

LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice

Issue Brief

Animal Care Standards vs. Nursing Home Resident Experiences: Nutrition & Hydration

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



Guinea pigs and hamsters shall be fed each day . . . The food shall be free from contamination, wholesome, palatable and of sufficient quantity and nutritive value to meet the normal daily requirements for the condition and size of the guinea pig or hamster.
-Animal Welfare Act, USDA



A New York facility failed to provide food of nutritive value, palatable and served at the proper temperature” with residents complaining that the food – including hot meals – were served cold.
-Statement of Deficiencies, CMS

STANDARDS FOR NURSING HOME CARE

Federal standards require that resident meals are healthy, appropriate for the individual, and appetizing. In addition, it is required that the dining experience fosters resident dignity. For more information on relevant regulatory standards, see [LTCCC's Primer: Nursing Home Quality Standards](#). See our [Fact Sheet: Resident Dignity & Quality of Life Standards](#) for information on requirement in respect to promoting resident dignity and independence in dining.

RELEVANT NURSING HOME STATISTICS

- **Food and fluid consumption concerns.** As noted in a [Journal of Gerontology article](#), “[i]nadequate oral food and fluid intake is a common problem among nursing home (NH) residents.” The article’s authors note that multiple studies have found that 64 to 80 percent of nursing home residents’ “mealtime food and fluid consumption is less than the federal criterion.”
- **Dehydration a significant risk.** [Researchers have found](#) that 46 percent of older people in long-term care (nursing homes and other residential care settings) had impending or current dehydration. “Dehydration is associated with significant adverse outcomes in older people including increased risk of hospital admission, disability, infection, falls, acute ischaemic stroke and mortality despite being largely preventable and treatable.”

“Inadequate oral food and fluid intake is a common problem among nursing home (NH) residents.”

- *Journal of Gerontology*

NEWS AND REPORTS

Failure to meet nutritional needs

A woman with dementia in an Ohio nursing home suffered “significant weight loss (greater than 5% in one month)” due to the facility’s failure to carry out a dietician’s order to provide snacks to counter decreases in her weight discussed and noted at the facility’s weekly interdisciplinary meetings. A [surveyor’s investigation](#) found falsification of records (to indicate that the resident had received and eaten food which she had neither received nor eaten) and, when interviewed, the LPN “denied that she was aware of [the resident] having had any weight loss.”

A dish worst served cold

A [New York facility failed to provide food “of nutritive value, palatable and served at the proper temperature”](#) to its residents. Residents complained that the food served was too cold, and one resident said that most of the time, the hot meals are served cold. Even the ombudsman that served at the nursing home stated that “one of the main complaints he has heard is the food being served cold.”