



The Maine Long-Term Care
OMBUDSMAN
Program

Annual Report 2024



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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We are proud to present the FY24 Annual Report for the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP). This report highlights the vital advocacy efforts of our dedicated staff and volunteers on behalf of older and disabled adults who depend on long-term services and supports, whether in care facilities or within the community.

This past year, Maine's long-term services and supports system has continued to face profound challenges, including a critical shortage of direct care staff, increased reliance on temporary nursing agency staff in nursing homes, and the closure of both nursing homes and residential care facilities.

In the face of these obstacles, the Ombudsman Program's advocacy has been a cornerstone in breaking down barriers to access and improving the quality of care for vulnerable individuals. Our work remains essential in addressing systemic challenges and ensuring that every person receives the care and respect they deserve.

Older and disabled residents of nursing homes and assisted housing programs across the state rely on the advocacy our staff and volunteers provide. There are over 300 long-term care homes within our mandate. We are fortunate to have a very dedicated and well-trained group of volunteers who work in tandem with our staff. Without our volunteers, we would be unable to reach residents in all these homes who may need our assistance.

This report provides a summary of our advocacy efforts along with comments from some of the individuals we have served. We consider it a privilege to do this work.

With gratitude,

Brenda Gallant, R.N.
Executive Director



Advocacy for Residents in Long-Term Care Facilities

LTCOP, through the Older Americans Act, federal regulations, and Maine state statute, is granted authority to identify, investigate and resolve complaints on behalf of residents of nursing homes, residential care homes and assisted living programs. We are responsible for assisting residents in protecting their health, safety, welfare, and rights. Through regular visits by staff and volunteers, residents have timely, private and unimpeded access to the advocacy provided by LTCOP.

LTCOP interventions to ensure access to and quality of care include quarterly visitation, resident rights and mandatory reporting training in facilities, collaboration with the DHHS, Division of Licensing and Certification, the Veteran's Administration, the Office of Maine's Attorney General - Healthcare Crimes Unit and the Quality Improvement Organization regarding quality-of-care concerns. Additionally, LTCOP assists residents and families in forming resident and family councils.

LTCOP actively participated in stakeholder and community groups to share information and participate in initiatives that are beneficial to consumers served by LTCOP. LTCOP serves in the following groups:

- Maine Council on Elder Abuse Prevention
- Elder Abuse Task Forces (chair position)
- Maine Elder Death Analysis Review Team (chair position)
- Elder Justice Coordination Partnership
- Aging and Disability Mortality Review Panel
- Acquired Brain Injury Advisory Council (chair position)
- Maine Council on Aging
- Statewide Independent Living Council
- Healthy Brain Initiative Stakeholder Group
- Innovation and Quality Council
- Essential Support Workforce Advisory Council
- Healthy Brain Initiative Stakeholder Group



In FY24 staff and volunteers made 1672 visits to long-term care homes across the state. Those homes, with a history of significant survey deficiencies and complaints were visited more frequently.

Complaint Investigation Overview

During FY24, a total of 1449 complaints were closed. Most often LTCOP receives complaints regarding resident care. Additionally, a significant number of complaints during this reporting period were complaints relating to admission to a long-term care facility and staffing shortages. Lack of adequate staffing continues to be a significant concern in nursing homes as well as residential care and home care programs.

Advocacy for Residents in Nursing Homes

During FY24, LTCOP received 738 nursing home complaints including but not limited to complaints related to quality of care, placement, admission and discharge, personal property/billing/charges, staffing, resident rights, and dietary/food service.

Advocacy for Residents in Assisted Housing

During FY24, LTCOP received 482 assisted housing complaints including but not limited to complaints related to quality of care, staffing, admission, resident rights and physical plant.

Long-Term Care Facility Closures

In this reporting period, LTCOP worked to assist residents impacted by the closure of 4 nursing homes, 5 residential care homes, and 2 adult family care homes. In all these closures, LTCOP met with residents on site to advocate for a safe and appropriate discharge. LTCOP closely monitored all closures to ensure that resident rights were protected and that resident needs continued to be met. Additionally, LTCOP staff followed up with residents who relocated to ensure a smooth transition.

What Consumers and Family Members Have to Say About the Assistance Our Staff Provided

“LTCOP staff was incredibly helpful with helping me after my mother passed away suddenly and I had to find a long-term care facility for my stepfather who has dementia. She quickly and patiently answered my questions and guided me through the DHHS process which is beyond complicated. I am so grateful for her assistance and responsiveness. Her dedication and professionalism was evident in the way she advocated for my stepfather. She made a very difficult situation easier. You are very lucky to have her on staff.”

“I was terribly frustrated and I’m still angry at how opaque the system is to those who have to navigate it. Danielle fixed everything – even when she ran into pushback. I cannot tell you how grateful I am.”

“Maria was so compassionate and caring and always called right back when I called. Thank you, Maria, you relieved so much stress.”

“Allison is amazing. She did/is doing everything for my mom that she can to ensure safe reliable transport to and from her dialysis. She was also the catalyst in finding a facility placement for mom when she was released from the hospital. I could not have done it without her and the Ombudsman’s office!”

“I was very happy and satisfied with Jamie and if I should need help in the future, I would want it from her specifically. She was very informative as well as kind and caring.”

“Jamie was fantastic. Jamie went above and beyond to help my mom. She is a treasure!”

“Danielle has truly been a godsend. Danielle talked to me like a person and really made things happen for us. You have a very special place in my heart.”

“Nice to know that there’s somebody to turn to when help is needed. You really helped me out. Thank you.”

“This program was so helpful at a time in my life when I simply needed a positive response and answers to my questions!”

“Very informative, extremely supportive, helpful. It was awesome to be assigned to Sue, right in our community. Thank you!”

“Sue was very dedicated and cared about the outcome for my father.”

“Thank you for being there for my dad. That was so scary and mentally affected me having his care taken, but you made fast changes and that was great.”

“Bethany really helped me to get home with the help from Homeward Bound. I so appreciated all the help. I’m home!”



Transition Assistance / Homeward Bound

LTCOP receives referrals from nursing homes, assisted housing and hospitals regarding residents and patients who want to transition to the community. The referrals come through as Transition Assistance, Section Q, and Homeward Bound. LTCOP is the local contact agency for all Section Q referrals. We work with residents in nursing homes and assisted housing settings, and patients in hospitals who want to transition to the community.

During FY24, LTCOP received 54 referrals for Transition Assistance. 30 individuals transitioned to the community, 1 was referred to Homeward Bound, 7 are in active transition planning and 15 did not transition for various reasons including choosing to remain where they were, going to rehabilitation from a hospital and then potentially revisiting a transition home or accessing hospice services.

LTCOP received 9 Section Q referrals. 1 of the referrals turned into Homeward Bound referrals, 2 residents chose to remain in the nursing home and 2 returned to the community.

LTCOP received 31 Homeward Bound referrals. 21 applicants were reviewed by the Transition Manager and assigned by the DHHS, Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) Project Director to an OADS Transition Coordinator. 19 participants transitioned to the community. Of these, 2 participants completed their 180 days in the community and 2 participants completed 365 days, 3 participants returned to nursing homes, 2 participants passed away, one of these passed at home with hospice. The second participant returned home with services and passed which was not unexpected. The other 15 remain in the community.

Advocacy for Home Care Consumers

Whenever possible older adults and adults with disabilities who need long-term services and supports want to remain in their homes. LTCOP receives ongoing calls from consumers and their family members about the difficulty of not being able to find staff. We connect consumers with assistive technology/durable medical equipment (DME), adult day services, participant-directed care and community volunteer-based programs.

Home Care Ombudsman staff have helped consumers navigate the Medicaid unwinding period as well as the end of the Federally declared Public Health Emergency.

During FY24, LTCOP home care complaints including but not limited to need home care/more services/understaffed, termination/reduction/denial of services, service coordination agency issues, and 11 assessment process issues.

Hospital Patient Advocacy

LTCOP provides advocacy for patients in hospitals who experience barriers in accessing long-term services and supports when they are ready for discharge. These patients are unable to obtain placement or home care services due to a variety of reasons including; dementia with symptoms of distress that can be challenging to manage, mental health diagnosis and a lack of available resources to support the individual, bariatric needs, complex medical needs, payment source, substance use disorder and lack of available resources to support the individual, young age, and criminal history which often has justice involvement. Historically, these individuals wait weeks, months or even years, for services to be set up at home or in a long-term care home.

In FY24, LTCOP opened 78 cases to assist patients who experienced barriers to accessing long-term services and supports. As of 9/30/24, 60 cases were resolved. Mental health diagnosis and lack of available resources, individuals displaying challenging behaviors and complex medical needs remain the most common barriers for discharge from the hospital.

Legislative Advocacy

LTCOP provides testimony on legislation impacting long-term services and support. Because of concerns about the closure of nursing homes, LTCOP participated in an event at the State House along with the Maine Health Care Association and the Maine Hospital Association to share our concerns about the impact of closures on residents. We invited legislators to attend to call attention to the number of closures and the impact on residents. Additionally, we participated in a press conference to outline the problem. We joined a coalition of organizations expressing concerns about closures. We testified on the Supplemental Budget and the Change Package supporting funding for nursing homes. Additionally, we supported legislation that expands the tasks that PSSs can perform for home care consumers under R.N. supervision.

The Power of Care Campaign



In late 2022, LTCOP, in partnership with the Maine Health Care Association, launched the "Power of Care: Immunization Campaign." The objective of the campaign was to increase vaccination rates among direct care staff of long-term care facilities, home health, and home care agencies.

In the winter of 2023 LTCOP extended this successful campaign to include resident vaccination.

Designed to improve voluntary influenza and COVID-19 immunization rates for residents, the Power of Care Campaign will reach residents, their families, and staff where they live and work.

Learn more at <https://www.mainequalityofcare.com/>

Social Media Campaign

ETHOS Marketing developed a landing page in addition to marketing on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. LTCOP meets monthly with ETHOS to review social media campaigns.

Maine's Direct Care Support and Professional Advisory Council

LTCOP established the Council with funding from the Maine Health Access Foundation (MEHAF) and the DHHS, Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS). The mission of the Council is to bring direct care and direct support professionals together to create a strong voice to inform policy makers about the issues that are important to them in their employment.

Council members are CNAs, PSSs, and DSPs employed in all long-term services and support settings across the state. Additionally, Council members represent the diversity of Maine's essential workers.

Virtual meetings with council members have been held quarterly. Members have been paid a stipend for their attendance at meetings and council-related activities. During this reporting period PHI National has provided training to council members on Using Social Media in Advocacy and How to Recruit New Council Members. Additionally, Laura Harper, Senior Associate from Moose Ridge Associates provided training on the Legislative and Policy Process in Maine.

Council Member Accomplishments:

- Continued outreach and engagement campaign in all LTSS
- Council members were featured in Maine Center for Economic Policy report, Closing the Gap: Maine's Direct Care Shortage and Solutions to Fix it
- Council member opened the day for "The Future of Maine's Care Workforce Planning Summit"
- Council member wrote an op-ed in support of Maine Center for Economic Policy Report
- Council members featured in Sun Journal Article to elevate the Profession
- Council member wrote an op-ed in support of LD 1718, An Act to Encourage participation in Maine's Essential Support through Access to Higher Education
- September 17th, 2024, held first conference for the Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council
- Office of Aging and Disability Services, DHHS provided presentation on the Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council for a webinar sponsored by Administration for Community Living.

Summary of Outreach and Engagement Campaign

In September of 2023, LTCOP on behalf of the council, launched an outreach and engagement campaign to recruit additional council members and educate direct care and support professionals about the advisory council across all long-term care services and support settings. Additionally, we hoped to hear directly from staff about the issues impacting their employment. Thus far, we have held 9 regional meetings across the state. These outreach and engagement meetings were successful in adding two new council members, one employed in a nursing home and the other in a home setting for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The outreach and engagement campaign has effectively reached beyond the council to provide education and future support to 87 direct care and support professionals across the state. We anticipate that this number will continue to increase as more meetings are held. We also see the benefit of holding meetings on an ongoing basis.

Meetings held September 2023- October 2024:

- 9/20/2023 Cedars, Portland.
- 10/3/2023 Eastside, Bangor.
- 10/19/2023 Prince Point, Falmouth.
- 10/25/2023 John F. Murphy Homes, Lewiston.
- 10/30/2023 Creative Works, Augusta.
- 11/15/2023 The Lamp, Lisbon.
- 11/21/2023 Bella Point Camden, Camden.
- 1/17/2024 MVH Scarborough, Scarborough.
- 6/17/2024 Sandy River Nursing Home, Farmington.

Uplifting the Voices of Maine's Direct Care and Support Professional Conference

The Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council hosted their first conference on September 17th at Maple Hill Farm Event and Conference center in Hallowell. The goal of the conference was to inform attendees about the council, inspire, and honor direct care and support professionals for the work they do every day. Keynote speaker, Dr. Susan Wehry, physician, educator and advocate opened the day. A panel discussion highlighted State and Federal perspectives regarding workforce initiatives. At the end of the day, round table discussion with direct care workers and support professionals and policy makers were held to provide input on recruitment and retention strategies. These strategies will help guide the goals and work of the Council.





The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is a non-profit agency whose mission is to advocate for quality of care and life for residents in nursing homes, residential care, and assisted living. We serve consumers trying to access home care services or those consumers who have concerns about their home care. We also serve patients in hospitals facing barriers in accessing long-term care services.

Our services are free and confidential. Our staff is knowledgeable about long-term care services. We can answer questions about services, including:

Where to find services;

How services are paid for;

What to do if services are denied, terminated or reduced, and

How to proceed when problems arise.