

Conclusion

The federal Nursing Home Reform Law establishes meaningful, resident-centered standards for care, safety, dignity, and quality of life. But those protections are of little value if violations are not identified, resident harm is not recognized, and meaningful consequences do not follow when minimum standards are not met.

The findings in this report point to a persistent accountability gap. Across the measures examined, survey and enforcement activity often bore little relationship to the extent and seriousness of known problems in nursing homes. Financial penalties declined substantially. Surveyors overwhelmingly classified substantiated violations of minimum health requirements as, essentially, harmless. In critical areas including infection control, sufficient staffing, pressure ulcer care, psychotropic medication requirements, and resident rights, the data reveal a broad national pattern of limited identification of deficient care and resident harm.

There are substantive differences in state performance and those differences matter. At the same time, the findings provide little basis for concluding that states with comparatively higher citation or harm-identification rates are consistently meeting the federal benchmark. The appropriate standard is not whether one state performs better than another. It is whether every resident is receiving the care and protections required by law.

Ultimately, effective nursing home oversight must be measured by its impact on residents. Survey activity, citations, severity classifications, and penalties are not ends in themselves. Their purpose is to ensure that residents receive sufficient staffing, appropriate clinical care, protection from abuse and neglect, freedom from unnecessary drugging, and respect for their dignity, autonomy, and rights every day.

The findings in this study underscore the need for stronger, more consistent, and more resident-centered oversight and enforcement. They also reinforce the importance of transparency. Residents, families, ombudsmen, advocates, policymakers, researchers, and the public should be able to examine how well nursing homes are meeting federal standards and how effectively government agencies are carrying out their responsibility to protect residents.

LTCCC's study webpage, <https://nursinghome411.org/ltccc-enforcement-study-2026/>, includes the report, issue briefs, searchable state and national data files, and other resources to help stakeholders and policymakers explore the findings and use them to support better care and stronger accountability for the safety, health, and dignity of nursing home residents.