

Volunteer Ombudsman Program - Frequently Asked Questions:

Q1. What is an ombudsman representative?

- A. An ombudsman representative investigates reported complaints, reports findings, and helps to achieve resolution of complaints for residents of long-term care facilities.

An Ombudsman representative helps one resident resolve problems, addresses issues that affect several residents or works collectively to change a problem that affects all residents.

The Georgia Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman oversees the six regional programs that serve over 70,000 residents in the state of Georgia

Q2. What does an ombudsman representative do?

The Georgia Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, authorized by the Older Americans Act and Georgia Law, was established nearly four decades ago to improve the quality of care and quality of life for residents living in long-term care facilities.

- A. Handle complaints

An ombudsman representative supports residents and families to resolve any problems or differences with the facility staff by defining concerns, explaining rights and identifying possible courses of action.

An ombudsman representative can help resolve the problem in most cases; however, complaints involving serious abuse or neglect are referred to the appropriate agency.

In all situations, confidentiality is maintained, and no information is released without permission of the resident or legal representative.

- B. Provide information and assistance

An ombudsman representative is a good source of information about quality of care practices and ways to enhance quality of life for residents. Also, an ombudsman representative is a resource for facility staff training and provides information for community resources.

- C. Advocate for system and legislative changes

State and regional ombudsman programs work cooperatively with other advocacy organizations to recommend legislation and regulatory changes that affect facility residents. Staff Ombudsman representatives routinely serve on boards and committees of other organizations and actively advocate for policies to promote quality of care.

- Q3. What skills are needed to become a volunteer ombudsman representative?
- A. Good listening, observing, interviewing, and advocating skills, as well as good problem-solving skills.
- Q4. What kind of authority does a certified ombudsman volunteer have at his/her facility?
- A. Once a volunteer completes his or her background check, training, and passes the certification exam, he or she is certified as a representative of the Georgia State Long-Term Care Ombudsman to fulfill their Volunteer Ombudsman Representative duties. Each has statutory authority to go into the assigned facilities at any time, and advocate for the rights and dignity of the residents.
- Q5. What kind of training and support do volunteers receive?
- A. All volunteers receive training prior to becoming certified. In Georgia, Associate Certified Volunteers must complete a minimum of 36 hours of required course work and field training and pass the post-test including an oral exam with a minimum score of 70%. In addition to the trainings, continuing education sessions are held regularly at the local long-term care ombudsman programs. These educational sessions provide volunteers with current information about issues in long-term care.
- Staff ombudsman representatives are always available to answer any questions volunteers may have, as well as provide them with support and guidance in their role as advocates for long-term care residents.
- Q6. What is the most common complaint from facility residents, and how is it normally handled?
- A. The most common complaint is about food quality. Other common issues include call lights not being answered in a timely manner, the needs of the residents being unmet, billing problems, and medication administration issues. If the matter can be resolved within the facility, the certified ombudsman volunteer works with the staff and administration with the primary goal to protect the rights and dignity of the resident. The role of certified ombudsman volunteer is not to make decisions or create an adversarial environment but to effectively advocate for what the resident wants.
- Q7. What does the volunteer ombudsman representative do during the weekly visits?
- A. The volunteer visits one-on-one or in small groups with the residents, by going room to room or chatting in common areas. The intent is to build trusting relationships so that residents will feel comfortable raising their concerns. The volunteer becomes familiar with non-communicative residents, too. While the volunteer ombudsman

representative will not initiate contact with residents' families or friends, he or she may work with them as they meet during facility visits.

Q8. What is the time commitment required of Certified Ombudsman volunteers?

A. Certified Ombudsman volunteers are asked to make facility visits 3 hours per month at times when they can be available to meet the residents' needs. The hours do not have to be consecutive. The volunteer can set his/her own schedule, and it can vary from week to week. Time to complete a monthly report for the local ombudsman office ranges from 30 to 60 minutes.

Q9. What are the requirements for continuing education, and how can they be met?

A. As an Associate Certified Volunteer Ombudsman Representative, recertification is required at the end of 12 months. Recertification requires an 18-hour minimum commitment of continuing education. Continuing education is presented at the state-wide Long-Term Care Ombudsman training or monthly WebEx. Volunteers can suggest an opportunity they can attend on their own with approval from his or her Ombudsman Representative Coordinator.

Q10. How many people are in long-term care facilities in Georgia?

A. The number of licensed facilities is approximately 399 nursing facilities and 2,658 board and care/personal care homes/assisted living communities with the capacity to serve 87,643 residents.

Q11. Who can be a volunteer ombudsman representative?

A. Volunteers must be 18 years old, have a valid driver's license with minimum statutory required insurance and have transportation available, and possess compassion and concern for individuals in the long-term care facilities. All volunteers must be able to pass a criminal history check and screening for conflict of interest.

Q12. What are the benefits?

A. Volunteers enjoy being able to make an impact on the quality of long-term care in their community and seeing the outcome of their support efforts for residents. Other benefits include being able to gain knowledge on navigating long-term care systems and improving and developing interpersonal and problem-solving skills. The opportunity to remain active, meet new people, and help others is highly rewarding.

"It is rewarding spending time with residents, some of whom I have known for a long time and some that I am meeting for the first time on my visit."

Contact us for information about becoming a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Representative volunteer at 1-866-552-4464, option 5 // www.georgiaombudsman.org

Thank you for your interest!