

How to Choose a Long-term Care Home

Geography

Most people start by choosing five homes (as required by the Community Care Access Centre) that are close to home and easily accessible by visitors. Concerned Friends has an interactive map on its website (www.concernedfriends.ca) where one can type in a postal code and locate the long-term care homes within a given radius.

Special Services

If a loved one requires any special services, visit the home's website or call to see if those services are available. For example, some homes specialize in caring for residents with dementia.

Read Inspection Reports Online

The Ministry of Health and Long-term Care posts the inspection reports for each home on its website. Visit www.publicreporting.ltchomes.net/en-ca/default.aspx. Here you can read about complaints or critical incidents that may have happened in recent years. Read the most recent "Resident Quality Inspection" which identifies where the home is non-compliant. Pay special attention to the "Orders of the Inspector." An Order is issued for more serious non-compliances and requires the home to comply by a specific date.

Scheduled Visits

Call each home and schedule a tour. During the tour, use all of your senses. For example:

- Do the residents look happy and well cared for? Are staff interacting with residents in a respectful way?
- Is there a lot of unnecessary noise?
- Are there lingering odours?
- Try to visit during meal time. Look to see if the meals are delivered in an orderly and respectful manner, and if everyone requiring assistance is receiving it.
- Does the atmosphere feel homey? Or does it feel chaotic? Sometimes busy workers can forget this is a home for seniors, and not just a workplace.

Questions to Ask

- What is the ratio of personal support workers to residents? The ratio will be different during the day and at night. There is no legislated minimum staffing level, and as a result, many homes are dangerously short-staffed. A ratio of one personal support worker to 10 residents would be ideal.
- What sorts of activities are available to the residents? How often are they taken outside? Typically there is one activity coordinator for every 60 residents in a long-term care home. It is challenging for one staff member to provide activities for so many on a daily basis.
- Does the home focus on individual needs? For example, if a resident misses dinner for some reason, will he be offered a

meal later on? If a resident wishes to go to bed at a specific time of his choosing, will that wish be accommodated every night? Some homes have adopted a “patient-centric” approach that recognizes such needs.

- Does the home have a nurse practitioner who makes regular visits? Nurse practitioners have been found to enhance resident care and keep trips to the emergency ward at a minimum.
- Are staff trained in managing difficult and aggressive behaviours? This is of growing concern in long-term care homes because many residents are mentally ill and physical attacks on residents are not uncommon.
- Does the home have a secured unit for highly aggressive residents? Confrontations between residents are common in long-term care. If a frail person is placed in a room with an aggressive person, will the home make every effort to move the physically aggressive person to another room (or better, to a secured unit?).
- Does the home have a sprinkler system in case of fire? Ontario has a poor record when it comes to fatal fires in long-term care homes. During the night, staffing levels generally fall to one staff for 20 residents. With so many in wheelchairs or suffering from dementia, how would the residents get out? Are fire drills conducted during the night shift?
- Is the home for-profit or not-for-profit? Research shows that not-for-profit homes provide better care and pay their staff better.

For help in choosing a long-term care home, or in resolving a problem within one, call Concerned Friends in Toronto at 416.489.0146 (toll-free at 1.855.489.0146). Or visit the website at www.concernedfriends.ca.