



A. Starting a New Family Council A-Z

Detailed resources and templates in the appendices 1-13 of the “Starting a Family Council A-Z” education series provide you with the support you will need to start an effective and successful family council.

Note: These are living documents and we welcome your feedback for continuous improvement

Background:

Before diving in, it's helpful to understand what a Family Council is and why it matters. Start by reviewing [Regulation 59](#) in the Residential Care Regulations, the [BC govt website](#) and the [Ministry of Health Guidelines](#) which explains the important role of the Resident and Family Councils.

You can also explore the many resources on the ILTCCABC website: <https://iltccabc.ca/>
- [What is a Resident and/or Family Council?](#)
- [How does the provincial association of family councils support long-term care homes?](#)

A. From the Decision to Start a Family Council Through the First Council Meeting

1. **Taking the First Step (Families):**

a. Consider what you want your Family Council to accomplish. What difference could this group make for families and residents in your care home community?

Here are some guiding questions to help you reflect:

- Why do I want to start a Family Council?
- What benefits could a Council bring to families, residents, and staff?
- What's a short-term goal and long-term vision for this Council?

b. Connect with other Residents and Families in your long-term care home in hallways and at activities. Ask if they have heard about councils, share resources, encourage 2-3 people to start one. Building a council is all about connection.

c. Contact your [Regional Association of Family Councils](#) for complete wrap around support.

d. Meet with the existing Resident Council if there is one to learn how they operate.

e. Meet with Care Home Management (e.g. Administrator, Director of Care) to learn about their current engagement with families. Let them know your interest in starting a Council. A supportive relationship with care home staff is a key factor in an [effective council](#).

f. Attend a regional association forum to meet other care home councils and learn from them.

2. **What if there is Long-Term Care Home resistance to a Family Council?**

[Explain that Residential Care Regulations 59.-59.2](#) are in place to ensure all long-term care homes provide the opportunity for resident and family councils to form. They are also in place to ensure certain supports are provided by each care home to maintain. Contact your [Regional Association of Family Councils](#) for complete wrap around support



3. **Hold an Introductory Meeting or Family Information Session**

The most important method of starting a council is to hold an information session to which all families of residents are invited. This introductory meeting can have a major impact on the success or failure of the council organization.

The purpose of the introductory meeting is to:

- Provide education about how to start a family council (to management, staff and families)
- Determine family interest in a council.
- Obtain family commitment to forming a council; and
- Lay groundwork for the first council meeting.

Any interested family members and the [regional association of family councils](#) (RAFC) in your area (if families wish), should meet (virtually) to plan this meeting.

The RAFC can coordinate with 2-4 interested family members, discuss ‘best practices’, answer questions, and facilitate next steps and the first “inaugural” family council meeting.

4. **The Planning or “Pre-inaugural” Meeting**

- Develop a “who you are and what you do” statement:
(Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct)
- Decide on the date/time. Place and supports you think you need and confirm with care home staff liaison to the forming family council.
- Set an Agenda
- Create Communication and promotion to share out in your long-term care home
- Consider a pre-inaugural meeting with the staff liaison to the family council to ensure everyone is on the same page

5. **Holding the First Council Meeting**

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Regional Association facilitator
- Define why we are here, what a Family Council is, and what we hope to achieve.
- Vote in the Family Council as presented or amended.
- Determine the date of your next meeting.

B. Create awareness of the positive outcomes family engagement generates in long-term care

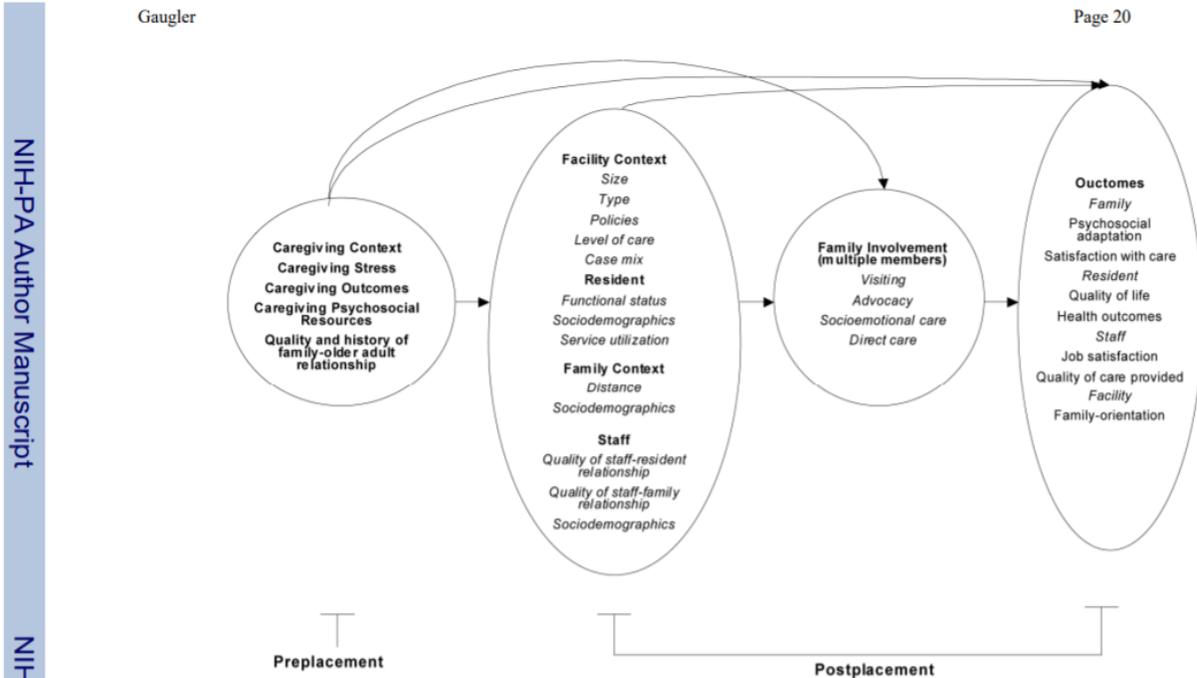


Figure 1.
 Conceptual model of family involvement in residential long-term care.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2247412/figure/F1/>

1. Extol the virtues/benefits of facility involvement in Family Council
2. Make it about us (the long-term care community – residents, family, staff, management) ...not “them” and “us.”
3. Continue to find ways to include Family and Resident Council in meaningful projects, surveys, committees, and all decision-making



C. Benefits for the Long-Term Care Community:

Table I: Potential Benefits of Involvement in Family Councils

- Improved quality of care for residents.
- Empowerment and improved satisfaction for residents/families because of formal way to process concerns, offer suggestions to improve care, and help resolve problems.
- Families realize facility administration is interested in their concerns and willing to listen; less likely to take concerns elsewhere; reduces complaints; forms stronger bonds.
- Family involvement/expertise a valuable resource within framework of shared decision making with staff and administration.
- Increased awareness of factors affecting delivery of care.
- Clarified expectations for families within the realities of LTC placement.
- Positive effect on perceived job satisfaction of nursing home employees.
- Expanded channels of communication (eg, newsletters).
- Two-way communication between administration, staff, and family when staff invited to attend; families express concerns, and staff keep family updated on changes that affect care of family member.
- Education sessions for families on how existing laws apply in real-life situations, ombudsmen role, regulations, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, financing, conservatorships, living wills, chronic diseases, etc.
- Residents/families plan enrichment and other activities.
- Residents/families support the staff (eg, volunteer feeding of residents).
- Sharing facility survey results and CMS reports encourages advocacy.
- Increased community involvement (eg, volunteers) with an improved facility image.
- Residents' feelings of encouragement that stronger voices than their own are making efforts to improve quality of life.
- Emotional support group for families dealing with common feelings of guilt, fear, anger, and frustration.
- Meaningful change can occur.

Information from references 1,2,5,8,10,11,18,25.

<https://www.hmpgloballearningnetwork.com/site/altc/article/6663>

D. Starting a New Family Council (Care Home Leadership and Family Members)

From the First Council Meeting to the First Election

1. BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE

- Leadership and Model are many, not prescribed but individualized
- Build the Terms of Reference which is the “who we are and what we do” document for all the care home community to see and be inspired by to be part of.
- Build the Code of Conduct (Policy for communication between Family Council members, the Resident Council and Care Home Team setting expectations for respectful conversations)
- Learn the care home procedure for handling individual family concerns. Encourage families to use this procedure to ensure it works and to support individual advocacy first.
- Promote participation in the Family Council



ILTCCABC

Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC

Your provincial long-term care councils' association



2. Supporting Family Council Elections (Council and Care Home)

There are many ways to hold elections. The following is one way in which elections can be conducted.

One example:

2.1 Before the Election.

The preparation process for elections should start at least a month in advance of the election date.

2.2 Support the families in developing a system for coming up with a slate of candidates.

This can be done by creating a nominating committee or by notice to all resident contacts.

Whatever approach is taken, it is important to be clear about how family members can easily express their interest. Give families advance notice, reminders and a deadline. Ensure a clear and inviting description of each role is included. Create a poster, create space for a poster, and work with interested families to put the posters up.

2.3 In the notice, ensure to ask candidates to write a sentence about themselves.

In one of the reminders closer to the meeting date, include a list of interested families. Make sure the date of the election is clearly publicized. Ask for a further expression of interest and state that one last ask will be made at the meeting.

3. On Election Day.

3.1 Conduct the voting by secret ballot at an in-person council meeting or by a show of hands using the "reaction button" in a virtual meeting, or a poll for a confidential vote

3.2 Have a neutral third party (such as a regional association of family councils member) to facilitate this whole process and announce the executive of the council.

4. After The Election.

4.1 If this is an election from an existing council, ask the outgoing executive to orient the new executive to their duties.

4.2 Ask the regional association to meet with the new executive to see if they need or want training.

4.3 Acknowledge the work of the outgoing executive at a meeting and thank them. Give them some token of appreciation, such as a gift certificate, to recognize their contributions.

4.4 If this is the first election, ensure the next meeting date is set, conversations have been captured in the meeting notes (Minutes) and that a notice goes out to all family members celebrating first (or new) family council leadership and topics and ideas raised.

E. Council Work

PROCESSING PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS (ALSO KNOWN AS PROBLEM SOLVING OR ADVOCACY)

A key to council effectiveness is forming a trusting relationship first, with the long-term care home team. Then, identifying common concerns leading to a common goal of continuous quality improvement becomes a joint effort.



Family Council regular meetings with the Senior Leadership Team or the Administrative Liaison will, over time, create improvements for everyone.

Regional Associations are equipped to mentor families in this relationship and advocacy space:

March 10 2025 Effective Communications and Building Relations [video](#) and [presentation](#)

While not part of starting up, it is important to remember a Council is not just about starting — it's about sustaining.

Here are some tips to keep your Council active and thriving:

- Hold regular meetings to keep momentum and interest.
- Keep inviting new members — through flyers, admission and welcome packages, email notices and/or newsletter, posters, family information desk days, or billing mail-outs.
- After each meeting, do a quick self-check: What worked well? What can we improve?
- Review and update your terms of reference at least once a year.

With consistency, relationship building, and teamwork, your Council will grow into a trusted, supportive voice for families and residents.

F. Problem Solving

Process for taking the identified collective resident concern from the Family Council to a state of actionable improvement

- Carefully identify the problem
- Develop a concrete and factual statement of the problems
- Identify the outcome that the council is seeking
- Identify possible solutions
- Identify possible obstacles and ways around them
- Choose an approach that the long-term care home will try
- Develop an action plan
- Carry out the action plan
- Monitor Progress
- Evaluate the results

How the Long-Term Care management might take steps to problem solve:



Table III: Recommended Steps for Problem Resolution

- Develop a form for communication with administration/staff that will:
 - identify the issue
 - provide possible solutions
 - offer strategies for resolving issue
 - give suggested time frame for resolution
 - make space for administration to respond
- Identify concerns that affect the most residents
- Assess whether "the problem" is an issue the Council wishes to deal with, considering institutional organization context and resources
- Gather more information
- Construct a plan
- Complete the form
- Present to administration

Information from references 1,5,12.

Family Council:

What to do when the long-term care home is Not Responsive to Council Concerns

- 1 Check the complaint process of the long-term care home to ensure you are following the procedure (maybe the procedure needs updating?)
- 2 Check that the person you, as the family council, are directing the concern to is the correct person – maybe it is not the correct person or department.
- 3 Go to the top. If you are not receiving the responsiveness and support you seek, go to the care home leader for support and direction. Stay curious and yet persistent.
- 4 Ensure you are familiar with the Residential Care Regulations, which state that any communication from the family council must be responded to. Ensure you state when you expect a reply (example: within 10 business days).
- 5 If all the above do not work, connect with the long-term care health authority lead in your region. Maybe this concern is a systemic issue which cannot be resolved at the local site level.
- 6 If it is an infraction of the Residential Care Regulations, then licensing is the proper contact.

Always know you can reach out to your local regional association of family councils for direction.



G. OTHER COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

- Education
- Peer Support
- Facility Committee Participation (Food and Dining Room Experience Committee, Ritual and Heritage Committee, Accreditation Committee, Safety Committee, Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) Committee, Emergency Preparedness, Resident Welcome Committee, Employee Recognition and Social Events Committee, Integrated Quality Improvement Committee and Risk Management Committee)
- Public Policy Advocacy
- Projects and Fundraising

H. Keys to Success – Successful Meetings and Outcomes

Use the Effectiveness Tool: <https://iltccabc.ca/news/iltccabc-collaborates-with-ubc-school-of-nursing-on-their-raise-your-voice-research-project/>

- Establish Ground Rules
- Use Committees
- Prepare for Meetings
- Run Effective Meetings
- After the Meeting
- Communication with senior leadership
- Activities and projects
- Celebrate Successes!



Table IV: Examples of Positive Outcomes from Family Councils

- Actions by facility to improve patient personal hygiene, answering of call lights, and improved demonstration of patient respect by staff
- Including Family Council members in orientation sessions for new families
- Improved staff/family/resident relationships
- Offering a training session for volunteers on safe feeding practices for residents
- Working with the planning committee on the building of a new facility and design of new resident rooms
- Developing manuals about respite care and nursing home placement
- Assigning the same nursing assistants to the same residents
- Installing ramps on sidewalks to facilitate wheelchair use
- Fixing a bump in a threshold to enable wheelchairs to cross easily
- Providing non-spill sipping cups
- Developing an outdoor garden area
- Creating an indoor aviary

Information from references 1, 10, 12, 23, 26, 27.

I. Sustaining Participation – Be visible – Be welcoming

Promote visibly: Use flyers, posters, newsletters, TV slides, or a Family Council bulletin board. Share who you are, why Councils matter, and how to join.

Show your story: Post photos from events, share updates, and highlight the impact your Council has made.

Build ambassadors: Select approachable, enthusiastic members to act as “Council champions.” Try welcome tables during visiting hours or wear “Ask me about Family Council” buttons.

Stay digital: Ask your care home to include Council updates on their website and newsletters. Consider creating a Council webpage.

Host events: Schedule 2 min at the mic at care home events, organize informal gatherings like Family Nights, teas, or BBQs to connect with families, share your role, and invite them to join.

Get involved in Care home projects: garden revitalization, library maintenance and book drives, activity support, employee recognition, committee attendance, accreditation preparation.

VIAFC has a tool – check it out: <https://vancouverislandfamilycouncils.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/21082024-VIAFC-TOOL-Page-Final.pdf>

ILTCCABC has the Education Portal. Check it out: <https://portal.iltccabc.ca/>



J. Bumps in the Road

- Obstacles

Table II: Obstacles to Starting and Maintaining a Family Council

<p>Staff/Administration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Negative perceptions of a Family Council• Communications problems with residents/families• Time constraints• Lack of facility staff support• Lack of monetary funds <p>Family Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unaware of rights to meet as a group and responsibilities of agency to provide support• Difficulty in obtaining family contact names to extend formal invitations• Lack of leadership with changes in Council membership• Communications problems with staff and within Council• Lack of family participation<ul style="list-style-type: none">-drop out with transfer or death of their loved one-time constraints-living too far away-fatigue-inadequate information and education about LTC-competing facility activities (eg, family support groups, family nights)-poor response to suggestions by LTC administration <hr/> <p><i>Information from references 1,9,11,12,17,23,24,26,27.</i></p>
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K. Maintaining the Council Legacy

- Family Council Successes are the key to inspire others to contribute
- Celebrate your successes, each conversation is a success.
- Share out minutes, photos, stories (SPOTLIGHTS) and newsletters.
- Your relationship with your care home community is key
 - welcome and introduce yourself to new care home team members
 - invite them and to speak about their role in resident well being to the family council

L. Strengthening the Council

- Evaluate and analyze: Use the Effectiveness Tool: <https://nursing-hopelab-2022.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2024/06/Reformatted-council-effectiveness-tool-June-24-Final.pdf>