



MEDIA Release

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For Immediate Release

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FACT SHEET: THE DENVER REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (DRCOG) OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

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- Ombudsman is a Swedish word meaning "representative of the people."
- DRCOG has 8 full time ombudsmen and 70 support volunteers who make more than 200 visits per month to assisted living facilities and nursing homes in the Denver region.
- DRCOG provides services to help resolve complaints and concerns within long-term care (nursing homes, assisted living facilities, etc.) settings.
- An ombudsman is assigned to every long-term care facility (a total of approximately 376 in the region) and can assist in choosing a long-term care facility or resolving any concerns facility residents or their family members may have.
- Ombudsmen work as advocates for residents.
- Inquiries and/or complaints received by an ombudsman are typically about a specific facility; either by a potential consumer, existing resident, or family member.
- It is the role of an ombudsman to investigate complaints on behalf of residents or family members.
- Anyone can call with a concern or complaint, but ombudsmen work solely for the resident (or resident's legal representative) and will only take action when permission is given by the resident.
- An ombudsman is not legally allowed to take action in cases of abuse unless given permission from resident or legal representative.

- An ombudsman will also assist in providing information about whether a facility is a good fit depending on the needs of a potential resident, pay source, facility population, special needs, etc.
- An ombudsman will often direct residents or concerned parties to file formal complaints with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment if a complaint or concern is something outside their scope of services or if efforts to resolve an issue have been unsuccessful.
- It is not unusual for an ombudsman to lodge a formal complaint with the health department.
- The ombudsman office is in close communication with the health department, which provides regulatory oversight, and provides pre-survey information giving background about ongoing issues or concerns about a specific facility. An ombudsman will also provide resident contact information (with resident permission) to the health department, as well as trends and patterns evident in the facilities.
- Due to privacy laws, an ombudsman cannot provide specific information about a resident complaint to a member of the general public. An ombudsman can, however, stop making referrals to a facility if there are chronic unresolved issues. Examples of unresolved issues can be abnormally high turnover for care staff, complaints about the facility administrator, care concerns, discharges, residents' rights violations, and abuse.
- The ombudsman office will document to the health department the failure of a facility to address issues appropriately and in a timely manner. Examples can include poor care, regulatory violations, inappropriate discharge, lack of oversight, and abuse.
- The health department website will document formal complaints and occurrence reports on its website (www.healthfacilities.info)
- The top five complaints registered for 2009 with ombudsmen are:
 - 1) Care
 - 2) Autonomy, choice
 - 3) Admission/discharge
 - 4) Environment
 - 5) Staffing

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The council of governments is a nonprofit collaborative association governed by a Board of Directors representing 56 county and municipal governments. Board members work together to achieve a better future for the Denver region. Through Metro Vision, the plan to manage growth over the next 25 years, the region's local governments work cooperatively to address development, land use, transportation, environmental quality and older adult issues.