

# *Practices In Excellence*



**Preparing Residents For Moving  
Out Of Assisted Living Residences**

## Introduction

**A**ssisted living professionals committed to delivering high-quality and person-centered care realize that preparing and supporting residents when they move out reduces their stress and anxiety. Assisted living residence (ALR) staff can help relieve the stress inherent in any move—and particularly for frail residents—by following a clear set of policies and procedures created by the ALR. This guide will explain the strategies involved in successfully transitioning a resident move-out during non-medical, non-emergency situations.

This guide assumes that the ALR has exhausted the coordination of outside consultant care allowed under state regulations. While this document provides guidance, its content is not to be considered “standards of care.”

## Contents

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>1</b> Training Staff About Move-In, Move-Out Criteria  | <b>4</b> Repeating Move-Out Criteria After Assessments or Hospitalizations     |
| <b>1</b> Establishing Realistic Expectations For Residents And Families Through Marketing Materials | <b>4</b> How Administrators Conduct The Notification Meeting With The Resident |
| <b>2</b> Including Move-Out Information In Resident Agreements                                      | <b>5</b> Creating A Mutually Beneficial Environment                            |
| <b>3</b> Reviewing Criteria And Obtaining Preference Information During Admission Process           | <b>6</b> Choosing The Right Words For The Resident/Family                      |
| <b>3</b> Documenting Conversations With Residents And Family  | <b>7</b> Informing Staff By Holding A Meeting                                  |
| <b>3</b> Diminishment Of Financial Resources  | <b>8</b> Move-Out Day  |
| <b>4</b> Resident Safety  | <b>9</b> Conclusion  |



**Advocating Care Excellence (ACE) is NCAL's quality banner identifying programs, resources, and tools that assisted living providers utilize in daily care to residents. This publication is part of the ACE collection.**

# Preparing Residents For Moving Out

## Training Staff About Move-In, Move-Out Criteria

**T**raining staff about move-in and move-out criteria is a core foundational element of consistent quality care and disclosure of accurate information to consumers. Staff training on move-out criteria should be included in employee orientations, periodic in-services, and staff meetings.

The basis of the training should include the ALR's written policies, procedures, and any applicable state regulations about resident move-outs. The training should include:

- ◆ Discussion of the ALR's move-out criteria;
- ◆ Good customer service strategies;
- ◆ Explanation of the importance of documentation, including forms;
- ◆ Information on any consumer rights pertaining to move-outs; and
- ◆ Information that should be included in the notice of move-out issued to residents.

Training provides staff a better understanding of what is involved with the move-out process and in turn provides the resident with better assistance. Training sessions can include role playing to teach staff what to say when residents, family members, or guardians ask for a resident to remain in the residence, require assistance, or just need to express their feelings.

Before training sessions begin, ensure consis-

tency between marketing and actual care practices by checking marketing and resident agreements to make sure that move-out conditions are included.



## Establishing Realistic Expectations For Residents And Families Through Marketing Materials

**M**any consumers believe once a resident moves into an ALR, they can remain for the rest of their lives. It is important for staff to establish realistic and accurate expectations and to correct this misperception if the ALR does not allow or accommodate unconditional “aging in

place.” By using ethical marketing and disclosure practices, staff can inform consumers of the actual care and services being provided to residents. (For more information about ethical marketing, see NCAL’s “The Power of Ethical Marketing” brochure.)

Considering how many people use the Internet to find information about an ALR, consider including move-out criteria in marketing materials on the ALR’s Web site.

Remember that move-out criteria should be in accordance with state and federal laws, such as the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Another idea is for providers to consider creating a chart with two columns, titled “Move In” and “Move Out.” These columns compare health conditions that can be accommodated and those that cannot be accommodated in the ALR. Examples for possible “Move-Out” criteria could include:

- ◆ Transferring the resident requires two people;
- ◆ The resident’s dementia results in uncontrollable wandering or elopement;
- ◆ The resident requires 24-hour nursing on a permanent basis; or
- ◆ The resident’s disruptive behavior, such as combativeness, causes physical harm to fellow residents, staff, or others.

The chart can be posted on the ALR’s Web site and included in its marketing materials. Provide

a printed copy to potential residents or relatives during a tour of the community. (The chart also can be used as a training tool with frontline staff.)

Marketing and sales representatives should be

able to discuss the health conditions that would be accommodated or prohibited in accordance with state regulations and residence policy. During the tour, a staff member should inquire about the person’s expectations. By listening, the staff member can verbally

correct any potential customer misunderstanding with the facts.

## Including Move-Out Information In Resident Agreements

**A**nother opportunity to reinforce move-out criteria is when a staff member is discussing the Resident Agreement with incoming residents and their family members. Resident Agreements should be written in clear and simple language so that all provisions can be understood by the incoming resident or person responsible—and provided well before move-in for adequate time to review.

Make sure Resident Agreements include the following items regarding move-outs:

- ◆ Move-out criteria;
- ◆ Explanations about how a resident or the ALR would notify each other about moving



out or terminating the resident agreement; and

- ◆ An explanation of a Resident Appeal process regarding transfers and move-out situations.

As determined by state regulations, residents may have a right to appeal an involuntary transfer or move-out decision to the ombudsman or state licensing or other appropriate oversight agency.

In states without appeal systems, NCAL's "Guiding Principles for Providing Information to Consumers" recommends that ALRs create an internal appeal process that utilizes an in-person meeting that is easily accessible to the resident. If an ALR already has an internal procedure for appeals, the Resident Agreement should include that procedure but should not be written in a manner that would require the resident to exhaust an ALR's procedures before appealing the ALR's decision to the state.

## Reviewing Criteria And Obtaining Preference Information During Admission Process

**D**uring the admission of a resident, a staff member should explain verbally and use printed materials when talking about the move-out criteria and procedures. Review the criteria that the state and the ALR have set for resident health and medical conditions.

Also ask incoming residents about the hospital, rehabilitation center, or nursing facility that they would prefer to go to should the need arise. If the resident hasn't thought about those choices, discuss the options available to them and reassure them they can inform the ALR at a later time once they have evaluated their options.

## Documenting Conversations With Residents And Family

**A**LRs should have a practice of documenting all interactions with residents, their relatives, or responsible party, especially during move-out. If the family or resident files a complaint with an outside agency, it also provides the ALR some proof of the agreed-upon move-out procedures. Documenting conversations also will help everyone recall information.

The documentation of conversations between staff and resident should include:

- ◆ The agreement between the ALR and resident about how the move-out will proceed;
- ◆ Who is the main contact person for the resident; and
- ◆ Where the resident chooses to go.

## Diminishment Of Financial Resources

**B**efore a resident moves in, the ALR should also discuss what happens should the resident's financial resources diminish. The conversation should define what constitutes a late payment and the number of days the ALR would give before the resident would be required to move out. Review the responsibility of residents to notify the ALR well before their private funds expire (e.g. 120 days) so the ALR can supply timely information to residents to help them make a transition.





## Information Needed For Official Move-Out Notice

The notice should include the following items:

- ◆ Effective date of the move-out.
- ◆ Reason(s) for move-out, including facts and circumstances on which the decision is based.
- ◆ Resident's right to appeal the decision.
- ◆ Information on where to appeal and time frame for filing appeal.
- ◆ Contact information for the Long Term Care Ombudsman Program.
- ◆ Resident's right to represent himself/herself or to be represented by legal counsel and a relative, friend, or another kind of resident spokesperson.
- ◆ Where the resident is moving.

Once the resident notifies the ALR, then the ALR should begin conversations with the resident or loved one about alternative arrangements as soon as possible. If the ALR participates in a Medicaid waiver program, then the administrator\* should explain the process and provide resources about how the resident accesses the Medicaid program or available resources and begin to help the resident with enrollment.

If not and there are other communities in the state participating in a Medicaid program, then gather information on those communities and share them with the resident, family member, or guardian.

## Resident Safety

In some instances, residents may become a safety risk to themselves or others. When this occurs, the ALR is required to

\*ALRs across the country use different titles to indicate the person in charge of the community, such as administrator, executive director, manager, or director. For this document, the term "administrator" is used to represent the person in charge.

ensure the physical safety of the resident, other residents, and staff. Simultaneously, notify the family or responsible party about the situation and explain how the ALR is required to proceed.

## Repeating Move-Out Criteria After Assessments Or Hospitalizations

Staff should always communicate residents' changing health conditions to family members or other responsible parties: the better the communication, the better the transition. It is recommended that staff members repeat conversations about move-out criteria when the resident's health indicators require more acute levels of care that cannot be provided.

## How Administrators Conduct The Notification Meeting With The Resident

An administrator is ultimately responsible for the care for the resident. Throughout a resident's stay, the resi-

dent, family members, or responsible parties look to the administrator to provide answers, solve problems, and manage staff. Continuing that administrator leadership position during the move-out process provides continuity and expresses the importance the community places on accommodating the resident's transition.

Administrators or a qualified designee should initiate an in-person meeting with the resident, making sure that a family member, guardian, or responsible party is also involved in the meeting. Whenever possible, the meeting should occur at least 45 days (or more if required by the state) before an effective move-out date.

Preparation includes:

- ◆ Completing the notice of move-out;
- ◆ Compiling resident health records and physician orders indicating the need for the resident to move-out; and
- ◆ Making copies of the ALR's move-in/out criteria, the Resident Agreement, and state regulations.

Many states and ALRs have ready-made forms for notice of move-out. NCAL's "Guiding Principles for Disclosing Information to Consumers" suggests that ALRs provide an official notification of move-out to residents if the residents are moving out for a non-emergency reason.

In addition, use a form during the notification meeting that allows the staff person to document the meeting as well as any follow-up items. Copies of the completed form will be given to the resident and family.

If the ALR has been practicing ongoing communication with the resident, the family, and the responsible parties, then the official notification usually will not come as a surprise.

## Creating A Mutually Beneficial Environment

**H**olding an in-person meeting allows everyone to obtain the same information at the same time. This meeting should not be held over the phone or through e-mail since these modes of communication are not good vehicles for reflective listening or conveying empathy.

The meeting room needs to be private and able to accommodate everyone attending. Both factors convey the message to resident and family that the ALR is concerned about the comfort and care of the resident. Setting the meeting's tone is done by the administrator's verbal communication and demeanor.

It is very important that this meeting establish an avenue for all to communicate their concerns. The resident and family members should be given the opportunity to express their feelings and encouraged to ask questions.

The administrator needs to make eye contact and give his or her full attention to the resident and the other interested parties. Turn off any personal electronic devices, such as cell phones or personal digital assistant devices (PDAs), and ask participants to do the same. In addition, inform staff about the need for no interruptions, which can include shutting off computers, placing a "Private Do Not Disturb" sign on the door, and redirecting office phones to voicemail or another extension.

Move-out conversations can be emotional for residents and family. Offering respectful and kind support is key in managing these delicate conversations. Maintain a positive attitude even if the reason for moving is dissatisfaction with your community.



## Choosing The Right Words For The Resident/Family

**T**he resident needs to feel that the ALR's primary focus is the well-being of the resident. Begin

the meeting by conveying a sense of empathy to the resident and family about the situation. Deliver the message in a gentle manner, with words that are not harsh. Never say the "resident has to leave."

Here is an example:

"We can no longer meet the needs of your mother, and at this time in your mother's life she deserves to reside in a setting where her needs can be better met."

If the resident or family is leaving because they are dissatisfied with the community, tell them:

"Another location may be better able to meet your needs, and we will support you through that process."

Provide options to the resident and family so that they feel empowered to make decisions about the next steps, then offer to make phone calls but do not steer or recommend other facilities. For example:

"We can make phone calls to other settings that you are interested in to help determine availability. We will support your needs and efforts as you move through this process."

Encourage the resident and family to explain their concerns and ask questions. This reinforces the idea that the ALR is working on their behalf. When they are done, the administrator needs to verbally reflect back to them the important points to make sure their concerns have been understood. If the family or resident expresses the desire to remain in the ALR, the administrator can respond with:

"If your mother should improve, and her condition is to the point where we can again meet her needs, we would welcome her back."

If the resident or family is persistent in wanting to stay, suggest the option of holding a room while they are in another location:

"If you like, we can discuss holding her room while she is adjusting to the new facility."

Reassure the family and resident that the resident is always welcome to return to the ALR.

Continue the meeting by discussing the other details involved in moving out. Offer to hold a special luncheon, dinner, or tea whereby the resident moving out has a chance to meet with friends and staff in the building before the resident leaves. Ask the resident what he or she would prefer.

When the notification meeting is over, document all decisions in a letter to the resident, relatives or guardian. The letter should include:

- ◆ The reason for move-out;
- ◆ The agreed-upon resolution;
- ◆ The date of move-out;
- ◆ Who's responsible for the resident;
- ◆ Tentative schedule for removal of the belongings;
- ◆ Where the resident is going; and
- ◆ The date for the return of the deposit if applicable.



## Informing Staff By Holding A Meeting

**H**old a meeting to inform staff of the resident's move. The administrator should explain why the resident is moving out, the date of the move, and where the resident is moving. Let the staff know who will



be the back-up point person when the administrator is not in the community. Be sure staff members on all shifts are informed when a resident is moving out.

Reaffirm the ALR's commitment to support the resident, and explain how staff will support the resident during the move-out process. Transitions for residents can result in negative health consequences. Emphasize the need to be courteous and accommodating in their interactions with the resident and family because negative interactions will have an impact on both the resident's transition to a new setting and the ALR. In addition, bad interactions with staff members can leave residents or family members with negative feelings about an ALR. Those negative feelings become stories being told to people they know and at the resident's next location.

These conversations impact the reputation of the community and can possibly discourage

others from considering living in the ALR.

ALRs can direct staff to answer the resident or family members' statements about wanting to

remain in the community by being pleasant and reassuring. Then staff should inform the administrator.

Review with staff the resident's special needs or considerations. Also review the key points of the ALR's policies and procedures for move-

out, so that staff have a fresh memory of the steps or processes involved in resident move-outs. Instruct staff to relay all resident and family, or guardian, questions and comments to the administrator as soon as possible.

Administrators should also ask staff for suggestions or personal knowledge about the resident that would help support that resident during the move. If a resident favors a particular staff member, appoint that staff member as the resident's liaison responsible for accommodating the resident's immediate needs, requests, or wishes. Or designate a staff member to the resident to help coordinate the details such as changing mailing address and referring moving companies or care managers.

Helping staff and other residents say goodbye will help everyone share their feelings, which contributes to everyone's emotional health and mental attitude. Encourage staff to spend time

with the resident to reminisce and express how much the resident has meant to them.

In those cases where the resident or family feel the move-out is unfair, the ALR should contact the long term care ombudsman's office or a representative from the state licensing agency. Contacting these offices provides a neutral third-party observer who can help inform the resident and family about the processes of appeal or the parameters of care that can be provided. In addition, staff should continue to be courteous and supportive of the resident.

## Move-Out Day

The ALR should consider undertaking extra efforts on move-out day to make the resident feel comfortable. Ask if the resident wants a staff person to help pack some of their belongings. Or arrange for a staff member to be available to answer resident or family members' questions. Have a cart ready to help them move some belongings.

Provide superior customer services such as supplying snacks or coffee, having lunch delivered to

their room, or delivering a small going away gift.

Prepare a move-out summary that includes pertinent information regarding the resident's

physical, mental, and cognitive status and a list of current medications. A copy of all pertinent resident records, including when an emergency transfer occurs, should also be compiled and delivered to the next facility. Have staff walk out of the building with the resident when leaving for the last time.

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A short time after the resident has moved out, the administrator may want to call the resident, family member, or responsible party to follow up. During this follow-up conversation, the administrator can ask:

- ◆ How the resident is doing;
- ◆ Is there any additional information the ALR needs to provide; and
- ◆ Was the resident's move-out satisfactory?

This shows the resident that the ALR cares, and it also provides an opportunity to resolve any outstanding issues the resident, family member, or guardian may have with the ALR.

## Conclusion

**A**n ALR that undertakes a holistic approach to resident move-outs is setting the highest standard for a quality outcome that benefits the resident. Remember that information about conditions and circumstances for move-out needs to be conveyed to residents before admission, during their stay, and while moving out. ALRs need to make sure this topic area is covered in marketing materials, Resident Agreements, or other written documents describing care and services for potential and current residents.

In-services about move-out procedures equips the entire staff with knowledge about the ALR's practices and conveys the message that supporting residents during move-out is just as important as delivering a high standard of daily care.

In addition, instilling and adopting a caring attitude, spending time, and finding out what the resident needs and wants can also produce successful transitions and make the last experience with the ALR as good as the first.



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## National Center for Assisted Living

**T**he National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) is the assisted living voice of the American Health Care Association. NCAL is dedicated to serving the needs of the assisted living community through national advocacy, education, networking, professional development, and quality initiatives. NCAL's proactive, national focus on assisted living legislation is backed by the strongest and most influential long term care advocacy team in the country. NCAL members know that their voices will be heard by the national policy makers and regulators who continually seek to influence the future of assisted living.

In addition to national advocacy, NCAL supports state-specific advocacy efforts through its national federation of state affiliates. NCAL state affiliates work to create local education, advocate on behalf of assisted living providers, and provide the direct, ongoing support their assisted living members need to improve quality, serve their residents, and grow their businesses.



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