

RESIDENTS' GROUPS

What are Residents' Groups?

Residents' groups are made up of residents and their relatives and friends who meet to discuss issues affecting residents living in aged care facilities.

By participating in meetings, residents and relatives are able to make decisions about issues affecting the residents' quality of life, comment on the care and services provided by the facility and make informed decisions and choices. Meetings also provide an opportunity to express complaints and grievances.

Management has a responsibility to communicate and consult with residents and relatives about care and services and Residents' Group meetings provide a good opportunity for this to occur.

Structure of meetings

Residents' Group meetings need to be open to all residents who wish to attend. It is usual for relatives and friends to be encouraged to attend as well. There are no fixed rules about how to structure the meetings. The residents of each facility have the right to decide the structure that best suits their needs. Above all, it is important for everyone to recognise that the residents have ownership of the meetings.

It is not appropriate for management of the facility to impose a structure or to limit the type of issues that can be discussed at a meeting.

The first step is to decide who will lead or facilitate the Group. The residents have the right to choose who this will be, after all it is their Group. Often, an interested resident, relative or friend will be appointed. Sometimes the residents may prefer to hand over this choice to the facility which might appoint a staff member such as the activities director to run the meetings. The need for office bearers will depend on who is the facilitator of the Group. It

is also important for someone to take the minutes of the meetings.

A common structure is for a resident, relative or friend to facilitate the Group and for staff not to be present for the first part of the meetings. This enables participants to discuss issues in a safe and confidential environment. The Director of Nursing or Manager may be invited to attend the second part of the meeting to hear about new matters and to provide feedback on previous issues. Certain staff members, e.g. the chef or the activities director, may be invited to discuss relevant issues.

Frequency of meetings

It is up to the residents to decide how frequently meetings are to be held. However, it is common for meetings to take place monthly. This helps residents to have a routine and to build relationships. Monthly meetings also help to keep the number of issues down, enable issues to be dealt with more quickly and the length of meetings will be shorter.

Most participants have contact with each other between meetings. It is helpful to have a process for dealing with issues between meetings, and raising agenda items.

Purpose of Groups

Having stated aims and objectives helps to clarify the direction and purpose of the Group. Purposes may include:

- enabling residents to discuss issues concerning the care and services they receive in the facility;
- improving communication between residents, staff and management;
- being a forum where residents can share ideas, suggestions, opinions and problems and to influence management decisions to ensure that they are more responsive to residents' needs;
- being a forum for grievance and dispute resolution;

- being a decision-making forum so residents can maintain as far as possible, their control, independence and autonomy over their lives;
- increasing residents' self-esteem and confidence, motivation and responsibility, feelings of achievement and communication and social skills;
- having guest speakers to provide information on a range of topics of interest to residents including information about their rights and entitlements as residents of an aged care facility;
- improving the attitude of staff by allowing them to see residents' skills, knowledge and experience;
- being a means for management to consult with and provide information to residents and relatives;
- protecting and maintaining the rights of residents generally;
- above all, being a means of improving the quality of life for residents in the facility.

Role of management and staff

Management and staff play an important role in the success of Residents' Groups. It is vital that management provides prompt, specific, and respectful answers and solutions to the Group's grievances, suggestions and concerns. This involves listening carefully to what is being said, investigating the relevant issues and implementing solutions that are acceptable to the residents and relatives.

Other ways in which management and staff can support Residents' Groups include:

- reassuring residents that raising issues will not jeopardise their position in the facility;
- encouraging residents to speak freely about their wishes and concerns;
- helping residents to get to the meetings if they want this;
- having written notices of meeting times clearly displayed;
- sending relatives notices promoting the meetings;
- ensuring that all participants can hear what is being said;

- acknowledging and respecting all contributions at meetings;
- taking the minutes and/or typing them up and distributing them to residents and relatives;
- providing information about the facility's policies and procedures;
- involving residents in decisions that affect daily living in the facility;
- making a committed effort to follow through on the Group's recommendations.

Achievements

The achievements of Residents' Groups include:

- choosing the types of activities and programs provided by the facility;
- inviting various guest speakers to meetings;
- having input into policy development;
- reducing staff response times to buzzers by showing how delays adversely affected residents' care;
- establishing a residents' garden;
- improving lighting in residents' rooms;
- creating a food sub-committee to have input into menu planning;
- offering solutions to residents' grievances;
- motivating management to have a more reliable laundry system by requiring the facility to compensate residents for the replacement cost of missing labelled clothing;
- having a Residents' Group brochure in the kit provided to new residents;
- increasing participants' knowledge of residents' rights and responsibilities;
- developing a residents' newsletter;
- organising some fund raising activities and determining how the funds were to be spent.

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Empowering older Victorians

Elder Rights Advocacy is the registered business name of Residential Care Rights Inc. (ABN 63 367 539 827) which is part of the National Aged Care Advocacy Program - an Australian Government Initiative.

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