



**Guidelines for the Development of
Resident or Family Councils**

**HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE
MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide information to assist in the development and implementation of resident/family councils that work collaboratively with facility staff and the operator to represent the interests of residents and their families or representatives, and engage the residents in decision making on matters that affect their day to day living.

Definition

A resident/family council is a group of consisting of persons in care and/or their representatives, family members and contact persons who work together with staff to maintain and enhance the quality of life of residents and to provide a voice in decisions within the facility that affect them.

2. Objectives

While specific objectives vary from one council to another depending upon the interests/goals of the individual council members, resident/family councils frequently form to address some or all of the following objectives:

- Provide networking and support and encouragement for residents and their families;
- Engage in education and information opportunities;
- Discussion of concerns and generating solutions to problems that arise; and
- Working on projects that will benefit residents.

While the creation of resident/family councils can be an effective way to represent the interests of residents, under certain circumstances it is not always feasible or necessary to establish a formal council. Under such circumstances informal collaborative arrangements between residents, their families and facility staff and operators can be an effective alternative.

3. Developing Mission Statements, Goals and Terms of Reference

Mission Statements and Goals

Research indicates that one of the most important aspects of a successful council is its structure.¹

A council that lacks structure and direction often fails despite the best intentions of its members.

A mission statement states why the council exists, what its goals are, and helps to guide the council's work.

¹ "A Guide to Starting And Maintaining A Family/resident Council". Prepared by Pamela Bailey Assistance provided by Bonnie Robertson-Evans, Family/resident Council Member and Toronto Regional Family/resident Council Network Member for the Family/resident Councils' Program.

Most resident/family council mission statements identify all of the residents and their family members as members and commit to monitoring and increasing the well-being of the residents. Four commonly held goals have been identified and they are:

1. **Communication** – A resident/family council facilitates and enhances communication between residents, families, staff and the facility owners/managers.
2. **Collaboration** – A resident/family council advances the interests of the residents. An example of this was when a resident/family council successfully collaborated with the staff and the facility operator for the installation of closed captioned television services for residents with hearing impairments.
3. **Support** – Resident/family councils support residents and family members. Resident/family councils may look to their members and facility staff to obtain guidance on what forms of support are most needed.
4. **Education** – A resident/family council provides a forum for discussion of relevant issues. Resident/family councils receive information directly from the administration, and staff and may receive education from external sources. An example would be a resident/family council requesting information about personal emergency preparedness.

4. Developing Terms of Reference

Terms of reference are the basic operating tool for successful councils, and may be helpful in outlining the role and goals of a resident/family council. For example, Terms of Reference can outline when and how council position will be filled, and may encourage individuals to express interest in a council position. Another benefit is that Terms of Reference can ensure that individual's personal issues do not become the focus of discussions and instead support the work of the council to represent the interests of the majority of the residents.

Some examples of terms of reference are:

- Memberships
- Time Commitment and Responsibilities
- Selection of Council Positions
- Meeting times and frequency

5. Staff Liaison

A staff liaison can be a great asset for a resident/family council. The staff liaison helps to facilitate communication between the resident/family council and the facility manager and can also assist with support and identifying opportunities for education. The staff liaison is usually appointed by the facility manager.

6. Planning the Introductory Meeting

When considering the creation of a resident/family council, it is important to hold a meeting to which all residents and families of residents are invited. The purpose of the meeting is to explain the concept of resident/family councils, determine the level of interest in having a council, and to begin organizing one, if the residents and families are interested in forming a council.

The introductory meeting should include the following components:

1. The purpose of a resident/family council, including identifying common goals, outlining a proposed structure, and the processes and supports available to make the resident/family council successful.
2. Identifying the level of interest residents and family have in forming a council.
3. Identifying residents and family interested in taking a council position.
4. Determining the frequency and structure of future meetings – deciding on regular or as needed meetings, and how information about the meetings will be circulated, and how residents and families will be kept informed about discussions at the meetings.

7. Cultural Diversity and Resident/Family Councils

Ensuring that the ethnic diversity of the residents in the facility is represented on the resident/family council is important in order to reflect their interests.

The following tips help to ensure effective representation of cultural diversity:

- Translate flyers, letters, minutes and newsletters into the languages represented in the facility when appropriate.
- Create an open and safe environment that encourages all residents and families to take part.
- Educate residents, families and staff about the different cultural backgrounds of residents in the facility.
- Encourage the facility to plan activities and events that give staff, residents and families and opportunity to share their cultural heritage.

8. Characteristics of Successful Resident/Family Councils

- Staff is engaged in and supports the council illustrating the facility's commitment.
- Creation of a mission statement that serves to reinforce the goals of the council and gives potential members a reason to take part in the council.
- Terms of reference and effective meetings help keep councils on track so members can use their time efficiently.
- The council's activities are clearly communicated and feedback from members is actively encouraged. People volunteer if someone they love benefits from their efforts and if volunteers themselves benefit.
- A collaborative, respectful environment is reflected in meetings.

9. Characteristics of Successful Resident/Family Councils

Resident/family councils provide an opportunity to provide support to staff and management in efforts to provide quality care. If members of the resident family council have compliments, concerns or complaints they should work with their facility representative to seek a collaborative response to the concern. If the concern or complaint is not resolved by the facility representative, the council should follow the steps and processes of the facility including contacting the Facility Operator. If the concern or complaint is not resolved at this level the council should follow the appropriate complaint resolution process in their respective health authority. If the concern/complaint is still not satisfactorily resolved the council can have their concern/complaint independently assessed by the Patient Care Quality Review Board.

For individual health authorities:

Fraser Health Authority –

http://www.fraserhealth.ca/about_us/compliments_and_complaints/compliments_and_complaints

Interior Health Authority –

<http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourEnvironment/ChildCareFacilities/IncidentReporting/Pages/default.aspx>

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority –

http://www.vch.ca/your_stay/in_general/patient_care_quality_office/patient_care_quality_office

Vancouver Island Health Authority –

<http://www.viha.ca/patientcarequalityoffice/complaint.htm>

Northern Health Authority –

<http://www.northernhealth.ca/YourHealth/CommunityCareLicensing/Families/FilingAComplaint.aspx>

The Patient Care Quality Review Board can be contacted at:

Patient Care Quality Review Boards

PO Box 9643

Victoria BC V8W 9V1

Phone: 1.866.952.2448

contact@patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca

Appendix A: Sample Resident/Family Council Terms of Reference

1. **NAME**
(Insert Facility Name) Resident/Family Council
2. **MISSION STATEMENT**
“Improve the quality of life and quality of care for all residents by promoting an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, sensitivity, caring and support among staff, residents and their family members.”
3. **GOALS**
 - To inform and educate families
 - To share ideas for the purpose of problem solving
 - To maintain two-way communication between families, residents and the facility
 - To collaborate with facility staff, families and residents to address the interests of all residents and families.
 - To provide mutual support for all residents and their families
4. **MEMBERSHIP**
Members of the resident/family council shall be persons in care and/or their representatives, family members and contract persons.
5. **POSITIONS AND THEIR DUTIES**
Members shall be selected for positions as needed (to be determined by the membership) in order to carry out the administrative/support functions of the council that may include the following:
 - Facilitating meetings;
 - Recording and distributing meeting minutes;
 - Organizing/coordinating activities/eventsCommittees to carry out specific projects/functions may be formed as needed by the council positions/membership.
6. **SELECTION**
Selection of council positions shall be held on a frequency to be determined by the council membership

Members are encouraged to volunteer on their own initiative to be considered for office.
7. **MEETINGS**
Meetings will be held on a schedule to be determined by the membership.
8. **AMENDMENTS**
Amendments may be made to these terms of reference at any meeting of the council, and supported by all present.