

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice

Issue Brief

Animal Care Standards vs. Nursing Home Resident Experiences: Sufficient Staffing with Appropriate Skills & Competencies

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](https://nursinghome411.org/ltccc-report-animal-care-vs-nursing-home-care) 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.

ANIMAL CARE STANDARD VS. NURSING HOME RESIDENT EXPERIENCE



A minimum of two qualified elephant keepers must be present any time a keeper is within trunk's reach of an elephant in order to allow a second person to intervene if required.

-Accreditation Standards, AZA



A resident suffered a fractured femur after the facility improperly transferred her with only one staff member despite the resident's care plan instructing staff to transfer the resident with assistance of two staff members.

-Statement of Deficiencies, CMS

STANDARDS FOR NURSING HOME CARE

Under federal law, nursing homes are required to have a registered nurse on duty eight hours a day, seven days a week. Additionally, nursing homes must have sufficient care staff to meet every resident's care, monitoring, and psycho-social needs. Unfortunately, "sufficient staff" is not a concept that is well-understood or enforced by many state surveyors, which is why so many nursing homes are woefully understaffed. For more information, see our [Fact Sheet: Requirements for Nursing Home Care Staff & Administration](#).

RELEVANT NURSING HOME STATISTICS

- **Resident needs unmet.** [A 2001 landmark federal study](#) indicated that a typical resident needs at least 4.1 total staff hours per day and current research suggests 4.5 hours per day given increased resident needs. Unfortunately, too many nursing homes fail to allocate the resources necessary to maintain safe and sufficient staffing. Federal data indicate that the average nursing home maintains only 3.4 total care staff hours per day.
- **Fluctuations.** A 2017 [report in The New York Times](#) revealed frequent and significant fluctuations in day-to-day staffing, particularly on weekends. The data showed that on the worst staffed days at an average facility, "on-duty personnel cared for nearly twice as many residents as they did when the staffing roster was fullest."
- **Lack of compliance.** A 2019 [Health Affairs study](#) found that "75 percent of nursing homes were almost never in compliance with what CMS expected their RN staffing level to be, based on residents' acuity."
- **Staffing goes up during inspections.** The *Health Affairs* study also found that staffing levels were higher during the weeks closest to the time of inspection.

NEWS AND REPORTS

Improper lift transfer

A resident at [Prescott Nursing and Rehab Community](#) (WI) [suffered a fractured femur](#) after the facility improperly transferred her with only one staff member rather than two. The resident's care plan instructed staff to use a Hoyer lift (a lifting device) with the assistance of two staff members, but the certified nursing assistant (CNA) attempted to transfer the resident alone because the two "other aides were busy," according to the CNA's statement. During the transfer, the resident "lunged forward and began to slide out of her chair," and was later observed with a baseball-sized lump in her right leg. Despite the serious injury, the violation was cited as no harm.

Resident left waiting, despite staff's knowledge of resident's call for help

[Riverview Manor Healthcare](#) (IA) nursing home was [cited for failing to "\[h\]ave enough nurses to care for every resident in a way that maximizes the resident's well-being."](#) A resident told one surveyor that there is usually a 30 minute wait no matter the time of day and that it could be up to an hour at times. The resident explained to the surveyors that s/he had an accident and had to sit in feces until the staff responded, which made the resident "feel awful."

Note: Visit <https://nursinghome411.org/nursing-home-data-information/staffing/> for the latest information on staffing levels for any licensed nursing home.