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# *Avenues for Advocacy*

## a newsletter of the Lower Savannah Regional Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Lower Savannah Council of Governments' Aging, Disability and Transportation Resource Center

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### **Long Term Care Ombudsmen – Resuming In Person Visits**

The Lower Savannah Regional LTC Ombudsman Program staff are developing protocols to follow to return to on-site routine visits. The Lower Savannah Regional LTC Ombudsman Program has invested in a twelve month service contract to use the Eversound Visitation Package. This system uses headsets and transmitters to provide clear communication between closed windows or outside but appropriately distanced from the residents. Each party can speak in a normal tone and be clearly heard on the other side. For more information go to <https://eversoundhq.com/visitation-package/>.

ALL routine visits at a facility will be prescheduled with the staff person designated as our point of contact for the date and time of our visit as staff cooperation and assistance will be needed. The type of onsite visit will vary based on the facility type, size, and current COVID-19 status.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 visitation restrictions, the Ombudsmen have continued to receive complaints. Complaints were and still are being addressed. Telephone and FaceTime interviews have been conducted and records requested have been faxed or securely emailed to the ombudsman. There are some complaints that need to be addressed with a visit inside the facility. All LTC Ombudsman Program Staff in SC are working together to develop protocols to follow for determining what complaint requires an inside visit, the pre-screening criteria each ombudsman must before entering as well as type of PPE to be used in each setting.

The LTC Ombudsman want to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all residents and staff during any type of encounter be it a routine visit or complaint investigation.

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### **Federal Stimulus checks- What happened?**

Distribution of the initial US Treasury Economic Stimulus Payments is not over. There are still residents who have not received this payment. Please help your residents or their representative trace their payment, request a replacement for a lost card or check or confirm their eligibility by going to <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/economic-impact-payment-information-center#prepaid>.

If you, residents or their representatives have questions, please call Susan or Alanna at 803-295-7165.



## October is Residents' Rights Month

This year's theme is "Connection Matters." The theme emphasizes connections – to family, to friends, and to the community – as an essential component of good health and quality of life for residents.

The COVID-19 crisis has made us all realize now more than ever how important it is to our residents that they stay physically and emotionally connected to their family, friends and community. The effects of isolation are devastating. Thank you for working to make Residents' Rights Month meaningful for all. For copies of Residents' Rights in other languages, including Braille, please go to

<https://theconsumervoice.org/news/detail/all/residents-rights-fact-sheet-available-in-multiple-languages> .

## Election 2020- A Resident has the Right to Vote!

All residents have a right to register to vote, request an absentee ballot and cast their vote in any election. Facilities should have one staff member who is responsible for talking to residents about their right to vote and to assist them in exercising their right to vote. If a resident is not a registered voter, the deadline to register to vote in the November election is 5:00pm on October 2, 2020.



Full details about registering to vote, reporting a change of address, or requesting an absentee ballot can be found at [www.scvotes.gov](http://www.scvotes.gov). If several residents are all registered voters and have requested staff's help to obtain an absentee ballot, please see the specific form for staff to use to request absentee ballots for more than one registered voter via one application that can be found at <https://www.scvotes.gov/absentee-voting>. The application is toward the bottom of this page. One form per county election office is required.

I strongly recommend your staff document the resident's desire to vote, register, update their registration, have help to request an absentee ballot, and whether the help the desire is to be from family or the designated staff. Thanks to all who have already taken action for Election 2020!

## Medicare Open Enrollment- October 15- December 7, 2020

Medicare Open Enrollment is a time for every Medicare beneficiary to review their coverage options for the next year. Beneficiaries in stand along Prescription Drug Plans (Part D plans), Medicare Advantage Plans or Special Needs Plans should review their options at [medicare.gov](http://medicare.gov) and make needed changes for 2021. For Medicare Beneficiaries who also have SC Medicaid (Healthy Connections) you can change your plan after Dec. 7, but reviews should still be done. Please help your residents complete this important review. Go to [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov) for more information.

**CRCF Residents with Healthy Connections PRIME Plans-** Residents enrolled in Healthy Connections Prime plans in SC (Molina Dual Options, First Choice VIP Plus, Absolute Total Care), have an additional advocate at the SC Dept on Aging. The Healthy Connections Prime Ombudsman can provide information about benefits, can work to resolve concerns and help navigate appeals. . For help, call the Prime Ombudsman at 844-477-4632 or email at [primeadvocate@aging.sc.gov](mailto:primeadvocate@aging.sc.gov).

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## Less Contact; More Worry.....Calls to the Ombudsmen

The *types* of concerns reported to the Long Term Care Ombudsman now when compared to in the months prior to the imposed visitation restrictions due to COVID-19 have not changed, but the *tone* of the voice on the other end of the line is different. Like you and your staff, the voice we hear is tired, worried, anxious, frustrated, disappointed and in some cases, mad. Here is a few of what your LTCO are hearing:

- Lack of response by staff to a family's report of a concern and staff not recognizing changes in a person's general condition. Involved family members have often voiced the opinion that if the family didn't tell staff about a change in the resident, the change would go unnoticed.
- Residents who have cognitive impairments and say no or display signs of refusal or resistance to care aren't getting care. Please be sure to try again and with a different technique to meet the residents' needs.
- Residents who can't call for help aren't getting help.
- The facility staff are not wearing masks around residents.
- The phones don't get answered at the nurses' desk.
- The facility isn't sharing information about their COVID-19 positive staff.

Not every call to the LTC Ombudsman results in a complaint report as some callers just need information to be empowered to advocate themselves for their loved one. Many calls start with "I know they are doing their best, but.." or "I know they are short staffed, but.." In those times and for most people, excuses don't help. An acknowledgement of the problem and a plan for resolution is what is desired by these callers to our office.

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## Say What? Listening Skills for Conflict Resolution

When was the last time you brushed up on your listening skills? For most of us, it's not something we think about regularly. We know listening is important, but we don't always know how to increase our understanding. Kabrina Bass, Executive Director of Midlands Mediation Center, provided all Long Term Care Ombudsman excellent training via Zoom regarding conflict resolution and enhancing our listening skills.

We learned most of us see conflict as a something that is negative, and we don't often see the light at the end of tunnel. We have to understand that conflict is natural, normal and inevitable. We ARE going to experience it, but it is how we HANDLE it that determines if it is detrimental or helpful to the situation. To resolve a conflict we need to listen to the other side and steer clear of trigger words (ex. Always/Never; Everything/Nothing; Either/Or). The trigger words will usually escalate the anger and can lead to no resolution being reached.

Active listening is a great tool when working through conflict. Julian Treasure, a communication expert, came up with the RASA guide to help us listen better and communicate more effectively. RASA is an acronym for **R**ecieve, **A**ppreciate, **S**ummarize, and **A**sk. You want to let the individual know that you have heard them (Receive); that you are glad they shared the info with you (Appreciate); repeat to them what they just told you for understanding (Summarize); and use open ended questions to get more information (Ask). When using open ended questions ask how, what, when, where, and why questions. Be careful though when using why, because it can sound accusatory and can put the other person on defense. Remember, you want to be hard on the problem and soft on the person. When resolving conflict you are partners, not opponents.

*Kabrina Bass can be contacted via Midlands Mediation Center to schedule training. (803) 714-1176.*

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## Important Links for Required Information Updates !

### Staff Contact Information

In order to effectively advocate for our residents, it is important for our office to maintain a current list of key administrative staff and contact information for each facility. Attached to the email is the **Staff Contact Sheet**. Once completed, return it via fax 1-803-335-1013 or email it to Alanna using the email address below. **If the position does not apply to your facility (example- Director of Nursing), please leave the space blank.**

### Disaster Preparedness

While we are in the middle of COVID-19, the LTCOP staff are asked by the State LTCO to have available upon request certain information about your disaster plans. Please click on the link below to complete the short form regarding your facility's disaster plan.

[https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=EHHQf\\_wEIUC-doBYLxCEXL2QdZZfozRjnOcUmiHoXWNUMjNZWEI3SFdZTVZKQIIMN1JXWEwxUUUpENS4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=EHHQf_wEIUC-doBYLxCEXL2QdZZfozRjnOcUmiHoXWNUMjNZWEI3SFdZTVZKQIIMN1JXWEwxUUUpENS4u)

Please email Alanna ([aberrie@lscog.org](mailto:aberrie@lscog.org)) if you need the Disaster Preparedness survey in a different format.

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*Staff-*

*Thank you for your continued dedication to your work to care for those who need you. Every team member has a part to the success of the facility. Regardless of the size of the house or number of residents who live there, every home provides a critical need to that person living there.*

*Thank you for giving 110% of yourself to care for those who need you. The long hours, extra shifts and you stepping up to take on assignments unique to COVID-19 do not go unnoticed..*

*We look forward to the day we can return to see everyone face to face- our residents and you!*

*With sincere thanks,*

*Susan and Alanna*

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Serving residents in long-term care facilities in Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell,  
Calhoun and Orangeburg Counties.

