

## CALIFORNIA ADVOCATES FOR NURSING HOME REFORM

### Volunteer at CANHR

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#### Become a Legislative Advocate

- **Yearly Legislative Campaign:** CANHR develops legislation each year to address important consumer concerns involving elder abuse and long term care. The California Legislature has passed dozens of CANHR sponsored bills on the rights of long term care facility residents, Medi-Cal, elder financial abuse, family councils and related issues.
- **CANHR legislative advocates** help these campaigns succeed by contacting their state legislators to explain why the bills are needed and to urge their support. As their constituent, you can strongly influence how your legislators vote on pending legislation.
- CANHR also studies and takes positions on elder abuse or long term care-related legislation sponsored by other organizations.
- When you sign up as a legislative advocate, CANHR will begin sending you legislative alerts when bills are under consideration. You will receive fact sheets about the bills we are sponsoring, along with sample support letters, updates on the status of each bill, and what you can be doing to help. Alerts will be sent out regularly throughout the legislative campaign, keeping you abreast of everything happening in Sacramento that is relevant to CANHR's mission to improve quality of care in California long term care facilities and to prevent elder abuse.
- New bills will start being introduced in late December 2009. Letters of support and advocacy will be in full swing by March 2010. You can access information about the new bills by visiting this website: [www.leginfo.ca.gov](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov). You can also use this website to find addresses and phone numbers of your legislators. This will be helpful when you start writing your letters.

#### Join the Media Campaign

- **Call and write newspapers and tell them your story.** Whether it is your personal experience or that of a friend or family member, drawing attention to incidents occurring in long term care is an important part of CANHR's advocacy.
- **Be CANHR's Media Watchdogs.**
  - Search online for articles about long term care and alert us by e-mail
  - Send CANHR newspaper clippings about long term care related incidents/issues.
- If you have a story that you think the public should hear, but you are not having luck with the media, tell CANHR your story. We will try to get your story heard. [Contact us](#).
- If you are a journalist or freelance writer interested in long term care issues, call CANHR and get on our **media contact list**. CANHR advocates will alert you to pertinent issues and relevant stories.
- Keep yourself informed by visiting our "[Newsroom](#)" on our website ([www.canhr.org](http://www.canhr.org)) and checking out current articles of particular significance to long term care.

## Support The Family Council Project

- A **Family Council** is defined by California law as a meeting of family members, friends or representatives of two or more residents to confer in private without facility staff. They are one of the strongest, most powerful tools available to improve the quality of care and quality of life for long term care consumers.
- Facilities are obligated to allow Family Councils to form, to provide a space for them to meet in the facility at least one a month, and to include information about the Councils in the facility mailings.
- You can get involved in Family Councils either by starting one yourself if you are directly involved with a facility (as a friend or family member of somebody who resides there) *or* you can help others start and sustain their Family Councils.
- While Family Councils are a very effective advocacy tool, like any kind of advocacy, they require time, effort, organization and leadership. Many people have difficulties taking on new responsibilities in their busy lives. As a **Family Council Advocate**, you could help relieve the burden of some of the organizational and time consuming tasks of a Family Council, while allowing the members to focus their time and energies on the important issues at hand.
- Being part of our Family Council Project means having access to our **Family Council Listserv**, moderated by a CANHR Advocate, where questions will be answered, issues discussed, and resolutions discovered.
- Various **special projects** will be developed through CANHR that will address the particular needs of the Family Councils. As repeated issues arise, Family Councils will get involved in our advocacy efforts. This will include our legislative campaigns, getting petitions signed, and helping with outreach.
- Click here to see our [“Family Council” fact sheet](#)

## RCFE Surveys

- **Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly** (RCFEs), also known as Assisted Living Facilities or Board and Care Homes, are for people age 60 or older who need 24 hour supervision but do not need full time skilled nursing care. They are *not* considered medical facilities, and are therefore not required to have nurses or doctors on staff. RCFEs provide room, board, housekeeping, supervision, and personal care assistance with basic activities like personal hygiene, dressing, eating, and walking.
- On the CANHR website, there is a **Residential Care Guide** that offers the public detailed information about RCFEs in California. This helps us provide pre-placement counseling for consumers and is a helpful tool for long term care consumers when they are researching facilities.
- With over 7,800 Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly in California (and with that number continually growing), it has not been easy to access all of the RCFEs through mass mailings. Volunteers will help resolve this issue by going directly to the RCFEs and requesting that they fill out **CANHR’s brief survey**.
- The survey itself will take the RCFE administrator no more than ten minutes, and can only help their business in terms of getting their information online and to consumers.
  - CANHR will provide you with a list of RCFEs in your region.
  - You can call or go directly to their door, and ask them to participate in our survey.

- You can also direct them to our website where they can fill out the survey online.

## **Regional Support Groups**

- There are many caregiver support groups throughout the state for family members who care for their loved ones at home. However, there are less support groups out there for families of residents of long term care facilities. Having a loved one in a long term care facility can be a very emotionally trying experience. Aside from the emotional experience of dealing with the illness or mental incapacity of a loved one, families and friends of long term care residents often have to deal with financial concerns, lack of communication with the administration, poor quality of care, unacceptable food, and many other issues. This can be very difficult to handle alone.
- Support groups give people the opportunity to come together and share their concerns, offer advice, come up with new advocacy tools, and offer emotional support.
- Support groups are different from Family Councils as they are not held in the facility and they can include people from various facilities from throughout the region. However, from these support groups, Family Councils can form separately, and provide people with a strong voice and ultimately better care.
- CANHR will help you start a family support group initially. CANHR staff will remain involved in the support group, coming to meetings and providing helpful materials and advice.
- As a CANHR volunteer, you will maintain the support group, organize regular meetings, and keep CANHR informed of any needs, progress, or concerns that the group may have.

## **CANHR Ambassadors**

- CANHR Ambassadors spread CANHR information and services in their own communities, passing out information and hanging up flyers at community events, attending support groups and sharing information about CANHR services, and directing long term care consumers to CANHR's toll free hotline and services.
- To be a CANHR Ambassador, you will attend CANHR trainings and volunteer meetings so that you can share the appropriate (and often complicated) information with long term care consumers and their families.
- Getting involved in direct advocacy with residents and their families is something that you can initiate, with the assistance of CANHR's Long Term Care Advocates.
- CANHR will rely on you to help spread the word about events, legislative alerts, big news stories, petitions, services and resources.
- Participate in senior health fairs and community events targeting senior populations. You will be provided with all the necessary materials to set up CANHR tables at local senior fairs and hand out information about CANHR services and long term care advocacy.
- Get involved with the special projects and programs that have been mentioned previously in this packet. As an Ambassador, you can be a major point person in your region, reporting progress to CANHR, initiating community support, and recruiting more volunteers.
- Join CANHR's petition signing campaign in 2010 to reduce the use of drugs in nursing homes. CANHR needs volunteer advocates throughout the state of California to convey to others the importance of this petition and get signatures.