's Rights

Each resident has the right to respect, dignity, and privacy. The list of patients' rights and responsibilities was developed in the Washington State Legislature (1979 WAC:248:14-217). It should be posted in all skilled nursing facilities. In addition, most nursing homes have a Residents' Council, which meets to discuss concerns about the care practices of the facility.

Conflict Resolution

Ask if conflicts have arisen in the past and how they were resolved. When conflicts occur, they should be handled with an attitude of openness and fairness. Ask the staff how they manage behavioral problems of residents.

The local Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program will answer questions and address complaints regarding residential placement. They can be reached at (360) 421-1080 or (360) 416-7585. You can also contact the Washington State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program at 1-800-562-6028.