

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice

Issue Brief

Animal Care Standards vs. Nursing Home Resident Experiences: Protections Against Abuse & Neglect

The quality and safety of nursing homes are longstanding public concerns. Numerous studies over the years have identified widespread and significant deficiencies in care, including serious abuse and neglect. It is such cases of degrading and inhumane conditions that led us to question the extent to which the experiences of residents in nursing homes actually fall below the standards and expectations for treatment of animals in zoos and other settings.

This is one issue in a series of briefs that provide the results of our assessment of the extent to which conditions in nursing homes fail to meet the standards of care for animals. Each brief focuses on an issue which we have identified as important. These briefs, and the [full report](#) on our assessment, are available at <https://nursinghome411.org/ltccc-report-animal-care-vs-nursing-home-care>.

The point of this work is not to trivialize the experiences of either nursing home residents or animals but, rather, to illustrate how systemic failures to hold nursing homes accountable for abuse and neglect too often subject residents to conditions that not only fall below the federal nursing home standards of care, but also below accepted standards for the humane treatment of animals.

EXAMPLE OF ANIMAL CARE STANDARD VS. NURSING HOME RESIDENT EXPERIENCE



Physical abuse, deprivation of food or water, aversive spraying with a hose, and other forms of negative reinforcement or punishment-based training are never used to train, shift or otherwise handle primates.

[-Standards for New World Primates, GFAS](#)



At a for-profit Iowa facility, an 87-year-old resident with dementia was denied water for several days and died after suffering extreme dehydration and extreme pain. The facility had a five-star rating at the time of the incident.

[-Senate Finance Committee Hearing](#)

STANDARDS FOR NURSING HOME CARE

Nursing home residents have the right to be free from abuse and neglect. Strong federal standards have been implemented to protect residents from any kind of abuse. Unfortunately, they are poorly enforced by the state and federal oversight agencies. For information on these standards and resources for resident-centered advocacy, see LTCCC's [Abuse, Neglect, & Crime Reporting Center](#).

RELEVANT NURSING HOME STATISTICS

- **Abuse prevalence.** [A 2010 study](#) found that 1 in 10 people age 60 or older experience some form of elder abuse in a given year, including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, potential neglect, and financial abuse.
- **Abuse on the rise.** [A July 2019 Government Accountability \(GAO\) report](#) found that the number of nursing home abuse citations more than doubled between 2013 and 2017.
- **Costs of abuse.** Elder financial abuse and fraud [costs older Americans between \\$2.9 billion to \\$36.5 billion annually](#).
- **Failure to report.** [A June 2019 HHS Office of the Inspector General \(OIG\) report](#) found that nursing homes failed to report 84 percent of the sampled 7,831 potential abuse and neglect incidents to state survey agencies. The report also estimated that 1 in 5 Medicare claims for emergency room visits from nursing homes were the result of potential abuse or neglect.



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NEWS AND REPORTS

U.S. Senate Hearing: “Not Forgotten”

Numerous instances of nursing home abuse were detailed during a March 2019 hearing held by the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance, [“Not Forgotten: Protecting Americans From Abuse and Neglect in Nursing Homes.”](#)

At [Walker Methodist Health Center](#) (MN), an 83-year-old resident with Alzheimer’s disease was [raped by a male caregiver](#) who had been a main suspect in at least two sexual abuse cases at the facility. The resident’s daughter [testified during the Senate Finance Committee hearing](#) that “[m]y final memories of my mother’s life now include watching her bang uncontrollably on her private parts for days after the rape, with tears rolling down her eyes, apparently trying to tell me what had been done to her but unable to speak due to her disease.”

“My **final memories** of my mother’s life now include watching her **bang uncontrollably** on her private parts for days after the rape, with **tears rolling down her eyes...**”

At a for-profit Iowa facility, [Timely Mission Nursing Home](#), an 87-year-old resident with dementia was denied water for several days and died after suffering extreme dehydration and extreme pain, [according to the resident’s daughter’s testimony](#). The facility had enjoyed a five-star rating at the time of the incident, despite being fined for physical and verbal abuse a year before the resident’s death.