



# United Senior Action of Indiana

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## ***CHOOSING A NURSING HOME***

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In general, when choosing a nursing home you should try to involve your loved one as much as possible - this will help him or her feel more in control of the situation. In addition, start researching different homes as early as possible and at a time when you are not in "crisis mode."

Here are some specific steps to follow when selecting a home:

Make a list of what is important to your loved one. Considering what your loved one likes and enjoys will help you determine what features you should look for in a nursing home.

Check with knowledgeable sources in the community. Talking with individuals who have contact or experience with nursing homes in the area can give you an idea of places you might want to consider. The following people or groups can be valuable sources of guidance: doctors, hospitals, attorneys, senior organizations, disease specific organizations (e.g. Alzheimer's Association) and long-term care ombudsmen (advocates for nursing home residents).

Find out about a facility's track record and performance history by examining survey (inspection) reports. Survey reports are the inspection reports completed by the Indiana State Department of Health whenever the Department's inspectors (surveyors) are in a nursing home. These reports indicate any problems that the surveyors found.

The most recent survey must be available in the facility in a place that is accessible to residents and the public. It is best if you can look at survey reports for the current year, and also for the preceding two calendar years - this will give you a better sense of the facility's performance over time. Recent and past survey reports are also available from the Indiana State Department of Health, the administrator or the facility, the long-term care ombudsman and on the internet at <http://www.medicare.gov/Nursing/Overview.asp> (click on "Nursing Home Compare").

In addition, you can find information on the Indiana State Department of Health's website: Nursing home report cards: <http://www.in.gov/isdh/regsvcs/ltc/repcard/index.htm> Profile of individual Indiana nursing homes: <http://www.in.gov/isdh/regsvcs/ltc/profile/index.htm>

Get a copy of a nursing home checklist. Many checklists are available to consumers that provide a list of points to consider when selecting a nursing home. A checklist prepared by the federal government can be accessed by going to: <http://www.medicare.gov/Nursing/Overview.asp> and clicking on "Checklist."

Visit!! All facilities give guided tours for prospective residents and their families, but it is critical that you spend some un-chaperoned time in the facility observing different activities. Try to go in at different times. Meal times are a good time to visit, as are early mornings, late evenings and weekends. Make sure you are respectful of resident privacy during your visit. You should think twice about a facility that does not want you to visit on your own.

Ask about staffing.

Ask about the ratio of nursing staff to residents on each of the different shifts, during the week and the weekend. Experts recommend at least the following ratios: 1 full time caregiver for every 5 residents on the day shift; 1 full-time caregiver for every 10 residents on the evening shift; and 1 full-time caregiver for every 15 residents on the night shift.

Find out about staff stability. Frequent turnover can have a negative impact on the quality of care in a nursing home.

Find out about staff training. Ask how many hours of training staff members receive each year and in what topics.

Staff response. When you are visiting, make a point of noting if staff respond quickly when a resident needs assistance. Ask residents and families if there are enough staff to give residents the help they need, when they need it.

Ask about activities. Look at the activity calendar and see what types of activities are offered. How does that compare with what your loved one likes to do? Ask how the interests of each individual resident are addressed.

See how the facility accommodates residents' individual needs and preferences. Can residents get up and go to bed when they want? How are bathing schedules determined? Ask what control residents have over their schedules and their day.

Find out if the facility is fully-sprinklered and whether there are hard-wired smoke detectors in each resident's room. Current Indiana regulations do not require all homes to have these features.

Discuss payment terms with the facility. Find out if the facility is Medicaid and/or Medicare certified. If the facility is not Medicaid certified and your loved one exhausts his or her funds, the resident may have to move. If the facility is not Medicare certified and your loved one needs skilled care paid for by Medicare, he or she may have to seek a bed in another facility.

Review all documents such as facility policies, written statements of residents' rights and admission agreements. Nursing home documents sometimes contain terms that purport to restrict or take away rights guaranteed by state and federal regulations or contain provisions that either misrepresent the law or that are blatantly illegal. Reviewing these documents carefully before signing can save much aggravation and even money later on!

Watch out for "arbitration agreements" that require that an individual settle all disputes with the nursing home through arbitration - a process in which one or more arbitrators decides the outcome instead of a jury made up of members of the community. Arbitration may be right for some people in some situations. But because arbitration is an option that consumers can choose at any point, consumers gain nothing from signing an arbitration clause prior to a dispute. Instead, they lose the constitutional right to a jury trial which we all have as a U.S. citizen.