

# LONG TERM CARE COMMUNITY COALITION

*Advancing Quality, Dignity & Justice*

## **THE BENEFITS OF THERAPY SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEMENTIA FACT SHEET FOR INDIVIDUALS LIVING AT HOME OR IN ASSISTED LIVING**

Therapy services can be very valuable for people living with dementia, helping them maintain their independence and improve their quality of life. By addressing physical, cognitive, and communication abilities, therapy services can help people with dementia adapt to their condition, delay decline, and sustain a greater sense of autonomy. However, accessing these services can be challenging due to systemic barriers, funding limitations, and gaps in caregiver and professional understanding of dementia care.

This fact sheet outlines different types of therapy services, potential barriers to accessing those services, and steps families can take when advocating for services for their loved ones. For more resources, please visit our website, <https://nursinghome411.org/dementia-care-in-the-community>.

### **Therapy Services**

Therapy services include:

- **Physical Therapy (PT)** can help individuals improve mobility, strength, and balance, which reduces the risk of falls and other injuries. Maintaining physical abilities can enhance independence in daily activities, like dressing, bathing, and moving around.
- **Occupational Therapy (OT)** can address memory, attention, and other cognitive skills. OT can improve health, well-being, and overall quality of life by supporting the ability to participate in activities. This can help individuals stay engaged and maintain independence.
- **Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)** can assist with language and communication challenges. Speech and language therapists can also help with swallowing difficulties.

### **Common Barriers to Access**

Families may encounter several challenges when trying to secure therapy services for their loved ones in assisted living facilities and other home and community-based settings, including:

- **Misconceptions About Dementia and Rehabilitation:** There is a widespread mistaken belief that therapy services are not beneficial for people with progressive conditions like dementia, leading to under-referral or denial of services for individuals with a dementia diagnosis.
- **Systemic Gaps in Assisted Living and Home Care:** Assisted living and home-based settings may not routinely incorporate rehab services, focusing instead on basic personal care. This can limit the ability of individuals to access and benefit from rehabilitation therapies.

- **Lack of Dementia-Specific Rehab Expertise:** Rehabilitation therapists are not always trained in dementia-specific techniques.
- **Communication Difficulties:** People living with dementia may struggle to understand the need for rehabilitation services, leading to resistance.
- **Resource Constraints:** Lack of proper equipment and dedicated rehabilitation spaces restricts the delivery of effective therapy. Assisted living and home care agencies may be more focused on meeting daily basic needs, with limited resources, including staff, allocated for specialized rehabilitation.
- **Restrictive Policies:** Use of physical or chemical restraints (such as antipsychotic drugs) or concerns about falls may prevent individuals from participating in rehabilitation.

### **Tips for Family Members and Loved Ones**

**Get involved!** Engaging with staff, attending care meetings, and encouraging participation in therapy services can improve outcomes.

**Ask questions,** such as:

1. What types of therapy services would best support my loved one's needs?
2. How are therapy goals set and measured?
3. How often are goals (and progress toward goals) reviewed?
4. How can we monitor progress?

**Request regular assessments:** Ask for ongoing evaluations of your loved one's physical and cognitive abilities to determine if they are eligible for therapy services. Inquire about whether physical, occupational, or speech and language therapy is available and appropriate.

**Encourage person-centered care:** Therapy services should be tailored to the individual's abilities and needs. Activities should be meaningful and aligned to the interests of the individual.

**Monitor and communicate progress:** Family members play a crucial role in observing changes in their loved one's physical and cognitive abilities. Sharing observations with the care team can help tailor therapy services to achieve better outcomes.

**Interdisciplinary collaboration:** Advocating for care teams to communicate and work together effectively can lead to better rehabilitation outcomes.

**Advocate for more resources:** Families can push for improvements in staffing levels and access to appropriate equipment. Request that staff receive training in dementia care and effective communication strategies to better support residents during rehabilitation.