

The Quality of Care in Nursing Homes: Getting Ahead of the Crises

In 1986, the Institute of Medicine conducted an evidence-based examination of nursing home quality and issued a consensus report on *Improving the Quality of Care in Nursing Homes*. Soon after, Congress enacted the Nursing Home Reform Act as part of the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1987 (OBRA 87), and the Health Care Finance Administration (now CMS) issued comprehensive regulations and survey processes to “ensure that residents of nursing homes receive quality care that will result in their highest practicable physical, mental, and social well-being.”

The original 1988 Conditions of Participation (the overarching regulatory structure for nursing homes) were reissued as Requirements of Participation in 2016, although there was no comprehensive review of the evidence to assure that they had in fact produced the desired outcomes. Today, the U.S. spends over \$170 billion on nursing home care annually, with extensive regulatory oversight. However, many quality issues persist today, and despite three decades of innovation, the fundamental approach to promoting quality in nursing homes has not been revisited.

Ongoing challenges to maintaining and improving nursing home quality are exacerbated by emergencies like natural disasters and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Nursing home residents are especially vulnerable to complications of coronavirus infection, and may ultimately account for half of all pandemic-related deaths in the U.S. Nursing home staff also face high rates of exposure to the virus and often have health risks of their own, and when they become sick, nursing homes struggle to provide care for all residents. Thus, revisiting how our nation delivers, regulates, and measures the quality and safety of nursing home care –both on a regular basis as well as during an emergency– is urgent and essential.

Statement of Task

An ad hoc committee of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine will examine how our nation delivers, regulates, and measures the quality and safety of nursing home care with particular emphasis on challenges that have arisen in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The committee will consider a broad range of issues such as:

- ways to generate and assess the evidence base for interventions, structures, policies, and care models to promote care innovation while assuring quality of care;
- the impact of current oversight and regulatory structures (including enforcement and penalties) on care quality and outcomes, which may include examination of:
 - the meaningfulness of the current five star rating system and how it is interpreted by consumers and clinicians;
 - the validity, efficiency, and effectiveness of the current survey and certification structures and methods, including inspection standards, training of surveyors, and their adherence to standards;
- the appropriateness of current emergency preparedness regulations and strategies for nursing homes in light of different environmental and pandemic threats to residents.
- the influence of current nursing home real estate ownership and payment models on the delivery of high-quality care and regulatory compliance;
- the role of the facility medical director as the clinical leader in nursing homes;
- strategies to attract, train, and retain a more skilled workforce to nursing homes and survey agencies; and
- the role of nursing homes in the continuum of post-acute and long-term care.

The committee will develop a set of consensus findings and recommendations to delineate a framework and general principles for improving the quality of care in today’s nursing homes, delivering high quality care in a consistent manner, and ensuring the safety and well-being of residents and staff in nursing homes. The committee may also consider the relevance of their findings and recommendations to other long-term care settings, if applicable.

Work Plan and Timeline

With the support of professional staff, a committee of approximately 15 experts appointed by the National Academies will analyze current scientific evidence, communicate with sponsors and other stakeholders in accordance with institutional guidelines, and develop consensus recommendations. The report will be subject to standard external review procedures prior to public release. The final report will be made available online, free of charge.