

FAQ: Nursing Home Regulation

1. What is the role of the Department of Health in regulating nursing homes?

The department licenses nursing homes and regulates them to ensure they adhere to minimal standards in order to be licensed in Pennsylvania. We conduct on-site inspections to ensure that the facility adheres to state and federal regulations. Nursing homes with a history of serious problems are inspected more frequently. Usually, at the same time as the licensure surveys, we conduct surveys on behalf of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), a branch of the federal government, to determine if the facility meets its requirements for certification to receive federal funds.

2. What is a survey?

A survey tells us how well the nursing home ensures that resident care meets federal and state regulatory standards. To accomplish this, the survey team follows common standards and practices to assess the residents' quality of care and life, including:

- Observing how the staff interacts with and provides nursing care to residents;
- Conducting interviews with residents and their family members about the care they are receiving;
- Reviewing a sampling of resident charts to verify necessary services are identified and provided;
- Touring the facility to verify the environment is comfortable and safe for the residents;
- Observing meals to ensure the food is nutritionally balanced, attractive, the right temperature and tastes good;
- Observing nurses providing medications and treatment to residents;
- Conducting group (i.e., resident council) interviews to identify any issues or concerns the group has; and
- Meeting with staff and administrators to review their plans to address issues and concerns.

3. What is the role of the federal government in regulating nursing homes?

CMS gives the state survey agency specific instructions on how to conduct surveys and provides guidance on the survey and enforcement process. CMS can impose civil monetary penalties against facilities that violate federal certification requirements, based on state recommendations. CMS can also impose other sanctions, such as limiting their reimbursement for services if the services do not meet standards.

4. How does the department respond when there is evidence that a nursing home isn't providing the proper care or services for a resident?

The initial response is the issuance of a report of deficiencies to the facility. Based on the seriousness of the deficiencies identified, one or more of the following state- and/or federal-level enforcement actions may occur:

- Imposing a fine;

- Imposing a ban on admissions and/or re-admissions;
- Issuing of a provisional license;
- Terminating participation in the federal Medicare or state Medicaid programs;
- Revoking the facility's license; and/or
- Mandating training programs.

Each nursing home receives the written survey results and must provide a plan outlining how the identified issues will be resolved. Survey results are available at each facility and on our website, www.health.pa.gov.

Check here for a [list of enforcement actions](#) that have been taken by the department.

5. How can I find out information about a specific nursing home?

The [Nursing Home Facility Locator Page](#) on our website allows you to search on specific nursing homes within Pennsylvania to find information like patient care surveys, building safety surveys and other additional information on the nursing home. The website also allows you to compare facilities.

[Nursing Home Compare](#) contains information on every Medicare and Medicaid certified nursing home in the country.

6. How can I report something that I think is wrong in a nursing home or is a problem related to a resident's care?

The first thing to do is to discuss your concern with the nursing home administrator. Staff at the nursing home should be able to tell you the administrator's name and how to contact him or her.

If your concern is about possible elder abuse, you can call the Department of Aging's 24-hour hotline at 1-800-490-8505.

You can also speak to an ombudsman, who is a specially trained person who will look into problems about nursing home residents' dignity and respect. The state ombudsman can be reached at the Department of Aging's office, 717-783-8975.

You can also file a complaint about the quality and safety of nursing home care by calling us at 1-800-254-5164.

Please note that the Department of Health does not license or oversee personal care homes/assisted living facilities. For complaints regarding a personal care home/assisted living facility, call the [Department of Human Services](#): 1-877-401-8835.

For other inquiries regarding nursing care facilities, call 717-787-1816.