



RESIDENTS' VOICES SURVEY REPORT

Residents' Councils Environmental Scan:
Exploring the Health, Function and Needs of Residents'
Councils in Ontario Long-Term Care Homes



Glossary

Resident

A person living in a long-term care home.

Residents' Council

A formal advisory body that is mandated by the Fixing Long-Term Care Act (FLTCA, 2021) to exist in every long-term care home in Ontario. All residents in the home are members of the Residents' Council. The Council belongs to residents and is independent of the long-term care home. In Ontario, the Residents' Council is afforded a wide scope of rights, roles, and responsibilities in legislation through FLTCA, 2021. *We refer to Residents' Councils as "Councils" in this publication.*

Resident Leader

A person living in the long-term care home who has taken on a formalized leadership role within the Residents' Council, often by nomination or election.

Residents' Council Assistant

A designated long-term care home team member (staff) who assists and takes direction from the Residents' Council. According to FLTCA, 2021 (c. 39, s. 64 (1).), the Residents' Council Assistant is appointed by the licensee (Administrator) and must be acceptable to the Council to support them.

Team member

A person working in a long-term care home, also referred to as a staff member. The term team member implies that a person is working as part of a team, often towards a shared goal.

To access OARC's detailed Environmental Scan report, visit:
ontarc.com/communications/residents-voices-survey.html

Purpose

Healthy, effective, and well-supported Residents' Councils are powerful barometers for the culture and quality of life in long-term care (LTC) homes. OARC's understanding of the current needs of Residents' Councils in Ontario's LTC homes was significantly enhanced by a province-wide environmental scan (*Residents' Voices survey*) conducted in the summer of 2022.

The survey was guided by three key objectives:



1. Discover how Residents' Councils are currently structured and how they are operating.



2. Determine the difficulties experienced by Residents' Councils and opportunities to improve their operations.



3. Learn how to further enable residents to be active decision-makers within their homes and in collaboration with their home's Administration.

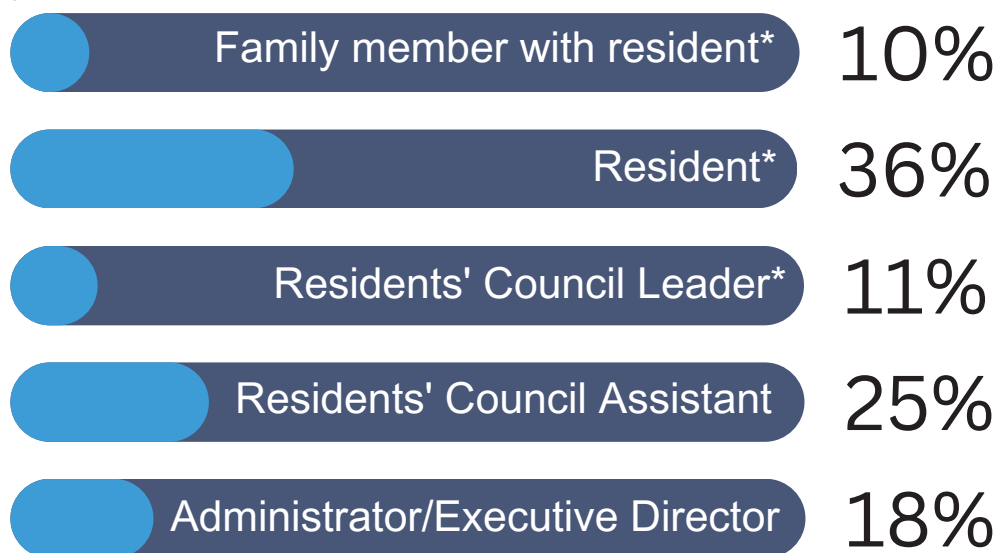
Garnering **1,002 responses**, our survey provided an informative glimpse into the current state of Residents' Councils. Our analysis revealed the continuing prevalence of established issues in LTC homes with implications for Councils, and helped to identify new opportunities to consider and explore. This report provides an overview of what we heard through the *Residents' Voices* survey including preliminary ideas about how findings might be used to inform OARC's work, operational priorities, communications, and education delivery strategies.

Fast Facts About Our Survey:

- Comprised of 39 closed-ended multiple choice and 1 open-ended question.
- Created in consultation with OARC's Resident Advisory (REAL) Group.
- Responses received were evenly distributed amongst Ontario Health regions.
- Available in English and French using web-based and printable formats.
- Participation was encouraged through OARC's communications channels, in-person home visits (posters and word of mouth), and further promoted by stakeholder partners through meetings and digital communications.

Survey Highlights

Our survey allowed OARC to hear directly from residents, Council Assistants and Administrators. More than half of our survey responses came from residents (including self-identified Residents' Council Leaders and those who received survey assistance).*



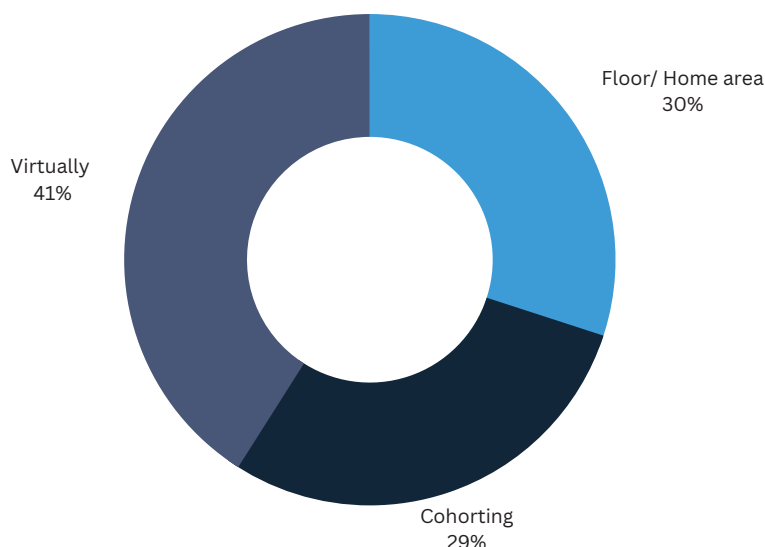
* Represents resident responses

85%

of residents are aware that
Residents' Councils exist

10-14

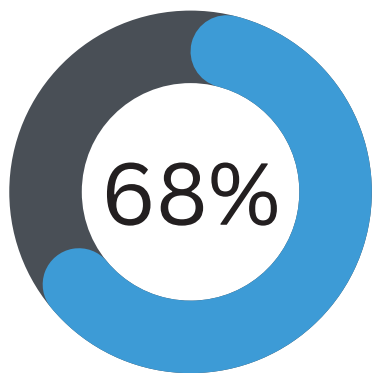
Average number of residents that
attend Residents' Council meetings



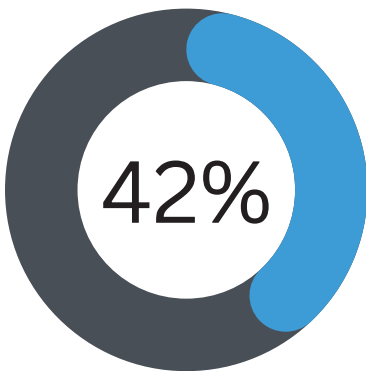
Meeting During the COVID-19 Pandemic

80% of survey respondents indicated that their respective Residents' Council met during the pandemic using various formats, including virtual, smaller floor meetings or meetings by cohort.

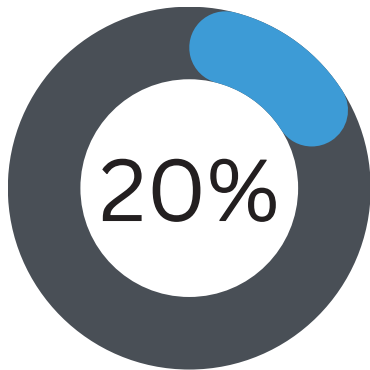
Residents' Council Structure & Sustainability



Percentage of Residents' Councils that follow a Traditional/Executive model of Council Leadership, with roles of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.



Percentage of Residents' Councils that have established Bylaws in place (capturing consensus decisions about Council operations).

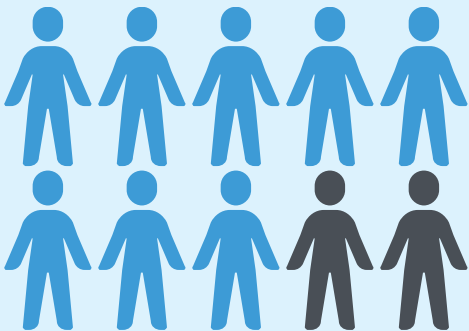


Percentage of Residents' Councils that follow OARC's guidance for elections. Some Councils (18%) indicated that they do not hold elections.



The most common process for Residents' Council elections is by self-nomination or nomination by peers and with a show of hands (68.5% of Residents' Councils)

8/10 of appointed Residents' Council Assistants are team members and managers from the long-term care home's Recreation department.



Identified Barriers Experienced by Councils

1

COVID-19 Pandemic

Pandemic-related restrictions were the most common barrier identified by Residents' Council members and their supporters. Council groups experienced difficulty meeting consistently because of limited team member (staff) availability and frequent turnover, which resulted in many paused or cancelled meetings during outbreaks. Masking and physical distancing discouraged some residents from joining Council meetings. Extended periods without meetings also left some residents with a sense of lethargy, further impacting resident interest in being involved with their Council.

2



Engagement

Survey respondents reported low attendance at Residents' Council meetings, a lack of engagement during meetings, and difficulty with recruiting and retaining residents to fulfill leadership positions on the Council. This may be a consequence of changes in resident acuity and their perception of Residents' Council effectiveness (see #3 and #4).

3



Resident Acuity

Changing resident acuity and cognition were two of the biggest identified factors with direct implications for the sustainability and effectiveness of Residents' Councils province-wide. This was reflected in approximately 10% of survey responses.

When asked to identify barriers that prevent residents from influencing home decisions, every group (residents, Administrators and Council Assistants) selected "too many residents unable to speak for themselves" as their top response.

OARC knows that it takes time and a hands-on, person-centred approach to work alongside Councils and adapt current practices to meet the changing needs of residents. We have heard that there are fewer residents with the cognitive ability to take on Residents' Council leadership positions and there is greater complexity involved in order to meaningfully engage residents and collect their perspectives. Residents' Councils need dedicated support at the home level and education and coaching at the regional/provincial level in order to continue to exist and thrive in every home.

4

Residents' Perception of Council Effectiveness/Importance

Residents ranked the **effectiveness** of Residents' Councils *lower* than Administrators and Residents' Council Assistants.



*Residents' average rank of
RC effectiveness*



*Administrators and team member
average rank of RC effectiveness*

When asked to rank the **importance** of Residents' Councils in the home, Administrators and Council Assistants, on average, ranked them *higher* compared to the rankings submitted by residents and Council Leaders.



*Residents' average rank of
RC importance*



*Administrators and team members'
average rank of RC importance*

Acknowledging a Potential Disconnect:

Our survey findings indicate that LTC home team members and management may perceive the Residents' Council in their home as functioning more effectively and having more influence on decision-making compared to what some residents perceive. Residents may not always know or understand the impact they are making through their Council. These results align with qualitative feedback obtained through the survey, where residents expressed uncertainty or frustration about whether their homes were doing enough in response to Council concerns. Some residents reported that they felt unheard or ignored by management, and that their concerns, when elevated through their Council, lacked actioned responses. While this does not reflect the experience in every home, our findings suggest that there may be an opportunity for continued relationship-building, enhanced communication and transparency, and collaboration to promote a mutual understanding.

Education and Communication Preferences

When asked about their preferred formats to receive information and learn from, the top selections identified by residents in order of importance included **in-person** presentations and OARC **home visits**, **small group** discussions and **written information**.

Residents who identified themselves as leaders on their Council were more likely to select webinars as another favoured form of education.



Residents' Council Assistants, by comparison, expressed the highest preference for educational webinars, followed by in-person presentations, written materials and visual diagrams/infographics. These findings indicate to OARC that our varied audiences require **a range of options** rich in repeated, in-person touch points, to support their learning and understanding.



3 Pillars: Working Together

While everyone in the long-term care home plays a part when it comes to nurturing and sustaining an effective Residents' Council, the critical roles that support Council success are residents, Administrators and Residents' Council Assistants. **These are the 3 'pillars' we engaged in our survey:**

- **Residents**, as the people that live in long-term care 24/7, want to be engaged as partners in planning, decision-making, and implementing solutions. They value proactive, transparent communication. Empowered and engaged residents are essential for the effective functioning of Council.
- **Administrators** help to model and set a resident-centred tone in the home. Through authentic and ongoing collaboration and consultation with residents, they help to ensure that residents shape the places they call home.
- **Residents' Council Assistants** help to identify and leverage resident strengths and encourage active participation in Council activities. They need dedicated time and support to carry out their duties, as identified by Council.

Top Education Areas of Interest

Residents have expressed that they want to learn more about:

1

Dementia and Communication Strategies

2

Supporting Mental Health

3

Residents' Bill of Rights

4

Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021

5

The Long-Term Care Inspections Process

Our survey also asked the supportive partners of residents (Administrators and Council Assistants) which education topics they felt would help residents to better understand and support each other. Their top responses mirrored those of residents, including dementia, mental health, residents' rights and diversity and inclusion.

Resident Engagement Outside of Council

Our survey helped to identify a number of ways that residents are engaged in their home operations outside of their Residents' Council meetings.

Food Committee participation

Providing feedback through the annual Resident and Family Satisfaction survey

Quality Improvement Committee participation

Facilitating tours with prospective residents

Welcoming new residents

Peer mentoring and friendly visiting

Volunteering in the LTC home



What Can You Do?

Residents and Residents' Council Assistants:

- Educate about the importance of Residents' Council, and brainstorm ways to increase meeting participation and welcome new residents.
- Invite a conversation between residents and home leadership to discuss unique and shared goals and preferred communication strategies.
- Consider the Shared Leadership Team model as an alternative structure for your Council, encouraging more residents to participate based on strengths.
- Create Residents' Council Bylaws to capture consensus decisions, promote consistent practices and enhance the sustainability of your Council over time.

Administrators:

- Maximize opportunities for relationship-building with residents outside of monthly Council meetings and prioritize proactive communication.
- Support the Residents' Council Assistant by ensuring they have protected time to serve in their appointed capacity and facilitate resident engagement.
- Celebrate successes, especially the ones that residents contributed to.

Everyone:

- Explore OARC tools and resources and reach out for tailored home support!

What is OARC doing?



People living in LTC homes located in different parts of the province have different needs, experiences and priorities. OARC is exploring ways to increase our capacity and presence in Ontario LTC homes. We are delving into the top educational needs and other barriers identified through our survey, and will be developing appropriate tools, strategies and leading practices to address them.



OARC's suite of education offerings includes monthly live webinars. Prioritizing topics identified by residents, we have already delivered sessions on resident mental health, the Ministry of LTC Inspection Program and Residents' Council Bylaws and we continue to use survey findings to guide future planning.



Legislatively Mandated - Operationally Essential

Now more than ever, residents want and need to be part of shaping the places they call home. We know that Residents' Councils provide one significant avenue for meaningful engagement for residents, through consensus decision-making and peer support opportunities. Our survey also helped to identify a number of different ways that residents are involved outside of Council, including social interactions, and contributing to programs, home operations and quality improvement initiatives.

The strong uptake for OARC's Residents' Voices survey and some of the responses contained within, indicate that while OARC is known to many Councils, there is still work to be done to raise awareness, and people want *more*. Residents' Councils need more tailored and relational support to function optimally. Councils and the people that support them need OARC to provide a roadmap for how to move forward in a meaningful, inclusive way that extends beyond legislative requirements.

Empowering residents and teams and building capacity at the long-term care home level, combined with coaching and knowledge exchange at the organizational and sector levels will help OARC to fulfill our mandate and will contribute to the positive culture change that puts people above policy and relationships and connection at the centre of all we do. *Residents' Voices* provided an insightful snapshot of the current needs and operations of Residents' Councils. As these findings are used to inform the next iteration of OARC's strategic plan, please know that you have our commitment to continue to action what we heard from you...so stay tuned!