



Ombudsman FAQs

1. What role does the Ombudsman program have in long-term care facilities?

An Ombudsman is an advocate for residents in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and group homes in Summit, Portage, Stark and Wayne Counties. Ombudsmen work with residents and families to resolve problems, improve care and protect their rights. Ombudsmen use negotiation, education and persuasion to achieve the resident's desired outcomes. We can also act as a mediator to resolve issues between residents.

2. I'm concerned that I will be identified as the source of the complaint, do I have to reveal my name to you or others?

The source of a complaint (complainant) and the residents' identity will be confidential unless approval for disclosure is provided verbally. The Ombudsman will specifically ask you for permission. Maintaining confidentiality can make reaching a resolution more difficult, especially if the problem affects a single person or small number of residents. We will always try to determine the scope of the problem by interviewing other residents.

3. I've been dealing with a problem for some time now, if I ask the Ombudsman to become involved, when can I expect you to begin as my advocate?

The ombudsmen typically begin a complaint investigation by collecting additional information within five working days of receipt. Complaints involving abuse, neglect or risk of injury begin by the next working day. We will offer options for addressing your concerns, follow the direction of the client or recognized decision maker and keep you updated as the investigation moves forward.

4. My complaint is about a nursing agency that sends help into my home. Can I still have the Ombudsman program act as my advocate?

While most of the Ombudsman's work is in nursing homes, assisted living and group homes, the Ombudsman is an advocate for all persons receiving care. The Ombudsman can advocate for you wherever you live and receive services. Exceptions include hospitals and facilities licensed by the County Board of Development Disabilities.

5. My complaint is so serious that I want the facility to be fined or closed. Someone should have to pay for this mistreatment. Is this an outcome I can expect with having the Ombudsman Program involved?

No, the Ombudsman program does not have that authority. That outcome can be reached through the Ohio Department of Health or other state regulator. While others have that responsibility, we would certainly want to investigate your complaint and determine how other residents may be affected.

6. My 28-year-old daughter had a terrible automobile accident and has traumatic brain injury, she's in a nursing home which has been paid by the insurance company up to now. They want to cut services next week, where can I get some help?

The Ombudsman can assist your daughter with the termination of benefits, the Ombudsman can assist with an appeal, explore other sources of payment and investigate care issues. The Ombudsman is available to all consumers, regardless of age or payment source.

7. My church friend told me that her sister who has dementia and is in an assisted living left the facility when nobody was watching and walked a half-mile down a busy street to the Kwik-Mart. Somebody there called the home and she was picked up. Does this sound OK to you?

No, it's not OK. The facility has a responsibility to maintain the health and safety of all residents. We would like to know more and offer our assistance to the resident and family. Given the contact information, we'll follow-up with the family.

8. My 88-year-old mother has dementia and has been in the nursing home for about two years and seems to get a UTI about every three months or so. I don't think she's getting enough to drink. Because of the confusion, she can't speak up for herself. Can the Ombudsman help find out what's happening?

Yes, I think the Ombudsman can help. We'll first want to speak with your Mother and determine her capacity to make decisions. If she can't understand how we might help, and give us authority to be her advocate, we'll turn to the POA or recognized decision-maker. We typically might speak with other residents, observe hydration practices at the facility and with written permission, review her records. We can start by contacting your mother in the next five days.

9. I received a call from the nursing home telling me that they sent my dad to the hospital and won't allow him to return. They say they can't meet his needs because he wanders into other residents' rooms. He has been there for seven months and they've never mentioned this problem to me. This doesn't seem right; can they do this?

No, this is a violation of the residents' discharge rights. There is a very clear process that must be followed when a resident is discharged. Your father must receive a written notice explaining his rights and how to appeal the facility's actions. Another concern is that you should be informed of changes in your father's condition and have an opportunity to discuss at a care plan meeting. We are glad to assist.

10. My husband is in his late 80s and is becoming more and more forgetful. I think I should begin to think about assisted living as an option. Can you tell me which one is best in Stark County?

The Ombudsman can help with the many decisions you might face. We recommend considering all the options before life changing decisions are made. The Ombudsman can help you with selecting the most suitable living situation for your husband. We would like to know more about the specific challenges you encounter in the home and help you make good decisions.

11. There just never seems to be enough staff at the nursing home where my aunt lives. There are twenty-six residents in the "Wildflower Wing" how many staff should be assigned each shift?

Currently there is not a staffing ratio in the rules which require a specific number of staff be available to assist residents. The rule states that there should be adequate staff available to meet the needs of all residents. It may be easier to advocate for your aunt and other residents by determining what tasks are not being done or being done in a timely manner.

12. My homemaker/aide is not reliable and seems to show up on her schedule, or not at all. I have called the home care company and it doesn't seem to help. Can an Ombudsman help?

Yes, an Ombudsman should be able to help you. If you have a care manager, we will likely want to speak with them and gather some additional information. The Ombudsman will want to have a conversation with you to better understand your experience with the aide or the providing agency.

13. I had a company install vinyl siding on my home and they did a terrible job. It's all crooked and they never finished the detail work around the windows. I paid them good money for the work and now the company won't even take my calls. Can an Ombudsman make them come back out and fix it?

No, this appears to be a consumer issue unrelated to long-term care. You might consider filing a report to the Better Business Bureau or the Ohio Attorney General's office. As a last resort, you could consult with an attorney.

14. I'm living in a nursing home and it seems I must wait forever to have an aide help me to the bathroom. Sometimes they come and turn the call light off and say they'll be right back... but they don't return. Is there a rule that says how long they can take to respond to a call light?

No, there is no rule defining a reasonable time to wait for assistance. However, it is a problem that the Ombudsman can help with. We would want to determine the root cause of the delay, is it lack of staff or problems with assignments? We'd be glad to investigate. Let's start the process.

15. I'm now living in a nursing home, but want to return to an apartment. I worked hard for years and now I've got nothing. It's just not fair. I have a guardian that's making all the decisions. I don't want a guardian. Can you help me get out of here?

Guardianship is established by the courts and follows a process that also includes the ability to challenge the need for a guardian and the guardian's actions. As an initial step, we recommend contacting the court for more information on the process they follow. The name of your guardian, the county court where guardianship was ordered would be helpful information for the Ombudsman.

16. My 80-year-old mother lives in group home with other older adults. I think she gets good care there and seems to enjoy being with the other six residents. When I call the facility to talk to her, the operator gets all snippy with me and then says that my mom is sleeping. She can't sleep that much. Can you help me get regular phone contact with her?

I'm sure the Ombudsman can help resolve this issue. Your mom has a right to access to a phone and to communicate with family and friends. I'm also concerned that the staff attitude you witnessed might also be directed towards residents. We'll want to check on both issues by contacting your mom and see what's going on.