

A Note from the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman:

In the United States, July is a month to celebrate freedom. Throughout the country, communities hold parades, special events and fireworks displays to celebrate our independence and demonstrate our respect for the rights of individuals. In a way, this is no different from what the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OSLTCO) does each day.

Under state law, the OSLTCO is charged with advocating for the rights of Iowa's 53,000 long-term care residents and assisted living program tenants. This includes protecting their right to privacy, confidentiality, dignity and respect; their right to make independent choices; and their right to choose visitors and meet in a private location.

Because many of these rights are relevant to the freedom of sexual expression, the OSLTCO is frequently asked to provide guidance when it comes to sexuality and individuals living in long-term care settings, particularly when cognitive capacity is in question. While every individual's situation is unique, the position of the OSLTCO is to strive to preserve each resident or tenant's freedom of sexual expression by promoting an attitude of awareness, acceptance and respect for sexual diversity.

Through guidance and education to residents and tenants, family members, administrators, directors and staff, the OSLTCO supports residents and tenants in developing maximum self-reliance and independence regarding their sexual choices without restricting or regulating their behaviors. Oftentimes, this involves providing policy development assistance to help clarify acceptable/unacceptable forms of sexual expression and establish consistent and ethical response strategies so sexual expression can be facilitated in a safe manner.

Though outcomes to sexually related situations vary innumerable, as each is different and must be considered independently, the OSLTCO believes a multidisciplinary effort is necessary to develop a thoughtful process from which to draw and support conclusions. It is not the responsibility of the long-term care facility or assisted living program (or a single staff member) to solely determine whether a



resident/tenant should or should not be sexually expressive. Residents and tenants who maintain cognitive capacity to consent should be afforded the same rights to privacy, respect and freedom of sexual expression as other adults, while those whose safety or capacity to consent is in question should be collectively assessed by an interdisciplinary care team to weigh the benefits against the potential risks associated with the act.

In this country, freedom is not something we take lightly; it is something we care about, believe in and celebrate as a nation every Fourth of July. But to uphold freedom, the individual rights of all citizens must be protected every day -- and that includes the millions of Americans who reside in long-term care.

For more information or resources on residents' or tenants' rights to sexual expression, please contact the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman at 866.236.1430.

Deanna Clingan-Fischer, JD

Sexuality and Aging: Debunking the Myths

Due to recent headlines from Iowa and throughout the country, aging and sexuality has become a frequent topic of discussion. Specifically, questions have been raised about if and how older adults experience sexual desire; how dementia and other age-related health issues impact an individual's ability to express desire for and consent to sexual acts; and whether older adults forfeit their right to intimacy once they move into a long-term care facility.



Because sexuality is a basic human need and the choice to participate in sexual acts is one that belongs to the individual, the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OSLTCO) is working to help debunk some of the myths that surround sexuality and aging. While every individual's situation and capacity to consent varies, the following facts may help guide meaningful dialogue about older adults and sexuality.

MYTH: Sex is for the young and attractive.

FACT: Only in the media! Sex does not belong solely to the youthful and beautiful. People don't "age out" of being sexual. It is inherent throughout the aging process and even associated with good health! Sexual expression fulfills a natural desire and can connect people, provide opportunities for affection and passion and build or enhance relationships.

MYTH: Older adults are unable to have sex because their bodies are too old or sick.

FACT: Some changes within the aging body can alter or complicate sexual expression and declines in sexual functioning may occur, but desire and interest remain. The use of medications to treat sexual dysfunction in both men and women has made it possible for people to remain sexually active late into life. One study revealed 61 percent of people over 60 said their sex life today was the same or better than in their 40s, and 26 percent of those over 75 remain sexually active.

MYTH: Residents of nursing facilities can't have sex.

FACT: Relocation to a nursing facility doesn't result in the end of a sex life. Residents are guaranteed certain rights under the federal 1987 Nursing Home Reform Law, including the rights to privacy, confidentiality, respect and expression. Facilities must promote these rights in a manner that enhances residents' quality of life and ensures dignity, choice and self-determination, while affording them privacy and opportunity to engage in safe and consensual sexual expression.

MYTH: Nursing facility residents with dementia or Alzheimer's shouldn't have sex.

FACT: Residents with cognitive impairments, such as dementia and Alzheimer's, have the same rights as other nursing facility residents. When a cognitively impaired resident indicates the desire to be sexually expressive, it becomes necessary for the resident's interdisciplinary care team to assess

the level of capacity to determine the benefits or potential harm associated with the expression. Each sexually related occurrence is unique and should be looked at individually.

For more information or to request staff training around aging and sexuality, please contact the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman at 866.236.1430.

Fact Sheet of the Month: *Reading and Understanding a Nursing Facility's Survey/Statement of Deficiencies*

The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman has created a new fact sheet for consumers and their families. "Reading and Understanding a Nursing Facility's Survey/Statement of Deficiencies" is designed to educate the public about the survey process and provide assistance about locating and making sense of a facility's surveys. The fact sheet has been approved by the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals and would make a great addition to your facility introduction packet or a helpful tool to share when someone requests a copy of your facility's most recent survey.

> [Download the Fact Sheet](#)



Upcoming Events & Learning Opportunities

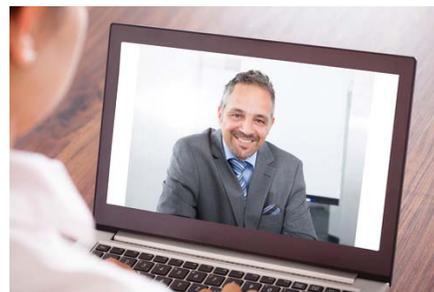
- Do you know someone who has made it their personal or professional mission to enhance the quality of life of older adults or adults with disabilities? If so, please consider nominating him or her for the Betty Grandquist Lifetime Achievement Award.

The purpose of the award is to identify and recognize an Iowan who has dedicated a portion of his or her personal or professional life to achieving excellence in the fields of aging and/or disability or has made significant contributions to promoting independence and enhancing quality of life among older Iowans and Iowans with disabilities. Nominations for this year's award will be accepted through July 15, 2015.

> [Read the criteria and download a Nomination Form](#)

- Save the Date! To celebrate older adults and individuals with disabilities and shine a spotlight on the many opportunities that accompany an ever-changing aging and disability community, the Iowa Department on Aging is proud to present the 2016 Governor's Conference on Aging and Disabilities at the Iowa Events Center in Des Moines from May 23-26, 2016. The theme – "Disruptive Innovations" – highlights the myriad ways Iowa's population is evolving and invites participants to engage in a thoughtful dialogue about the many contributions older adults and individuals with disabilities make to society. More information to come!
- The OSLTCO recently added a page to its website listing several new learning opportunities relating to the advocacy and support of Iowa's long-term care residents. Resources include videos, brochures and presentations about a variety of topics that are beneficial to residents, their families and the staff of Iowa's long-term care facilities.

> [Visit the website](#)



Welcome New Volunteer Ombudsmen

Please join us in welcoming the following new members of the Volunteer Ombudsman Program:

- Susan Bartsch, Green Hills Care Center (Ames)
- Lynne Clifton, Windmill Manor (Coralville)
- Dee Dee Dohman, Norwalk Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (Norwalk)
- Maggie Elliott, Iowa City Rehab & Health Care Center (Iowa City)
- Sue Marsh, Oakwood Care Center (Clear Lake)
- Nancy Nickerson, Good Shepherd Health Center (Mason City)
- Cathy Stone, Oaknoll Retirement Residence (Iowa City)
- Shelley Turner, Good Samaritan Center (Forest City)
- Bill Warren, Kahl Home (Davenport)
- Raye Wolfe, Lutheran Retirement Home (Northwood)

For more information about the program, visit <https://www.iowaaging.gov/VOP>.

The mission of the Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman is to protect the health, safety, welfare and rights of individuals residing in long-term care by investigating complaints, seeking resolutions to problems and providing advocacy, with the goal of enhancing quality of life and care.