

Nursing Facility Care

Finding the Right Facility

Finding the right nursing facility is time-consuming, but very important. In some cases, the facility may become the individual's home for a significant period of time. As a result, you should visit a number of facilities, spend time talking with residents, families and staff, and observe the care being provided. Use the following steps to guide you through the process.

1. Consider Location and Types of Services Needed

Find out from a physician what kinds of services your relative will need.

Decide who will visit most often, and identify those communities closest to the visiting relative or friend.

If it's important, find out whether your relative's personal physician will be able to continue to provide care in the communities you select.

2. Identify Appropriate Facilities

Once you have selected the communities in which to look, identify facilities in those communities that provide the kinds of services your relative needs.

Select a reasonable number of facilities and make appointments with the admissions staff for an informational meeting and tour of the facility.

3. Visit, Observe and Ask Questions

Do residents appear well cared for? Are they dressed appropriately and well groomed? Ask to speak with residents and family members about their experiences with the facility.

Listen for the content and tone of the staff as they speak with residents. Do staff members seem friendly and interested in the residents? Do they call residents by their appropriate names? Do they respond promptly to residents' requests?

Does the facility appear clean? Does it smell? Strong odors may indicate poor assistance with personal hygiene or other unsanitary conditions. Ask to see the shower and food preparation areas in particular.

Ask about the facility's hiring and staffing policies. How are prospective employees screened? What kind of training do new employees receive? What about ongoing training? What is the staff-to-resident ratio?

If you are considering a facility with a specialized Alzheimer's unit, ask if the unit meets the Alzheimer's Association's suggested guidelines for such units.

If your relative will be residing in a semi-private room, ask about the facility's policies regarding roommates. How are residents paired? What recourse is there if a roommate situation doesn't work out?

What is the facility's policy about personal items? To what extent can an individual bring personal items from home? What steps are taken by the facility to prevent theft of personal items?

What are the facility's visiting hours? Are there common rooms available for family visits in addition to the resident's own room?

Observe the facility at mealtime and sample the food. What is the quantity, quality and temperature of the food? Are there food choices? Are special diets available? Are snacks and drinks available on the units?

What social activities are offered? What is the nature of the activities and how often are they offered? Ask to see a copy of the facility's activity calendar for the month.

Depending on the needs of the individual, inquire about the facility's rehabilitation program and ask to see the therapy area.

Ask about the cost of care and the availability of Medicare and Medicaid coverage.

4. Narrow Your Choices, Revisit and Check Survey Performance

Narrow the choice to two or three facilities, and visit these facilities again.

Contact the Department of Public Health (DPH) at (800) 493-8333 and ask for the survey performance tool for each of the facilities on your list. You can also obtain this information on DPH's website. The tool measures a facility's performance in key quality areas. You can also request copies of the complete survey reports upon which the tool is based.

Question each facility about its survey performance. If performance is less than satisfactory in any area, ask what the facility has done to correct the problem.

Make your final choice and contact the admissions staff for placement advice.

Once you have made your selection, meet with the administrator and key staff to discuss any specific concerns you may have about your relative's care.

Once your relative has been admitted to the nursing facility, visit as often as you can and remain involved in his or her ongoing care. While the family's role changes when an elderly or disabled person is admitted to a nursing facility, family contact remains just as important. If your family needs support in adjusting to this change, seek out the facility's social worker for help and ask the facility if it has a family support group or family council in which you can participate.

Source: MECF.org (Massachusetts Extended Care Federation) and MassLongTermCare.org