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Long-Term Care Residents' Rights Month reminds us that connections to family, friends and community matter

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services is joining partners in observing Long-Term Care Residents' Rights Month this October and promoting this year's theme: Connection Matters. In support, Gov. Doug Burgum has issued a [proclamation](#).

Created by Consumer Voice, this observance month celebrates the value of individuals living in long-term care facilities and raises awareness of their rights, including the right to privacy, to be treated with dignity and respect, to make decisions about their care and other quality of life issues. Residents also have the right to vote, to file grievances, and to have certain protections against involuntary transfers and discharges.

"This pandemic has reinforced the fact that connections – to family, friends and the greater community – are essential to good health and quality of life for residents of nursing homes and basic care and assisted living facilities," said department Executive Director Chris Jones.

Jones leads the state's vulnerable populations team, which continues to work closely with the North Dakota Long-Term Care Association, the Task Force on Reuniting Residents, the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman and the North Dakota Department of Health on efforts to balance residents' needs and rights with visitation policies and ongoing efforts to prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19 in long-term care facilities.

State Efforts to Support Connections

To support connections, the department's Aging Services Division has been focused on addressing and preventing isolation of individuals with disabilities living in the community and in long-term facilities. The state's Long-Term Care Ombudsman team continues to be a resource to help long-term care facility residents and their families resolve concerns.

In May, the department announced a partnership with ND Assistive to offer technology solutions to nursing homes and basic care facilities – especially those in rural areas – so that facility residents, their families and caregivers could stay connected.

Through September, 63 long-term care facilities had received equipment from ND Assistive with funding provided through the department. Assistive technology experts at ND Assistive have also reached out to 24 additional facilities to identify equipment and training needs.

"We've received positive comments from participating facilities. They've told us they are very excited about the equipment and what we've been able to do to support family connections," said Mike Chaussee, executive director of ND Assistive. "Our team continues to make contacts, and our goal is to reach all nursing homes and basic care facilities."

State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Karla Backman encouraged family members to continue to do what they can to stay connected.

"Keeping in touch matters, whether it is an outdoor visit, an indoor visit with all necessary precautions, window visits, virtual visits, calling by phone, sending letters, or other creative ways," she said.

Backman encouraged long-term care facility residents, their family members and staff to show their support of residents' rights, by coloring and labeling a [handout](#) highlighting their important connections.

Backman and six local long-term care ombudsmen based in Bismarck, Devils Lake, Dickinson, Fargo, and Minot advocate for long-term care facility residents and families across the state. Because COVID-19-related visitor restrictions vary by county and facility, the ombudsmen are mainly available by phone and other technology. Program and contact information is online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/adultsaging/ombudsman.html.

The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is a programmatically independent advocacy service located within the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Aging Services Division. The program receives, investigates and works to resolve concerns affecting long-term care residents, and advocates for residents' health, safety and rights.

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