

# **YOUR GUIDE TO SELECTING A NURSING HOME**



Sean Doolan  
Doolan Platt & Setareh, LLP  
56 Main Street 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Irvington, NY 10533  
T: 518-755-3443  
F: 914- 478-0100  
E: [Sean@dpsattorneys.com](mailto:Sean@dpsattorneys.com)

Phil Rizzuto  
The Rizzuto Law Firm  
50 Charles Lindbergh Blvd.  
Uniondale, NY 11553  
T: 516-622-0606  
F: 516-622-2112  
E: [Prizzuto@rizzutolaw.com](mailto:Prizzuto@rizzutolaw.com)

## INTRODUCTION

Finding a nursing home that will best meet your needs can be a difficult and time-consuming task. If you do it right, choosing a nursing home isn't easy. It could take days and even weeks to make sure that your loved one is in a place where their needs will be met. And while nursing home ratings can help you see how different facilities stack up on important measures like staffing, nothing beats visiting places in person.

The more information you have, the easier the task will be and the more likely you will find the nursing home that is right for you. Making the decision that a nursing home is the right place for you and looking at different homes to identify those that best meet your needs, from the services they offer to their cultural environment, is important to do.

It is best to have several nursing homes in mind. Before it is time for you to be admitted to a nursing home, you should explore what options are available and research each facility. There are several ways to obtain information. With the help of your doctor and the hospital discharge planning staff (if you are hospitalized), realistically assess your medical, nursing and social needs and seek facilities that can best meet those needs. For example, a facility with a strong physical therapy department might be important if you are recovering from a stroke. Discuss nursing home placement with your family so that all possibilities can be fully explored and your feelings are known. Watch for articles in newspapers and magazines and for television programs that discuss nursing homes. Pick up information on nursing homes from social service agencies or local aging and health departments. Contact community groups and advocacy groups. There are a number of State and voluntary agencies that may be able to help.

To obtain information on nursing homes in New York State, visit the New York State Nursing Home Profile at [https://profiles.health.ny.gov/nursing\\_home/#5.79/42.868/-76.809](https://profiles.health.ny.gov/nursing_home/#5.79/42.868/-76.809). This will give you a lot of information about the facilities and the quality of care they provide. The care the nursing homes provide can also be compared on the Federal Medicare website (Nursing Home Compare). Ask family and friends about their own experiences. If you know someone who is in a nursing home, visit that person and ask questions. Ask your doctor if he/she provides care at any nursing homes so that you may be able to continue your relationship with him/her within the nursing home.

Ask questions of key personnel at the facilities you visit -- the nursing home administrator, admissions director, social work director, nursing director and medical director, for example. Make your own judgments. A caring nursing home should welcome both your desire to visit and the questions you ask.

## HOW TO CHOOSE A NURSING HOME

A nursing home, also known as a skilled nursing facility, provides a wide range of health and personal care services. These services typically include nursing care, 24-hour supervision, three meals a day, and assistance with everyday activities. Rehabilitation services, such as physical, occupational, and speech therapy, are also available.

Some people stay at a nursing home for a short time after being in the hospital. After they recover, they go home. However, most nursing home residents live there permanently because they have ongoing physical or mental conditions that require constant care and supervision.

If you need to go to a nursing home after a hospital stay, the hospital staff can help you find one that will provide the kind of care that's best for you. If you are looking for a nursing home, ask your doctor's office for recommendations. Once you know what choices you have, it's a good idea to:

**Consider what you want.** What is important to you—nursing care, meals, physical therapy, a religious connection, hospice care, or special care units for dementia patients? Do you want a place close to family and friends so they can easily visit?

**Talk to friends and family.** Talk with friends, relatives, social workers, and religious groups to find out what places they suggest. Check with healthcare providers about which nursing homes they feel provide good care.

**Call different nursing homes.** Get in touch with each place on your list. Ask questions about how many people live there and what it costs. Find out about waiting lists.

**Visit the facility.** Make plans to meet with the director and the nursing director. You should also visit a facility you are seriously considering multiple times and different times of the day. The Medicare Nursing Home Checklist (attached) has some good ideas to consider when visiting. For example, look for:

- Medicare and Medicaid certification
- Handicap access
- Residents who look well cared for
- Warm interaction between staff and residents

## **TOP 5 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A NURSING HOME**

### **1. LOCATION & SIZE**

When considering different nursing home care, location is one of the most important factors to consider. If you're the one needing care, you will want to be as close to your family as possible. If you're looking at nursing homes for a loved one, you should be able to easily visit your loved one frequently.

If the nursing home isn't close to you, it should be close to another trusted family member that is willing to be there to support your loved one. The size of the nursing home is also extremely important. It should be based on the unique personality and preferences of the person that needs care. For example, you can ask yourself or your loved one questions like these:

- Is this person more introverted and quieter, or social and outgoing?
- Would having a lot of other people around be better environment for this person?
- Are there places where he or she can get outside and walk around?
- If so, are these places easily accessible and safe?
- Does the facility have enough room to offer quiet areas and activity spaces so that residents can decide what they want to do at any given time?

The bottom line is, the closer a facility is to your home, the more likely you'll be able to go for a visit or talk with staff and the more you will see your loved one.

### **2. SERVICES**

Though they all offer a long-term care, different nursing homes offer many different services and health care, so it is crucial to find out which ones are provided by the homes you're considering. While some services are essential for meeting the specific needs of the resident, others are just as important for improving their quality of life. For example, the meal and dining experience have been shown to make a big difference in the overall satisfaction of nursing home residents.

That's why you should always visit the home during mealtime before making a final decision. During your visit, you should check to see if the residents get to choose between different options for their meals. You should also have a meal there and taste the food first hand and decide for yourself.

Ask someone if they provide options for special dietary needs and if they offer nutritious snacks when residents ask for them. If needed, do they help residents drink and eat during mealtime? Besides mealtime, there are other activities that can make the residents' experience better. The best nursing homes allow their residents to play a role in the planning and selection of activities.

Special health care services should also be available for different patient needs. For example, if the individual needing care has dementia, you should choose a place with a specialized unit to care for dementia patients. If they need rehabilitation, it would be helpful to have a rehabilitation unit on-site.

### **3. STAFFING**

The staff members at a nursing home are going to be the ones ensuring your loved one's safety and their attitude, expertise, and professionalism is extremely important. You should always ask plenty of questions and spend some time observing the staff before making a decision. While you observe, you should look for staff who possess skilled nursing care and personal care, but also demonstrate a polite, warm and respectful relationship between the staff and the resident. You can also see if the staff knocks on residents' doors before entering and if they call residents by their name.

#### **Things You Should Consider When It Comes to Nursing Home Staff:**

- Do the staff have easy access to continuing education and training programs at the nursing home?
- Check with administrators to ensure the nursing home does not hire people with skilled nursing care that have any record of mistreatment or neglect in the nurse aide registry
- There should be a licensed nurse at the facility at all hours of every day. There should also be a registered nurse or RN, there at least 8 hours daily
- Make sure that the nurses and nursing assistants will work with you (or your loved one) to ensure your needs are met
- Keep an eye out for nursing homes with a lot of turnover, especially in the administrative ranks. This can be a sign of underlying problems

### **4. CHOICES & INDEPENDENCE**

Moving to a nursing home is a scary experience for most individuals. They often feel like they want their freedom to make their own choices. While it is true that they cannot do many of the things they used to do, some aspects of their lives can, and should, remain up to them as long as they are mentally capable.

This is something that should be considered during the decision-making process. Choices like what side item they want to eat, what activity they want to participate in, when they go to bed and wake up, what shows they watch and more help residents feel more comfortable and happier in nursing homes. If the individual receiving care is still mentally healthy, the last place you want to put them is a home where their every move is controlled by the staff.

Also look at the activities the facilities provide... Bingo, Magicians, Card Playing etc... Do they offer day trips? Will they provide transportation to and from religious services?

## **5. RED FLAGS**

We've discussed some of the most important things to look for when searching for a nursing home. But what about the most important to look out for? The following represent red flags among poor nursing homes.

### **NINE RED FLAGS TO LOOK FOR**

Here are nine signs that a facility isn't right for your loved one.

#### **1. A POOR VIOLATION HISTORY**

Although both state and federal agencies place strict regulations on nursing homes, there are still some bad eggs out there. You can find the nursing homes with bad reputations for care by doing a little research online.

[Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) offers a very helpful search tool that provides reports on different nursing homes based on ZIP code. They rate these facilities on factors such as staffing violations, health inspections and more. If the nursing home you're interested in isn't showing many stars, you should take a look at the home's full report.

There are many other great search engines like those provided by [ProPublica](https://www.propublica.org) and [U.S. News](https://www.usnews.com) that can be very helpful tools for choosing the right nursing home in your area.

While you're likely to find some minor violations for many nursing homes you consider, it is important to understand that the severity of the violations make a big difference. For example, a nursing home could have a violation for allowing a resident to wander off the campus.

That is a very dangerous situation. On the other hand, they could have a violation for incorrect placement of soap dispensers or for having a cobweb in their basement. If the nursing home you like best has a few minor violations, just make sure you ask the administrator what they have done to fix those issues.

## **2. LOUD NOISES**

When you walk through a nursing home's doors, don't just look – **LISTEN**. How noisy is it? How chaotic is it? Usually, the higher-functioning organizations tend to be much calmer and not as chaotic. Loud overhead paging can also enhance agitation, especially among people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

## **3. DISRESPECT**

How staff and residents interact speaks volumes about life at a long-term care facility. Do the nurse assistants – the “backbone” of resident care know the residents' names? Do they respond promptly? Does the respect go both ways? Staff members who talk more to each other than to the residents is another red flag.

## **4. ABSENT ADMINISTRATORS**

Talking to the facility's staff is just as important as watching them in action. Are they overworked? Stressed? The facility's administrator will be your contact person so he or she should be accessible and open to questions.

## **5. A LACK OF CHOICES**

A move from independent living into a long-term care facility strips older adults of a lot of autonomy. That's why it's important for them to make choices. Such as what and when they eat, what they wear, and when they go to sleep and wake up. Variety matters, too. Do they have bingo every single day? Or ... can residents choose what they really want to do?

## **6. VISITING HOURS**

Don't forget, this is your loved one's home. For the most part, you should be able to come and go as you please as you would in their home. While it's fair for nursing homes to make reasonable request. you should be able to come and go as you please. You should definitely be able to join your loved one for a meal or activity. Check out the place on nights and weekends.

## **7. AN UNSAFE NEIGHBORHOOD**

While nursing home residents tend to spend most of their time inside, the neighborhood still matters, since getting outside safely can make a big difference in mental health. Make sure the nursing home and the outside space is secure. Residents should be comfortable and secure and not be able to get lost.

## 8. MISALIGNED VALUES

You want to pick a place that behaves in a manner that's consistent with your values and preferences, which means that you've got to be really honest about why your loved one is using the nursing home. They should be treated at the nursing home as they would be in their OWN HOME.

- What is the facility's philosophy of care?
- How are difficult to manage residents handled and treated?
- How does the facility approach end-of-life?
- How do those answers align with your family's values?

## 9. A BAD FEELING IN YOUR GUT

You've heard it said many times, "trust your gut!" This applies to this decision just as much if not more than others. There will be some nursing homes that you just know aren't the right place. From the cleanliness of the facilities to the respectfulness of the staff and even the smell, your impression of the place, in general, does matter. While choosing the right nursing home is always a challenging process, these issues can help you avoid the true nightmare that some people experience. After all, the care of you or your loved one is a very important matter that deserves time and attention. Do your research, follow these tips and stay positive. You'll find the perfect nursing home soon.

### Visiting Nursing Homes during COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nursing homes may continue to update their services and policies to comply with state department of health and CDC guidelines. For example, visitors may be required to wear a face mask or cloth face covering. Before you visit, check with the facility for information on their policies. You can also follow CDC guidelines to protect yourself during your visit.

**Ask questions during your visit.** Don't be afraid to ask questions. For example, ask the staff to explain any strong odors. Bad smells might indicate a problem; good ones might hide a problem. You might want to find out how long the director and heads of nursing, food, and social services departments have worked at the nursing home. If key members of the staff change often, that could mean there's something wrong.

**Visit the facility again.** Make a second visit without calling ahead. Try another day of the week or time of day so you will meet other staff members and see different activities. Stop by at mealtime. Is the dining room attractive and clean? Does the food look tempting?

**Carefully read your contract.** Once you select a nursing home, carefully read the contract. Question the director or assistant director about anything you don't understand. Ask a good friend or family member to read over the contract before you sign it.



The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services requires each State to inspect any nursing home that gets money from the government. Homes that don't pass inspection are not certified. Ask to see the current inspection report and certification of any nursing home you are considering.

## **Nursing Home Provider Associations**

Nursing home provider associations also have useful information about nursing homes that are members. The following organizations represent and provide assistance to nursing homes in New York State:

### **Greater New York Health Care Facilities Association**

519 Eighth Avenue, 16th Floor  
New York, New York 10018  
212-643-2828  
[www.gnyhcfa.org](http://www.gnyhcfa.org)

### **Healthcare Association of New York State**

One Empire Drive  
Rensselaer, New York 12144  
518-431-7600  
[www.hanys.org](http://www.hanys.org)

### **Intercounty Health Facilities Association, Inc.**

1615 Northern Boulevard, Suite 306  
Manhasset, New York 11030  
516-627-3131  
[www.intercountyhealth.com](http://www.intercountyhealth.com)

### **LeadingAge New York**

13 British American Boulevard, Suite 2  
Latham, New York 12110  
518-867-8383  
[www.leadingageny.org](http://www.leadingageny.org)

### **Long Term Care Community Coalition**

One Penn Plaza, Suite 6252  
New York, NY 10119  
212-385-0355  
[www.nursinghome411.org](http://www.nursinghome411.org)

### **New York State Association of Counties**

540 Broadway, 5th Floor  
Albany, New York 12207  
518-465-1473  
[www.nysac.org](http://www.nysac.org)

**New York State Health Facilities Association**

33 Elk Street, Suite 300  
Albany, New York 12207  
518-462-4800  
[www.nyshfa.org](http://www.nyshfa.org)

**Southern New York Association**

39 Broadway, Suite 1710  
New York, New York 10006  
212-425-5050  
[www.snya.org](http://www.snya.org)

***Resources***

American Health Care Association

[www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov)

Resources National Institute on Aging, [www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov)

U.S. News & World Reports