



Family Council Startup **By Vancouver Coastal Association of Family Councils ([VCAFC](#))**

Background

What is a Family Council?

According to the [Ministry of Health](#), “A Resident and/or Family Council is a group of persons who either live in a long-term care (LTC) home, their families, and/or the residents’ representative, who meet regularly to maintain and enhance the quality of life of residents in LTC. Councils exist to engage the resident community and to improve the experiences of all residents, by providing their insights and advice and represent the collective interests of residents.

One of the key roles that a Resident and/or Family Council can play is to promote improved communication and collaboration between residents, family members, LTC staff, and management. This may involve working collaboratively on projects that enrich the lives of residents, making recommendations to decision makers, and communicating common concerns and ideas for improvement.

Variations in council structure and advocacy occur across Long Term Care Homes (LTCHs)

- Councils are voluntary organizations,
- Interests and needs of their members differ
- Some will be small and informal, and meet occasionally,
- Others will be larger, more formal, and may meet more often.
- Councils may serve as peer-to-peer support and may be more advocacy-focused
- Others take part in committees, organize events and even fundraise.

Despite variations, all councils exist to promote the collective interests of the residents in care.



One of the key roles that a Family Council can play is to promote improved communication and collaboration between family members, care home staff and management. According to the Ministry of Health, this may involve working collaboratively on projects that enrich the lives of people in care, making recommendations to decision makers and communicating common concerns and ideas for improvement.

What is a family council?

Ideally, family councils are:

- Self-led.
- Independent
- Exist to promote the interests of residents.
- Democratic.

What is a Family Council Not?

Family councils are not:

- Run or managed by the care home.
- A decision-making body.
- Organized meetings by Long Term Care Home (LTCH).

The term “family” is used to refer to important people in a resident’s life – this may include children, spouses, parents, contact persons, friends, and any other person who is important to the resident and who may represent them in a long-term care context.

Why Encourage and Support Family Councils?



Regulatory Requirements

In B.C., the [Residential Care Regulation](#) under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act states that a care home must:

Provide an opportunity, at least annually, for people in care and their parents or representatives, family members and contact people to:

- *Establish one or more councils or similar organizations to represent the interests of the people in care, or their parents or representatives, family members and contact people, or both, and;*
- *Meet with the licensee, either as a council or, if no council is established, as a group, for the purpose of:*
 - *Promoting the collective and individual interests of the people in care, and;*
 - *Involving the people in care in decision-making on matters that affect their day-to-day living.*

Alignment with Person-Directed Care

The Best Day Possible (BCCPA)

Support for a person's individual abilities, needs, preferences, culture and lifestyle

Building Strong Connections

Family as part of the care team and ambassadors to new families

Learning about and Addressing Concerns Early

The Communication Channel acts as a triage to take care of concerns before they become a complaint.

Other Benefits

In addition to the reasons already discussed, there are several other reasons to encourage Family Councils:

- Councils are a link to the community and can facilitate programs that benefit both the residents and the community, e.g., intergenerational programming.
- Councils can support the service provider by successfully advocating health authorities and the Ministry of Health.
- Councils can help inform families new to long-term care about existing policies and best practices.
- Councils can help to set a tone of trust, collaboration, and partnership throughout the care home.
- Councils can review and provide feedback on new policies.
- Councils can create a culture of peer support, where information, resources and emotional assistance are shared across family members.
- Council representatives may sit on committees or support other activities important to improving the quality of life of residents, e.g., fundraising.

The Role of the Regional Association of Family Councils



In each health authority, the Regional Associations of Family Councils exist to:

- Advocate on regional, long-term care systemic issues at regional association family council forums hosted by your [ILTCCABC regional association](#)
- Contribute to the [government health authority-led regional resident and family council network \(RRFCN\)](#)
- Share success stories of advances in the quality of resident life through family council advocacy
- Promote awareness of the benefits of residents and/or family councils.
- Provide mentoring, support, tools and advice to existing or emerging councils by way of education sessions and the [Family Council Education Portal](#).
- Promote understanding and awareness of the [Residential Care Regulations](#), [Community Care and Assisted Living Act](#) and other policies and practices.
- Assist with troubleshooting as it relates to specific issues.

What Makes a Family Council Effective?



Supporting a thriving Family Council is not without its challenges. [A study conducted at the UBC School of Nursing](#) indicated that the most common difficulties associated with creating a successful family council include:

- A perceived lack of interest or support for a council
- A lack of understanding of the purpose of a family council.
- Ensuring consistency of family over time – e.g., attrition due to the death of a family member.
- A lack of a communication strategy to create awareness to residents/families of the opportunity to establish a council, participate in committees or volunteer

Conversely, the long-term care homes of a successful family council include:

- Providing opportunities to connect and provide peer support.
- Offering learning opportunities – e.g., guest speakers.
- A multi-modal communication strategy to keep residents/families engaged regarding such things as:
 - Staff Changes and building a Family “Who do I Contact?” List
 - Accessible programming offerings (printed and online calendars)
 - Committee involvement to ensure residents and family input in decision-making

Together or Apart?

A Family Council or Resident Council may exist separately or together. While the format will depend on the particular care home (including factors such as interest, size, resident composition, etc.), there are many clear advantages to supporting separate councils:

- Residents may need more support to participate in a council due to physical and cognitive challenges.
- Family members may “dominate” conversations in a composite model.
- Scheduling needs and preferences may be different for the two groups.
- Topics of interest may not align.
- Offering separate meetings allows for dementia-friendly approaches to be implemented when seeking feedback (see below).

Where to start? For Staff and Families



Encouragement and enthusiasm from the care home sends the message to residents, families, and staff that family councils are important and fully supported by management. The following are actions which can be taken to show your support:

If a Council is Not Yet in Place:

- Ensure that the pre-admission and admission handbook includes wording indicating that the care home supports the establishment of a resident and/or family council and how the Council can be contacted.

- Invite a representative from your regional association of family councils into your care home to support the education of your staff and present an information session to your family and friends
- Approach specific residents and family members that you believe will be interested in organizing a council – the task of establishing a council relies on enthusiasm and buy-in from residents and family members. In doing so, be aware of diversity while avoiding tokenism.
- Include a regular message in town hall meetings and correspondence, such as newsletters, indicating that management supports the establishment of a resident and/or family council and how they can be contacted.
- Consider inviting a representative of your local [Regional Association of Family Councils](#) to attend a town hall meeting to discuss the benefits of establishing a council.

While a Council is Becoming Established:

- [Contact the Regional Association of Family Councils in your area.](#) They can provide guidance, insights, tips, and even assist with coordination as a new council is forming.
- Hold an introductory meeting with residents, families and friends to discuss the concept of a council, roles, benefits, etc. – this can take place in conjunction with a regularly scheduled event to capture a larger audience.
- Provide the Council with information on possible structures - this may range from being very informal with a Chairperson and Recorder who writes up the minutes of the meeting, to a more formal structure with elected officers, formal committees, quorum requirements, terms of reference, etc. See part two of this guide for sample documents.
- Encourage new councils to read the Ministry of Health’s [Guidelines for the Development of Resident or Family Councils document.](#)
- Create a Policy & Procedure document outlining the long-term care home support for Councils and the related corporate procedures surrounding this.
- Designate a staff liaison to support the council and educate and regularly inform staff of council updates. Ideally, this person will be genuinely interested in the role of resident/family councils.
- Educate staff on the concept and role of a Council at an in-service or education session for staff, so that all staff know what a council is and how they can direct any questions appropriately to either management or a designated staff person.
- Ensure family councils have access to the resources from: [Raise Your Voice: How to Increase the Effectiveness of Resident and Family Councils in Long-Term Care Homes. Canadian Journal on Aging](#)

- Ask the emerging council what they think they may need in terms of support and try to accommodate it, avoiding overpromising. Examples of assistance include:
 - Orienting families to the Council at the time of move-in, and other junctures.
 - Printing and posting notices, agendas and minutes.
 - Making a private room available.
 - Making AV equipment available.
 - Providing access to virtual meeting platforms such as Zoom.
 - Creating a family council portal on the care home's website and posting minutes, etc.
 - Aiding in setting up before and cleaning up after meetings (e.g., tables and chairs), etc.
 - Organizing guest speakers.
 - Providing extra support or hospitality for occasional, special events, including tablecloths or refreshments, as resources allow.
- Consider virtual options for holding and attending meetings (see the section on virtual meetings in part two of this guide for more information).
- Aid in arranging guest speakers.
- Work with the Council to determine the best way to reach families and optimize attendance at meetings and events. This may include posting on notice boards, including information in regular newsletters or posting on the organization's website and/or Facebook group.
- Assist the Council in surveying others and selecting the most appropriate times for meetings and information sessions.
- When collecting consent to add residents and family members to newsletters, ask if they consent to having their information shared with the Family Council directly, so that they can be contacted about council meetings and receive other news and updates.

If a Council is Already Active:



- Hold ongoing training for staff, including tips on how to communicate with residents and family effectively.
- Attend a meeting in person and/or virtually, at the invitation of the Council. The Council may also invite other staff, ideally through the administration, to attend a portion of the meetings to learn about their work.
- Offer feedback on the agenda, if requested.
- Provide expertise and resources at meetings, if requested, to educate families, answer specific questions, etc.
- Facilitate an annual resident/family survey to evaluate the functioning and effectiveness of the Council and support the Council in any areas highlighted by the survey as requiring action.
- Assist the Council in developing a brochure introducing the Council to new families. Include the brochure in the home's welcome package and give the resident and family the opportunity to reach out to the Council.
- Alternatively, consider dedicating a section to councils in the Resident/New Family Handbook, providing information on what a council is, their role, benefits and contact names for Residents and families to connect with the Council.
- Involve council members in providing feedback, especially on new protocols, and changes in care, e.g., menu and dining experience feedback, recreation, events, and other areas of daily life. Invite the council to take a tour of the care home to collect their feedback.
- Provide bulletin boards or brochure rack space in various areas of the home for the Council.
- Include a "Council Corner" in electronic newsletters for information on the Council.
- Maintain a family council portal on the care home's website where minutes, resources, etc., can be posted.
- Invite residents and families to participate and/or become members on various committees in the organization
- Include council members in quality improvement activities/initiatives

Best Practices



The Initial Meeting

- Invite all residents, family members, friends and other resident representatives to ensure an inclusive and positive start.
- Consider whether holding a meeting virtually is feasible (see the section below for more information on virtual meetings).
- **Notice:** Ensure 2-3 weeks' notice of the family council meetings via email with a couple of reminders. Post the meeting on notice boards strategically placed on each floor or wing in a prominent place (not all family caregivers use technology).
- Provide an agenda. This will help to formalize the meeting and will provide timelines to guide it. Consider sharing it with management for feedback.
- Consider wearing name tags. Alternatively, if the meeting is taking place virtually, ensure that attendees are asked, and know how to change their names on the virtual platform which is being used – this will also assist with minute taking.
- Generate enthusiasm by ensuring people have a positive experience at the meeting.
- Ensure that a high-level explanation of what a Family Council is and what the goal is can provide motivation. Consider inviting management to speak to this and how the efforts of the Council can benefit a resident's quality of life.
- Consider inviting an engaging guest speaker who will provide first-hand experience of participating in/leading a council, e.g., [a representative from your local Regional Association of Family Councils](#), a member of an established council from another home, or a family member who has experience with another council. The more informative and applicable the meeting is, the more people will want to keep on participating.
- Invite residents, families and friends to share ideas and actively participate – the more participation is generated, the more people will feel they are part of the Council and will want to attend in the future. Show the participants that the Council is not just another social event, but rather a place for residents, families, and friends to generate information, have questions and issues dealt with and hold meaningful discussions, to improve the quality of life for residents.

- Create a Code of Conduct, which will help to shape expectations for how participants will participate in meetings.
- Develop a process for addressing issues which arise where there are conflicting opinions. Ensure participants are aware that the Council is not a decision-making body.
- Determine the date of the next meeting or a regular recurring time. If all participants are comfortable with technology, an online Doodle Poll may help to do this.
- Enlist volunteers to organize and run regular Council meetings. They should be chosen by the families and friends attending and may be temporary at first until the Council is fully established.
- Prepare a sign-in sheet to record the names and contact details of all attendees and interested parties. This will be useful for gathering feedback and identifying volunteers who can be approached directly. If you are holding meetings virtually, some platforms allow for attendance lists to be generated following the meeting.

Meeting Structure



- Elect a chair. Consider electing co-chairpersons who will support one another in organizing meetings and council activities. This is helpful in case one chairperson is no longer able to participate (continue reading for the qualities which should be considered when electing a chair).
- Hold regular monthly meetings (monthly or bi-monthly) but take breaks for August and December (typically low attendance periods) if families want.
- Some councils choose to have staff attend on a regular basis; others prefer to forward the meeting minutes following the meeting. Discuss the ongoing role of staff with attendees. Consider appointing a staff liaison who can be the direct contact to support the Council. It is important that the Family Council is run by families for the benefit of residents.
- Try different ways to attract families to your meetings. [CLICK HERE](#)

- Create an agenda that promotes time for sharing; include a "kudos corner" that highlights experiences that exemplify the kind of care and quality of life in appreciation of what is working well.
- Take minutes of the meetings and distribute them in a timely manner for review before the next meeting; this should include sharing with care home management. Even if people can't attend, they may wish to review the ongoing discussion and outcomes to stay connected and informed.
- With minutes less, it is often more. They should:
 - Be as objective as possible.
 - Do not include names, unless it is necessary to indicate the person responsible for an action item. For example, minutes should not say, "*Mr. Smith expressed a wish to have more recreational activities for residents.*" Instead, they may read, "*a discussion was held about the need for more recreational activities for residents. The Chairperson will bring this to the attention of management.*" This helps council members feel safe in sharing their experiences, concerns, and ideas.
 - Clearly detail any action items and outcomes.
- If meetings are conducted in a virtual format and most participants are comfortable with technology, consider using tools such as Google Docs, Google Hangouts, SLACK and so forth to share and store information.
- Celebrate success! Consider adding a "kudos" section to the agenda, where the Council can identify positive things that have occurred or acknowledge staff members who are making a difference (e.g., one family council reported selecting a special staff person and writing a thank-you card to the person as part of each meeting).
- ILTCCABC Education Portal is offered to all family councils in long-term care. Register (for free) and explore all the educational resources that support the start-up and maintenance of a family council.
[ILTCCABC Education Portal](#)



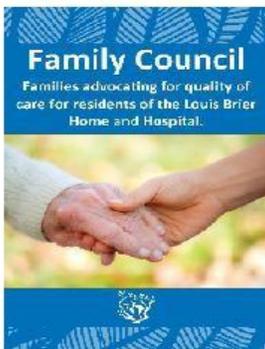
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Family Council welcomes new members and volunteers!

Come and join us! We welcome you to attend our meetings to find out more. Our membership is free with lots of "rewards".

What is Family Council?

For both residents and their families, friends or other caregivers, moving to a care centre is a major transition, accompanied by a loss of what is familiar and comfortable. The Louis Brier Family Council is a group of people (families of residents, friends and caregivers) who collaborate with LBHH senior management team to continue to advance residents' quality of care from the family and resident perspective.



What are the benefits of being part of Louis Brier's Family Council?

We give families opportunities to:

- work together, support one another, share experiences and look for solutions to common concerns
 - communicate concerns to LBHH, join committees, follow up on solutions, have a voice in decisions, and hear staff and administration's views
 - advocate for approaches which improve resident quality of life and create a community of care
- increase member understanding and awareness of what's possible through guest presentations and knowledge sharing

What impact can the Family Council have?

These are successes our Family Council has had. We have:

- created ways to welcome and support new residents and their families
- developed strong relationships between residents, families, caregivers and the Senior LBHH Leadership Team
- helped families understand long-term care environments
- raised funds, through an annual campaign, for projects, items, and activities (an ongoing "wish list")



For more information, please email lb.familycouncil@gmail.com