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LTCHA enables and supports Councils

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Happy Family Council week! Family Councils play a vital role in long-term care homes and it is such a pleasure to hear from Councils across the province as they celebrate Family Council week.

Our recent blogs have been about the major goals of a Family Council. This blog is focused on some basic aspects of the [Long-Term Care Homes Act](#) that enable and support Councils.

The *Long-Term Care Homes Act* is important and remarkable for Family Councils: it was the first piece of legislation in which Family Councils were embedded. For the first time ever, Family Councils were recognized

and included in the laws governing long-term care in Ontario. This legislation provides important information about several aspects of a Family Council, including Council formation and powers. Read on for more information on these sections.

Right to form a Council and home support

If there is no Council in the home, a family member or person of important to a resident may request the establishment of a Council. At the request for a council to be formed, the home must assist in the establishment of a Council within 30 days of receiving the request. This is important as it clarifies that the right to establish a Council belongs to the families and persons of importance of residents.

Alternatively, if there is no Council and no request for a Council to be established, the home must advise residents' families and persons of importance of their right to form a council. The home, on an ongoing basis, must advise residents and families of their right to form a Council and must have semi-annual meetings open to all families and persons of importance that encourage the formation of and participation in a Council. This section helps to reinforce the importance of having a Family Council in each and every long-term care home and that home staff must support the establishment of a Family Council.

Family Council Powers

Under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act* a Council has several powers:

1. Provide assistance, information and advice to residents, family members of residents and persons of importance to residents, including when new residents are admitted to the home.

- Family Councils are the ideal place for families to share their knowledge and experience with each other. Caregiving can be an isolating experience and a Council can provide support and care for the caregiver through its regular meetings and information sharing. Providing assistance, information, and advice in a Family Council meeting is a great way to practice peer support and enable a good family experience of long-term care.

2. Advise residents, family members of residents and persons of importance to residents respecting their rights and obligations under this Act.

- Established Councils can make sure new members understand the basics of the Act and what the home must do and provide. This is an important educational activity a Council can carry out to help support families.

3. Advise residents, family members of residents and persons of importance to residents respecting the rights and obligations of the licensee under this Act and under any agreement relating to the home.

- Councils can help families and persons of important to residents better understand how the home works and what the home must provide and do. Many Councils have their administrators or staff from different departments attend meetings- upon invitation- to give updates on the home, share any changes in programming. This helps educate families and build knowledge. This can establish a strong relationship between families and home staff, which supports resident quality of life and the family caregiver experience.

4. Attempt to resolve disputes between licensee and residents.

- Sometimes issues arise between the home and residents and families; Family Councils can help resolve these disputes. Many Council need some advice and assistance when conflicts arise since members may not have the skills to resolve a dispute. FCO now offers a mediation course that can help family members acquire skills to deal with conflict so that an escalation can be avoided and issues can be discussed and often resolved without communication breakdown. Contact us to learn more.

5. Sponsor and plan activities for residents.

- Many Councils find creative projects to work on together for the benefit of the home. The most successful that we have seen are projects that are done in partnership with the home staff and administration. Common activities include guest speaker events or social events where residents can share their knowledge and experiences with their peers. FCO shares many of these projects through its newsletters and regular bulletins.

6. Collaborate with community groups and volunteers concerning activities for residents.

- Many Councils invite community leaders to their meetings to provide information on local resources that are of interest to caregivers. Family Councils Ontario can also help link Councils to speakers and we also host regular education days throughout the province on a wide range of topics. For example, local chapters of Alzheimer's society, Osteoporosis Canada, and the Local health Integrated Network (LHIN), and are all possible speakers just to name a few. Educational events such as these help educate and support families and friends of residents.

7. Review inspections reports, detailed allocations of funding and financial statements that have been filed with the local Health Integration Network.

- All inspection reports are publically available on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ltc/home-finder.aspx>. It is important to note that the compliance reports are a small snapshot of the home but not the whole picture of life in a home.
- Financial statements can provide important information on home operations. We encourage Councils to review these statements with the home staff so that questions can be addressed.

8. Advise the licensee of any concerns or recommendations the Council has about the home.

- Home staff and administration want the best care possible for the residents and are always willing to listen to a Council's concerns and work with the Council to discuss issues and resolve them when possible. Helping process concerns and find solutions is an important Family Council power.
- Homes can invite Family Council members to attend their committee meetings when appropriate to help plan programs and activities. Some homes invite Family Council representatives to their strategic planning sessions and quality improvement planning committees. These are great ways to embed the family voice, knowledge, and experience into home planning initiatives.

9. Report any concerns or recommendations that the council wants to bring forward to the Director.

- Family Councils Ontario encourages Council members and home administration and staff to sit together to resolve issues and to find resolutions. The best way to resolve issues is in working together for the benefit of all residents and family caregivers. If this is not possible, Councils have the power to bring their concerns to the appropriate person- Director- at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

These powers are not given to a Council by the administration or staff of the home, but are rights that are given by the crown. This means that Council powers cannot be taken away or limited by home staff. The Home must work in partnership with the Council and vice versa for a Council to be successful and for positive relationships to be formed between the Council and home staff.

These powers outline important roles and tasks that a Council can carry out, but keep in mind that no Council has to do any or all of these activities. As well, there are projects and activities Councils carry out that do not fit into these powers; while these things are not embedded in law they can be carried out in collaboration with the home. The Act supports the ability of Councils to carry out powers and activities that are tailored to the needs of each home and families.

Family Councils Ontario has an introductory video that is helpful in explaining the basics of a Family Council and can be found on our YouTube channel. You can follow this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dONibtHWRkg>.

The video is a good reminder to long time members of a Council how important a Council is and how Councils can support education of new and existing members. It is also a great introduction for new families. Many Councils use the video as a recruiting tool, such as inviting new families to a welcoming tea and showing the video.

Membership

The Act has important information about membership. In summary, no one involved in management of the Home, anyone with a controlling interest in the Home, the administrator, anyone employed or on contract with the Ministry can be a member of a Family Council. Essentially, Family Councils are by and for families.

There are often questions about what happens when a member of a Council no longer has someone in the home: can they stay on a Council? The Council can decide how it wants to function in terms of this question of membership. Many people stay on a Council after their loved one dies and provide ongoing leadership. This is protected in the membership section of the Act that specifies that "a person of importance to a resident is entitled to be a member of the Family Council of a long-term care home."

Interference

A section of the Act pertaining to Councils is called “no interference by Licensee.” This section makes it clear the staff and administration of the home cannot prevent members from attending a Council meeting or interfere in the operation of the Council. FCO encourages Councils and administration to work together so that no issue escalates to the point where interference may become an issue.

Being part of the Council is a rewarding experience and supports the families and the residents by creating a healthy vibrant home. Knowing the basic information about the *Long Term Care Homes Act* as it pertains to Family Councils is a good step in being a knowledgeable member.

Supporting one another in the Family Council makes sure that no one feels isolated or that they are alone. It’s easier to be a caregiver when you have knowledge that supports you in the caregiver role. Family Councils can be that special place of support, knowledge, and engagement in the home.

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