



By Sarah McVeigh

Consumer Guide to Quality Aging Services

When older adults are seeking aging services or care, it is important to know how providers are managed, what values drive their work, and how they will meet the needs of older adults.

When people are selecting a facility or service for a loved one, they want to know how it will meet their loved one's needs as well as how it will respond to their concerns about the older adult's care.

Not all providers of care and services are the same, and asking questions is a good way to find the one that is right for you or your loved one. That is why we developed a list of questions you can ask when you visit senior housing, assisted living residences, retirement communities and nursing homes, and when you inquire about adult day or home health services.

Ask some or all of these questions to a representative from each organization you are considering. You can also ask these questions when you are a resident or client as a way to encourage the organization to improve. The answers you receive can help you learn more about the organization, evaluate the quality of its care and services, and compare it to others.

High-quality aging services providers should be able to answer these questions. You are entitled to understandable answers.

This guide should not be your only resource in this process. Talk to family members and friends, meet with a financial advisor or care manager, or ask for a referral from your physician or other professionals. State and area agencies on aging also can be useful sources of information on care and services for older adults. And most important, follow your instincts.

Our goal is to help you find the provider of care and services that is best for you or your loved one...an organization that you can trust.

This questionnaire was prepared by LeadingAge as part of Quality First, a national quality improvement initiative. This questionnaire is designed to help you identify quality organizations. It is not a guide to the types and costs of care and services these organizations offer.

1. Commitment

- Does your organization participate in a quality improvement or accreditation program? If so, please explain which one(s) and why.
- Does your organization have a written Code of Ethics? If so, how does it guide what your organization does?

2. Governance and Accountability

- What is your organization's mission and what policies and procedures do you have to ensure all staff members work according to the same beliefs and goals?
- Who serves on your Board of Directors?
- What are some examples of ways in which your organization practices sound financial management?

3. Leading-Edge Care and Services

- How does your organization identify and adopt new care and service practices?
- Do you have an example of an innovative policy or procedure that you have implemented recently?
- How are you using technology to improve care and services for your residents or clients?
- Do you collaborate with other organizations to develop and study new ways of providing services?

4. Community Involvement

- How are volunteers involved in your organization?
- What kinds of community programs or services do you bring into the facility, and how do you involve residents in programs, events and activities in the neighboring community?
- Describe how residents are encouraged and enabled to vote in elections; participate in religious services; and continue other lifelong activities that are important to them?

5. Continuous Quality Improvement

- How do you evaluate and measure the quality of the services you offer and identify opportunities for improvement?
- What are your organization's current quality improvement goals?

6. Human Resources Development

- What training opportunities do you offer employees?
- Is your staff encouraged to give feedback? For example, do you conduct staff satisfaction surveys and, if so, how do you use the results?
- What is the average length of employment for your staff members and what reasons do employees cite for leaving your organization?

7. Consumer-Friendly Information

- What information do you share with your residents or clients about the financial health of your organization?
- How do you educate individuals about Medicare and Medicaid and how to determine whether they are eligible for benefits? Can you explain what each covers?
- How do you ensure that individuals can make informed choices about their care?

8. Consumer Participation

- What methods do you provide for residents and clients and their families to share their ideas and concerns with your staff, management and trustees/board members?
- What is the role of resident and family councils in your organization?
- What is your process for measuring customer satisfaction; sharing this information with residents, clients and families; and making changes based on the results?
- How do you include family members in making decisions about the care and services for their loved ones?
- How are your residents or clients encouraged to participate in their own care or services?

9. Research Findings and Education

- How do you stay current on research and trends on care and services for older adults?
- What new practice or approach have you implemented recently?

10. Public Trust

- How do you tell the community and the local media about your work for older adults?

After your visit with the aging services organization's representative . . .

After your visit, take time to reflect on your experience. Read the organization's materials and look at its Web site, review any notes you took, or talk to a friend or family member about the visit.

You may also find it helpful to ask yourself these questions about your meeting:

- Did he/she seem interested in me and my loved one's specific needs?
- Did he/she answer my questions and provide me with the information I requested?
- How did he/she interact with residents or clients?
- Did you meet employees of all levels?
- Did these employees seem engaged and informed about the people they serve?
- Did I leave with unanswered questions?
- Did he/she encourage me to visit again or offer additional information to me?

The ultimate question to ask yourself is, "Can I trust this organization and the work they do for their residents or clients?"

This feeling of trust will help guide you to the aging services organization that is right for you or your loved one.