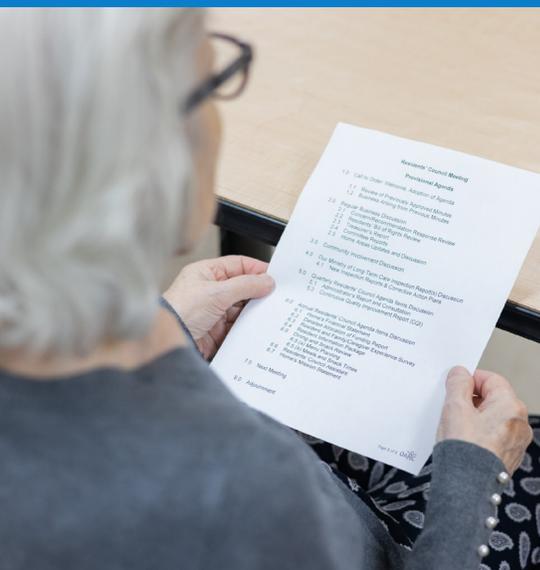




EVERYTHING ABOUT RESIDENTS INVOLVES RESIDENTS

A Co-Designed
Toolkit Inspiring
Resident
Engagement
in Long-Term
Care Homes



Foreword

Be part of long-term care (LTC) culture change. Living and working in LTC homes is changing. Societal myths are being challenged, power imbalances are being corrected, residents are viewed as sources of expert advice, and the institutional care model is being turned on its head.

This is the work of the Ontario Association of Residents' Councils (OARC) that began in 1981.

This toolkit, informed by over two years of research on resident engagement, is where theory becomes practice. This 'partnership resource' brings home leadership and residents together as co-designers of the operational solutions and decisions that shape the places residents call home. Recognizing that leaders set the tone, model actions and attitudes that are expected, residents identified Administrators as key to establishing the culture of the home. While everyone has a role in advancing resident engagement, residents articulated if there is no 'buy-in' from the home's leadership, this commitment and practice can't be sustained.



We invite you to embrace the concept of resident engagement and co-design, not through the lens of compliance, but through the spirit of relationship building, openness, respect, and curiosity. With this approach, you are not simply 'checking a box.' Fostering meaningful connections becomes the cornerstone of a culture that creates LTC homes where people want to work, live and visit.

Sincerely yours,

Dee Tripp
Executive Director
Ontario Association of Residents' Councils

I entered a LTC home in February 2020. Four weeks later, COVID-19 closed the world. Seeing that I was doubly isolated and in need of finding a purpose, I volunteered for research projects where I was asked: “Who should speak for the resident?” The question stayed with me. Today, five years later, I give the obvious answer: “We can and should speak for ourselves – and be heard.”



The LTC homes you are helping to create are the ones that you may live in someday. Residents must be enabled to live our fullest possible lives. Physical care by itself is insufficient. Mental health has a profound effect on the well-being of a person, and active consultation provides a source.

Residents have a unique and comprehensive view of living in LTC homes. Hear us. Work with us.

Our hope is that this toolkit will equip you with what you need to be inspired

to think differently about how you approach your own role and commitment to working with residents. Wishing you all the best as you begin your co-design journey.

Thank you,

Jim Gilhuly

OARC Board Treasurer and Resident Expert, Advisor and Leader (REAL)

Group Member,

Resident Leader, Sunnyside Home Long-Term Care, Kitchener, Ontario

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Toolkit Aim and Key Concepts

Aim:

This toolkit presents diverse approaches to resident engagement to inspire those living, and those working, in long-term care (LTC) homes to authentically engage residents in shaping the places they call home.

“
Nothing about
residents,
without
residents.”



Key Concepts:

What is Resident Engagement in Long-Term Care?

For this toolkit, **resident engagement** refers to actively seeking out and incorporating residents’ needs, values, and preferences into **home-level decision making**. This toolkit does not cover resident engagement in personal care or decisions that affect the entire LTC sector (e.g., provincial policies).

Resident engagement can occur across a spectrum:

		Level of Engagement 				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Description		Providing residents with information that will help them understand issues under consideration.	Obtaining resident feedback on enacted changes, solution alternatives, or events.	Working directly with residents throughout the process to understand their needs, values, and preferences.	Partnering with residents in each aspect of a project or decision.	Placing final decision making in the hands of residents.
	Example	Sharing updates about changes in the home through newsletters or bulletin boards.	Conducting surveys or focus groups to gather residents’ opinions on new policies or programs.	Including residents in planning committees for home improvement projects.	Co-developing initiatives with residents, ensuring their active engagement in shared decision making.	Having a resident-led committee that makes decisions about services offered in the home.

Adapted from: Federation of International Association for Public Participation
https://www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/iap2_spectrum_2024.pdf

What is Co-design in Long-Term Care?

Co-design in LTC means working together—residents with home leadership, team members (staff) and others—through every step of a project or initiative. From identifying a challenge or opportunity to creating, carrying out, and reviewing solutions, everyone has a voice. This engagement approach builds stronger relationships, sparks new ideas, and can lead to better experiences

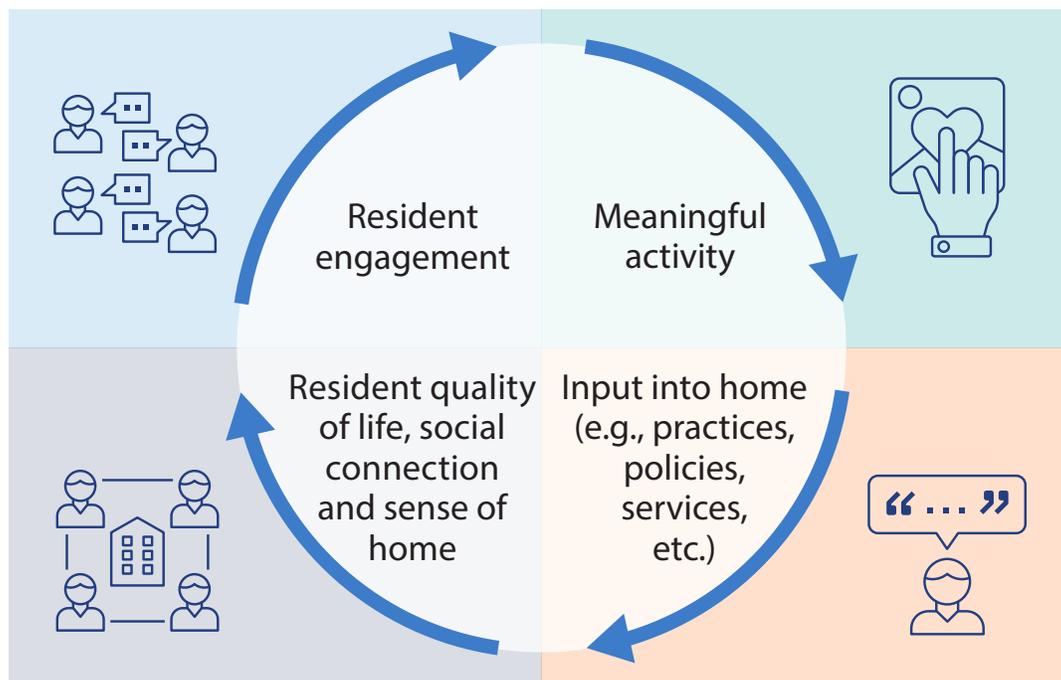
for everyone living and working in the home. Prioritizing the residents' role in shaping their LTC home also helps to address power imbalances experienced by residents, and challenges perceptions about residents' abilities. Co-design starts with the idea that people are not always on opposite sides of an issue. They can often work together to find shared values and mutual benefits.



Why is Resident Engagement Important?

Resident Engagement is:

- A core principle of the culture change movement, marking a shift in LTC philosophy that prioritizes resident autonomy and empowerment. Resident engagement, like the culture change movement, emphasizes the commitment to building relationships and honouring self-determination, as well as residents' roles in shaping their home and community.
- A way to ensure that LTC homes align with the needs and priorities of its residents and create a community based on mutual respect.
- An approach to improving resident well-being as well as the working environment for team members (staff) within the home.
- A legislative requirement for LTC homes in Ontario. In fact, the Fixing Long-Term Care Act (2021) defines powers and scope of influence for Residents' Councils and the requirement for LTC licensees to formalize a process (and an internal committee) to engage residents in continuous quality improvement and operational planning.



Adapted from: Wagner, J. A. (2008). Nursing home resident councils: Development of an instrument to evaluate their effectiveness. University of Wisconsin—Madison

Using This Toolkit

Who is This Toolkit For?

This toolkit is intended for anyone involved in making decisions that affect their LTC home, including:

Home leadership: Administrators, Executive Directors, Directors of Care, Managers, and other leadership roles.

Residents: The people who call the LTC home their home and are often most affected by the decisions, culture, and practices in the home.

Team members (staff): Social Workers, Residents' Council Assistants, Recreation Aides, Personal Support Workers (PSWs), Registered Nurses (RNs), Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs), Nurse Practitioners (NPs), volunteers, and more.

Care partners: Family, friends, and other persons of importance.

This toolkit calls on all these individuals and groups to actively support resident engagement by:

- Recognizing the systems of power, such as ageism and ableism, that marginalize residents.
- Listening to the experiences of residents and centering their voices in decision making.
- Using their privilege to both defend resident rights and promote inclusion.
- Demonstrating ongoing commitment to learning and action on resident engagement.



How Should This Toolkit be Used?



This toolkit is a compilation of ideas, examples, and resources to inspire and guide LTC homes in planning and implementing new approaches to resident engagement and co-design. The toolkit resources are meant to help with specific aspects of LTC home operations and promote opportunities for resident engagement. It takes an evidence-informed approach by integrating research evidence and recognizing that local contexts, preferences, and resources will inform action.

It is essential to use this toolkit *with* residents. Ask residents about their interests and priorities, and how they would like to contribute and stay informed.

“
It is essential
to use this toolkit
with residents.
”

Relationship–The Basis of Effective Resident Engagement

A key enabler of effective resident engagement is a strong relationship between home leadership and residents. Residents consulted during the development of this toolkit emphasized the importance of having home leadership that is accessible to them.

The following is a list of ideas generated by residents to support this relationship building in their home:

Residents Want Home Leadership and Team Members (Staff) Who:

- Demonstrate that the place they work is HOME for its residents.
- Are empathetic, curious, and open-minded.
- Listen to understand, not to respond.
- Start with a “yes” mindset and work backwards to find creative solutions, including workarounds or adaptations.
- Prioritize mindful and transparent communication with residents.
- Hold a mindset of mutual collaboration and respect.

“

The sweetest sound to a resident’s ear is their own name

”



– Jim Gilhuly,
Resident Leader, Kitchener

Be Visible:

- Manage by walking around. See and be seen by people.
- Attend programs and events at the home.
- Build a relationship with the Residents' Council by seeking opportunities to attend meetings to share updates and seek feedback.
- Engage in conversation with residents. Learn names and demonstrate interest in all residents.
- Join residents for a meal in the dining room or take a coffee break in the home's lobby or cafe.

Be Known:

- Consider hosting a "meet and greet" or social event by floor or home area to help residents connect with home leadership and team members (staff) on a personal level.
- Communicate the location of home leadership's offices and maintain an open-door policy.
- Create a "who's who" information board displaying the names and roles of home leadership.

Be Proactive:

- Engage residents from the onset through to the completion of changes, decisions, or projects.
- Close the loop. Share progress and outcomes with residents to demonstrate the home is listening to and acting on their feedback ([see page 17](#)).

“

Don't just listen to us... but HEAR what we have to say!

”



– Devora Greenspon,
Resident Leader, Ottawa

Nine Principles of Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative engagement recognizes the critical role of residents. It emphasizes that time is taken to consider relevant information, discuss issues, and develop ideas so residents can meaningfully impact decisions. Residents share their views with each other and directly with others responsible for making decisions about the home. It works to

ensure all perspectives are encouraged and heard. These principles reduce barriers and maximize engagement with residents who may be excluded due to societal factors or changes related to communication or cognition. Deliberative engagement can be applied in single-instance activities or ongoing processes across the spectrum of engagement.

1 The process makes a difference

- Ensure residents know their voices impact the home (e.g., improvements for all residents).
- Listen and provide clear evidence that residents' views have been considered. Report back with outcomes and decisions based on their input.
- Share success stories across the home to highlight the impact of resident engagement.

2 The process is transparent

- Commit to communicating openly, honestly, and as clearly as possible.
- Develop a separate process to address individual concerns and complaints.
- Record discussions where possible, offer written summaries, and report back to residents so points of interest can be highlighted and clarified.

Adapted from: Deliberative Public Engagement: Nine Principles, Involve (UK)
www.involve.org.uk/resource/deliberative-public-engagement-nine-principles

3 The process has integrity

- Ensure everyone is open to the potential of resident engagement and committed to ensuring the integrity of the process.
- Be clear on what can and can't be changed throughout the process.
- Recognize and address power imbalances by working to create safe and respectful spaces for residents to express concerns. Be mindful of the uncertainty and fear of retribution that residents may have about expressing their views to home leadership.

4 The process is consistent but adaptable

- Consider the unique contexts of residents and their environment.
- Be clear on objectives, activities, roles, and intended outcomes of engagement.
- Remain open to unanticipated opportunities and challenges.

5 The process supports diverse representation from residents

- Seek diverse voices – residents of different cultures, sexual orientations, gender identities, faiths, languages, abilities, and ages are supported to participate in ways that respect their identities.
- Understand and consider the experiences, values, and preferences of individual residents, including those who are not typically involved in the home's activities.
- Be responsive to residents' varied approaches to engagement. Demonstrate approachability and responsiveness by accommodating for residents' varied needs—such as language, literacy, and sensory or cognitive changes.
- Build on the strengths of individual residents.

6 The process treats residents with respect

- Emphasize that the residents are the most important part of the process. The home exists because of the residents.
- Honour residents' lived experiences, autonomy, and expertise.
- Create an environment where residents feel comfortable and confident to express their views.
- Ensure residents have meaningful influence on decisions, priorities, and outcomes.

7 The process gives priority to residents' experiences and ideas

- Promote different ways for residents to express themselves collectively and individually (e.g., voting, notes, conversation).
- Recognize residents as experts in their own lived experience of long-term care. Their feedback is as valuable as that of home leaders and other professionals, and should guide decisions with equal weight and respect.

8 The process is reviewed and evaluated to improve practice

- Use a range of evaluation strategies to collect feedback, assess impact, and improve practices. Strategies may include surveying residents, conversing with residents, and noting observed changes in the home.
- Plan for and implement, from the outset, evaluation techniques and ways to report to residents that engagement is working ([see page 57](#)).

9 Residents are kept informed

- Provide residents with clear information on the process before, during, and after meetings and other initiatives.
- Create and sustain formal and informal networks for information sharing.

Methods of Engagement

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
<p>1 <u>Individual feedback</u></p>	<p>One-on-one exchanges, including in-person, phone, or email conversations between residents and home leadership or team members (staff). These conversations can be initiated by residents or others.</p>
<p>2 <u>Residents' Council, including subcommittees</u></p>	<p>Independent, self-determining, resident-only groups. In Ontario, through the Fixing Long-Term Care Act (2021), every licensed LTC home must establish a Residents' Council. Residents' Councils are supported by an appointed Residents' Council Assistant. Residents' Councils may also have scope-specific subcommittees (e.g., food committee, welcoming committee etc.).</p>
<p>3 <u>LTC home committees and scope-specific meetings</u></p>	<p>Formal, ongoing committees and meetings with a specific mandate and terms of reference (e.g., Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Committee, Palliative Care Committee, Ethics Committee, Accreditation Committee etc.). These committees are typically coordinated and attended by home leadership and team members (staff) but may involve others (e.g., residents and care partners).</p>
<p>4 <u>Resident-to-resident</u></p>	<p>Resident Leaders, such as those who lead Residents' Councils, gather feedback and share information with co-residents and care partners through individual conversations.</p>
<p>5 <u>Town hall meetings</u></p>	<p>Formal or informal gatherings where all residents in the LTC home, or a specific area or floor, are invited to come together. These meetings are an open forum for residents to receive updates, share ideas, ask questions, and discuss topics with each other, home leadership, and team members (staff). They are typically organized and facilitated by home leadership and may include other guests (e.g., care partners, contracted service providers, etc.).</p>

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
<p>6 Surveys</p>	<p>Residents are invited to complete structured feedback questionnaires, typically prepared, scheduled, and conducted by home leadership. In Ontario, through the Fixing LTC Act (2021), every licensed LTC home must survey residents and their care partners at least annually.</p>
<p>7 Suggestion boxes</p>	<p>Residents are invited to provide written feedback with the option to remain anonymous. The feedback is typically collected and reviewed by home leadership or team members (staff) on an ongoing basis. Trends may be reviewed by the Residents' Council as well. Suggestion boxes are often placed in high-traffic areas, such as a front lobby, or on every floor or resident home area.</p>
<p>8 Research projects</p>	<p>Residents partner in research studies as members of the research team. They actively participate in aspects such as priority-setting research topics, conducting research activities, interpreting findings and sharing results.</p>



Example: Individual Feedback



The LTC home located at Emo Health Centre in Emo, Ontario, has adopted a personalized approach to collecting resident feedback. They foster a sense of community, engage residents, and build trust through:

Daily walkabouts

Home leadership and team members (staff) visit residents door-to-door, collecting information and feedback that is used to influence home activities, quality improvements, and decisions.

Daily discussion groups

The Recreation Therapist leads daily discussion groups with residents, with the Administrator joining by invitation. Residents report that this activity makes them feel informed, included, valued and part of their home community.

Adapt to Your Home

“Our LTC home is too large for home leadership to walk through in 20 minutes.”

- **Ask the home leadership to commit to 20-minute walkabouts each day, visiting different home areas each time.**

“Residents are frustrated that their feedback doesn’t ‘go anywhere’ or lead to any tangible changes.”

- **Follow up with residents about their questions or concerns. Specify any actions taken based on their feedback. Through conversations with residents, you might identify opportunities or shared concerns.**

“I don’t know what to ask residents or how to engage them in conversations during walkabouts.”

- **Introduce yourself and ask residents about their day.**
- **Ask how they are finding a certain activity, aspect or change in the home.**
- **Use tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions that convey genuine interest, positivity, and warmth. When engaging with residents who are living with cognitive changes, prioritize non-verbal communication – such as positive body language and reassuring facial expressions – over asking open-ended questions.**

Example: Residents' Councils

A Residents' Council is a formal advisory group that is independent of the LTC home and belongs to the residents. All residents are members of the Council, regardless of their meeting attendance. An effective Residents' Council involves the participation of three groups: the residents, the appointed Residents' Council Assistant, and the home Administrator/Executive Director. They work collaboratively to maximize resident engagement and enact the legislated scope of a Residents' Council.

Engaging with your home's Residents' Council can be the best place to start when seeking residents for engagement activities. For guidance on creating and sustaining an effective Residents' Council (including tips for overcoming common challenges such as low attendance or engagement), refer to [OARC's Resource Guide](#) and promising practices for accessible meetings ([see page 54](#)).

Find additional Residents' Council resources, such as fact sheets, agenda and minutes templates, and bylaw templates, on OARC's website: www.ontarc.com.



Example: LTC Home Committees

At St. Patrick's Home of Ottawa, residents are embraced as valued members on every committee within the home.

Residents may learn about committee opportunities through the Residents' Council, or they might be approached by home leadership to join a committee based on their strengths and interests.

Resident participation is supported by:

- Asking each resident committee member what they need to maximize their participation.
- Providing residents with a copy of the committee's Terms of Reference and previous meeting minutes, in large print on request.
- Providing meeting packages by email or hard copy, according to the residents' preferences.
- Giving residents the opportunity to review meeting documents and ask questions before the meeting.
- Personally reminding residents the morning of their meeting.
- Hosting meetings in an accessible space where the spaces located closest to the door(s) are reserved for residents.
- Provide education to support understanding (e.g., education on palliative care provided by the Director of Nursing).

One positive outcome of having residents involved in home committees included the experience of one resident who was a Palliative Care Committee member. Her ongoing participation inspired her to work with the home to create a peer-led volunteer program. She (and others) sit at the bedside and provide comfort and companionship to fellow residents at end-of-life. Home leadership further supported this resident by creating a communication process for Substitute Decision Makers to obtain consent, streamlining the volunteer process for residents.



Example: Resident-to-Resident

Rainycrest Long-Term Care in Fort Frances, Ontario, recognized and proactively addressed residents' frustration over delayed and inadequate communication during the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- Supplementing written information posted in the home with regular verbal update meetings between the Administrator and the Residents' Council Chair, the late Gary S. This provided an opportunity for mutual sharing and knowledge exchange.
- Having Gary share these updates with co-residents throughout the home, visiting common areas such as dining rooms and the Tuck Shop, where he volunteered.
- Preparing copies of the home's communication (memo) for Gary (pictured right) to reference when sharing with co-residents, which ensured accuracy and continuity.

Taking on this communication-ambassador role was a natural fit for Gary, a retired Social Worker with a desire to help others. This peer-to-peer approach was well received in the home, and Gary felt a strong sense of purpose in keeping his fellow residents informed. The Administrator also valued Gary's contributions and commitment.



Adapt to Your Home

“I don’t know where to get resident volunteers.”

➔ Each resident has their own unique strengths, skills and interests that might lend themselves well to being an ambassador. Residents might not know these opportunities exist – ask them!

“Some residents don’t know what updates to share.”

➔ Provide prompts or questions for resident ambassadors to ask peers and report back to meetings or home leadership.

“Some residents forget what was shared.”

➔ Provide the resident ambassadors with handouts, written communications, or visual aids to support their sharing.

“It is difficult to sustain this practice with only one resident sharing.”

➔ Identify a small group of resident ambassadors to help support communication throughout the whole home. Consider working with your Residents’ Council Home Area Representatives (if applicable).

Aspects of the Home as Areas for Engagement

- 1 Food and Dining Experience:**
Selecting and planning menu offerings, dining room arrangements, meal and snack times, or any other aspect of the dining experience.
- 2 Physical Environment:**
Planning or designing the physical environment of the home (e.g., identifying and addressing safety and accessibility concerns; selecting furnishings, lighting, and décor; designing indoor and outdoor spaces, etc.).
- 3 Recreation and Occupational Activities:**
Selecting, planning, and/or directing activities, outings, observances, celebrations, and/or special events.
- 4 Quality Improvement:**
Identifying, implementing, and/or evaluating home programs and initiatives through discussions at committees, annual resident experience surveys or other means, to improve the quality of life and care for residents and the working environment for team members (staff) within the home.
- 5 Day-to-Day Operations:**
Planning or facilitating other aspects of home operations (e.g., program areas, processes and schedules, resident volunteer roles, welcoming initiatives and home tours, pets, communications such as newsletter or website content, etc.).
- 6 Human Resources:**
Planning or participating in interviews or hiring; orientation, training, and education; and recognition activities for new or prospective team members (staff), home leadership, volunteers, and student placements.

7 **Finances:**
Identifying or helping to prioritize home expenses and/or operating budgets (e.g., capital spending and project prioritization, fundraising activities and expenditures, etc.).

8 **Community Connections:**
Identifying, developing, or maintaining connections to outside organizations and groups who interact with the home (e.g., societies, programs, clubs, religious spiritual communities, charities, etc.).

9 **Policies and Home Practices:**
Developing or reviewing policies and home practices that impact daily life for residents (e.g., smoking, visiting, infection prevention and control, emergency preparedness etc.).

10 **Quality Improvement:**
Selecting and reviewing services contracted by and offered within the home (e.g., dental services, aesthetics, hairdressing, cable, phone and internet packages, etc.).

11 **Resident Complaints:**
Identifying, reviewing, discussing, and/or resolving individual resident complaints, the complaints process, and highlighting trends and developing action plans.

Long-Term Care Home Spotlight Stories: Engagement in Action

These LTC home spotlights were selected to spark fresh ideas and inspire new or improved ways to engage and co-design with residents in your home. We encourage you to explore the spotlights with residents and invite their input on potential opportunities and solutions tailored to your home.



Spotlight 1:

Residents Engaged in Personalizing the Seasonal Menu at Kensington Village

At Kensington Village in London, Ontario, residents initiated the “Taste of Home” project to improve menu options. Starting as a small-group weekend recreation program, residents prepared their favourite recipes.



One resident suggested incorporating these recipes into the home’s menu cycle, a decision which was supported by the Executive Director and Food Services Manager. Residents and care partners worked with the Dietary and Recreation departments to gather, cook, and taste recipes. Residents added the most successful and desirable recipes to their menu, which became a source of great pride for all who took part in the program.

This project strengthened relationships and created a sense of community with one resident noting:

“
Our home is
not just serving
meals—we’re
serving memories.
”

Implementation Tips

- Explain limitations, such as those related to food costs and vendors/suppliers, upfront and proactively engage residents to brainstorm creative alternatives together. Modify recipes with residents' input.
- Ensure all residents are included. Consider enlisting care partners to help collect resident preferences and recipes.
- Maintain a schedule of regular meetings with residents to brainstorm and "taste test" new recipes. Communicate these meetings clearly, such as on the program calendar and by word of mouth.
- Keep visual aids or prompts of residents' recipes (e.g., recipe book, cards, or a collage) to aid memory.
- Use meals to celebrate cultures within the home. Ask residents to plan or prepare their traditional recipes as a meal or snack for others in the home.
- Include residents in gathering feedback about menus or dining experiences from others in their home area.
- Invite home leadership to meet with residents to explain their roles. Where possible, invite residents to observe their work areas (e.g., kitchen tours) to support their understanding of 'behind the scenes' activities.

Additional Resources

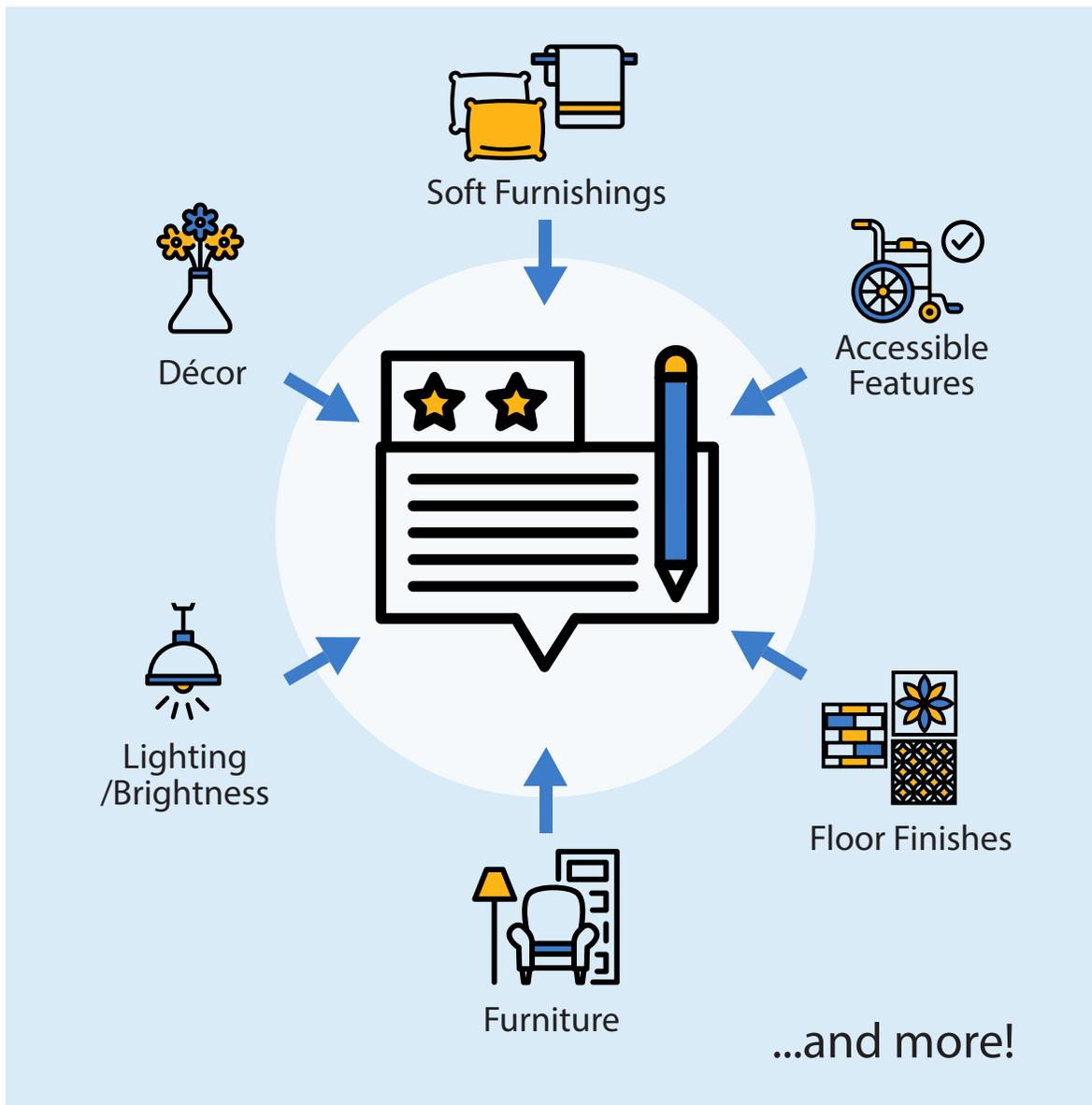
- CLRI Nutrition in Long-Term Care resources: <https://clri-ltc.ca/resource/nutrition/>
- GUIDE: LTC Menu and Mealtime Planning: Guide to Enhancing Resident and Family Partnerships https://www.ontarc.com/documents/misc/OSNAC_FNAT_LTCMenuPlanning_ResidentFamilyEngagement.pdf
- CHOICE+ Program: <https://the-ria.ca/programs/choice/>



Spotlight 2:

Residents Shaping the Physical Environment of their Home

Include residents in decisions about proposed changes to indoor and outdoor spaces, including redevelopment projects, to ensure that these initiatives reflect their needs and preferences. Residents can be engaged in areas such as:



Home Renovations and Capital Development

Residents can play an active role during all stages of a home renovation or redevelopment project by:

- Participating in meetings with architects, designers, and contractors at the beginning of any planned projects to better understand the process. Residents may use these meetings to bring forward identified priorities. Hearing directly from residents about how they plan to use their new space may also help to inform the design of a new build.
- Engaging in regular project updates at Residents' Council meetings, relayed by development leads of the LTC home (e.g., Director of Facilities and Capital Projects). This provides an avenue for reciprocal sharing and documenting ongoing feedback from residents.

Cassellholme, a long-term care home in North Bay, Ontario, included residents in their home redevelopment journey by:

- Enabling and encouraging residents to follow the construction progress through a live-stream camera.
- Developing a model simulation of proposed room designs for residents to explore and provide feedback on before replication in the new build.
- Creating a frequently asked questions (FAQ) page on the home's website, and offering online progress updates and photo galleries in other sections.

Get inspired by Cassellholme's inclusive and proactive approach: www.cassellholme.ca/redevelopment/

When proposing changes in the home, provide residents with options to test and try. Display images of these options in a binder or on a poster that is easily accessible. Invite residents to mark their favourite choice. Pilot changes in one home area before rolling out home-wide. Collect ongoing feedback and be sure to communicate changes back to residents regularly at meetings, in newsletters, etc.

Spotlight 3:

Wiigwas Elder and Senior Care: Designing a Home Rooted in Culture and Community

With a shared vision to create a new expanded home for current and future residents, home leadership and Board of Directors at Wiigwas Elder and Senior Care in Kenora, Ontario embraced a deeply collaborative approach to bring this vision to life.

Partnering with an architecture firm experienced in Indigenous community projects, the development of the new Wiigwas home has been shaped by extensive community consultation and cultural guidance.

This inclusive process has ensured that every design element reflects and respects Indigenous culture and community-identified priorities. From the beginning, the goal was clear: to create a LTC environment that is open, welcoming, and culturally safe—a place where residents feel at home and community connections continue to thrive.

Residents of the current Wiigwas building have played an active role in shaping their new home, participating in consultations and planning meetings alongside team members (staff) and community representatives. Residents' Council meetings have provided a meaningful platform to share ideas and identify infrastructure and service gaps—ensuring that the voices of those who live there remain at the heart of the project.



Intentional design choices for the future Wiigwas home will reflect a move away from institutional features, embracing natural light and raw materials to foster comfort, familiarity, and a deep connection to the land. The team plans to incorporate references to traditional activities, such as hunting and fishing, into the home's decor. Bathing spaces will be reminiscent of a log house, using treated wood panels, in place of traditional white tiles on the walls. The new home, which will be built in proximity to a new hospital, will also share culturally significant spaces including a teaching lodge, dedicated areas for ceremonies, and gardens for growing traditional medicines. Each element will be thoughtfully integrated to support healing, connection, and cultural continuity.

Learn more about the Wiigwas Elder and Senior Care development project [here](https://snyderarchitects.ca/project/wiigwas-elder-senior-care-centre/), (<https://snyderarchitects.ca/project/wiigwas-elder-senior-care-centre/>).



Spotlight 4:

Co-creating an Accessible Garden at Queen's Garden

At Queen's Garden Long-Term Care in Hamilton, Ontario, Resident Leader Steven W. noticed that overgrown bushes were impacting the accessibility of outdoor spaces for residents, especially those using mobility aids.

Together with his home leadership and Residents' Council, they began their journey towards envisioning a new accessible space, featuring a sensory garden for residents and care partners. The idea was first proposed to the Programs Manager in 2020, who responded enthusiastically. However, the home did not know where to get the funds to start the project.

In 2021, the family of a late resident asked to plant a tree in memory of their father. This was the catalyst for the home to begin creating the garden. By 2022, another family provided a significant donation, and the Programs Manager proposed that the funds be used to create the garden. Meanwhile, the Programs Manager and the visionary resident met with the home's owners to articulate their proposal for the garden transformation. After receiving approval from the owners, the Executive Director set the wheels in motion to install concrete pads for the garden by including this investment in the home's capital spending plan.



Residents' Council and Family Council collaborated with home leadership to design and plan the garden, removing the old stone pathway and bushes to create an accessible concrete pad and raised planter boxes. As the project progressed, residents received regular updates at Residents' Council meetings and even visited the garden to watch the concrete pad being installed. Residents, through a 'Flower Committee,' also chose the flowers and shrubbery each year to grow in the raised garden beds. Care partners raised funds for benches, a tree, flower beds, and a concrete pad, and now volunteer for maintenance. This collaborative project was such a success that plans for a second garden space are underway at Queen's Garden.

Adapt This to Your Home

Residents may be unaware about engagement opportunities or feel their efforts would have no impact their home.

- ➔ **Set the tone that resident ideas and input are encouraged and welcomed. Share examples of how resident contributions have led to positive changes in the home.**
- ➔ **Include project updates on the Residents' Council agenda and seek resident input on design, layout, finishings, and furnishings.**

Residents may hesitate to share ideas, or voice concerns due to fear of retaliation, discomfort, or a desire to avoid conflict.

- ➔ **Build trust between residents and home leadership and team members (staff) by creating safe spaces for open conversations.**

There are limited resources and funds.

- ➔ **Think creatively about what can be done and what to prioritize.**
- ➔ **Communicate ideas with supporters of the home, including schools, other local community organizations, and care partners for partnership opportunities.**
- ➔ **Explore local community-based grants.**

The Role of Care Partners

In the context of resident engagement, care partners can support by listening to residents and prioritizing their voices and needs. By doing so, they help ensure that residents remain at the centre of decision-making. Care partners may help facilitate meaningful engagement of residents, including those living with cognitive changes or experiencing language barriers. Because they often know their loved ones well, care partners can help articulate resident's strengths, preferences, values, and needs, in ways that amplifies the resident's own voice. Through Family Councils, care partners can also collaborate with residents to promote initiatives that foster resident engagement and share information about opportunities for residents to participate.

For tips on how Residents' Council and Family Council can work together, see:

Webinar Recording: Residents' Councils and Family Councils – Key Distinctions and Opportunities for Collaboration. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XaxfAMEzps&feature=youtu.be>

Family Councils Ontario's Website: <https://fco.ngo>

Spotlight 5:

Activity Planning Program at Brierwood Gardens

At Brierwood Gardens in Brantford, Ontario, residents co-create programs with the Recreation Therapist through a monthly Residents' Choice Activity Planning Program.

For this initiative, residents create a program of their choice for the following month titled the "Residents' Choice: [Insert name of program]." Residents determine what the program is and what it will be called. They identify associated costs and discuss cost and whether they wish to fundraise. They also decide whether residents will execute the program or have a Recreation Aide assist. These planning sessions are held in a casual, fun atmosphere where residents hear how their input will be used, what goals are realistic, and how ideas may be adapted to fit the home's capabilities. Participation in the Residents' Choice Activity Planning Program has evolved from modest beginnings as residents become increasingly engaged, motivated by seeing their preferences reflected on the calendar. All Residents' Choice programs, along with corresponding promotion posters, planning templates, and event photos, are saved in a binder so they can be easily referenced when reviewing what activity to do for the following month.



Adapt This to Your Home

Residents may be intimidated by the idea of a formalized meeting or have a misconception of it being a forum to share their complaints.

- Foster a welcoming atmosphere with snacks, decorations, and posters that emphasize the casual, idea-sharing nature of the session. Consider having smaller group sizes. To help set the tone, Brierwood Gardens chose to refer to their calendar planning time as an “activity” rather than a “meeting”.
- Build residents’ confidence by involving them in preparing materials or resources for events or volunteering to execute components of a program, according to their strengths.

Residents may not have an immediate response to open-ended questions.

- When facilitating discussion, come prepared with visual prompts (e.g., photos, collages, previous calendars) and verbal cues.
- When calendar planning, discuss previous activities (e.g., a recorded list or “celebration board”) that includes photos of programs they co-designed.

Our home does not have the capacity to organize an additional calendar planning activity.

- Include recreation/activity planning on the Residents’ Council’s monthly agenda as an opportunity to collect group feedback. The Residents’ Council may choose to sponsor or supplement home-led programs on the recreation calendar.
- In larger homes, pilot calendar planning sessions with one home area first.

Spotlight 6:

Engaging Residents in Capital Project Prioritization

Residents at an LTC home in Brampton, Ontario voiced concerns about the prioritization and scheduling of major home improvements, feeling frustrated by project timelines and budget limitations.

For example, replacing carpeted flooring with laminate in six home areas had to be spread over several years due to funding constraints and other urgent repairs. To address their frustration and concerns, the Administrator was invited to attend a Residents' Council meeting to explain the home's budget process and to seek resident input on prioritizing projects. Residents were invited to rank five improvement areas:

- Repair the roof.
- Resurface the parking lot.
- Replace flooring in two home areas.
- Redo hardscaping and landscaping in courtyards for accessibility.
- Redo hardscaping in front of the main entrance.

Residents made their selections. The Administrator then shared how home leadership ranked each project, and a consensus decision was reached. The ranked list was displayed in the boardroom for easy access by residents and team members (staff). During subsequent Residents' Council meetings, the Administrator referred to this list to address concerns about project timing, helping residents and team members (staff) feel more in control and fostering unity and teamwork.

Adapt This to Your Home

Residents need assistance in understanding the capital budget projects.

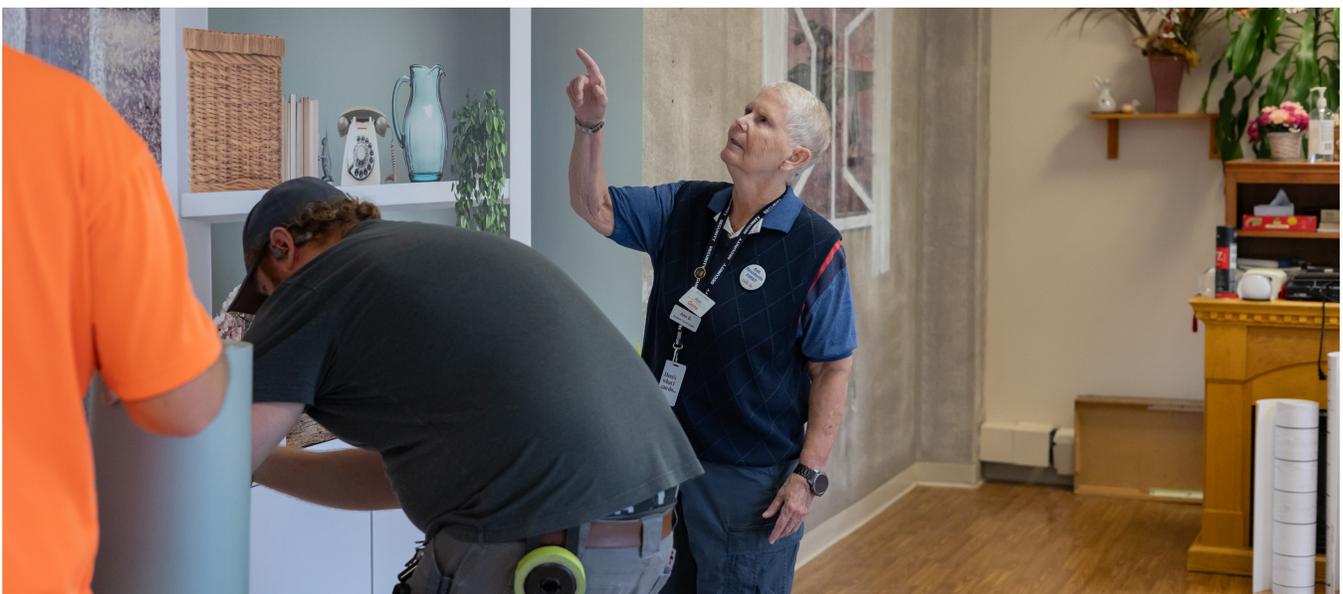
- Use visual prompts (e.g., flip chart with large text) to outline capital development project options, associating each option with a picture for better memory recall.

Residents express frustration because the capital projects that they view as priorities are delayed or incomplete.

- Ensure that home leadership and the Residents' Council stay connected and proactively informed about resident-identified priorities and experiences through regular touchpoints both inside and outside of regular Council meetings.

It is difficult to get opinions from a diverse group of residents in the home, beyond those who attend the Residents' Council meetings.

- Explore ways to capture residents' input on the physical environment and home projects year-round through various communication strategies (formal and informal). This might include the creation of information boards in high-traffic areas where residents can mark a stamp, tally, or sticker beside their preferred ideas. Residents can always be engaged one-on-one to collect feedback.



Spotlight 7:

Resident Leadership in Human Resources at St. Patrick's Home of Ottawa

At St. Patrick's Home of Ottawa, Resident Leaders play an active role in interviewing prospective team members (staff). The late Leslie (Les) F., former Residents' Council President and a retired foreman, contributed invaluable leadership experience and enthusiasm to the home's hiring process.

Recognizing his strengths, the former President and CEO of St. Patrick's Home invited Les to contribute to her 360-performance review, affirming the value of the resident voice in leadership evaluation. When the CEO retired, Les was also consulted on the qualities he hoped to see in her successor. He took great

pride in these contributions, often saying, "As residents, we know what we're looking for when it comes to good staff." Les also welcomed new team members (staff) and student groups by co-presenting the Residents' Bill of Rights with the home's Social Worker.



Tips for Engaging Residents in Hiring

- Ask residents, “What is most important to know when selecting someone to work at our home?” Share the qualities residents value with potential candidates during interviews.
- Co-develop interview questions with residents.
- Include residents on the hiring panel. Alternatively, invite residents to review applications and contribute to interview notes.
- Offer coaching or practice sessions for residents who want to participate in interviewing, to help them feel confident and prepared.
- Confirm with residents how much they can influence in the hiring process.
- Clarify the professionalism and confidentiality requirements with residents, using examples when residents review applications.
- Let the Residents’ Council know when your home is welcoming and onboarding new team members (staff) or anticipating a new cohort of students. Consider introducing them using your home’s newsletter or profile them on home displays that are accessible to residents. This familiarity can facilitate trust when there are new faces in the LTC home.



Tips for Engaging Residents as Teachers

- Include residents in orientation programs for team members (staff), volunteers, and students completing placements in their LTC home.
- Work with residents to deliver education and training.
- If residents are unable to deliver education or contribute to an in-person orientation session, explore other ways to incorporate resident messages and teachings. This may include using personalized video recordings or written testimonials. For example, in 2021, OARC encouraged all LTC homes to work with residents to create their [own Residents' Bill of Rights awareness videos](#) during Residents' Council Week.

Topics for education can include:

- The Residents' Bill of Rights (Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021). For guidance on how to meaningfully include residents in co-delivered education sessions about the Resident Bill of Rights, see OARC's signature program, [Through Our Eyes: Bringing the Residents' Bill of Rights Alive](#).
- The lived experience of a resident's health condition or diagnosis. These sessions can help others to deepen their understanding and compassion.



Tips for Engaging Residents in Evaluating Team Members (Staff)

- Invite residents to provide input into performance reviews of the team members (staff) who work most closely with them.
- Communicate with residents, at the outset, how their feedback will be used: Be clear on what actions they can and can't expect.
- Reassure them that their input will not affect the quality of care or services.
- Emphasize that this is an opportunity to share constructive feedback and appreciation.

Spotlight 8:

Residents Leading Community Connections at Meadow Park Chatham

At Meadow Park Chatham, a commitment to building relationships and celebrating residents' unique strengths has transformed into a culture of community engagement and inclusion. When Brenda Y. a resident living with dementia, felt comfortable sharing her diagnosis, it set a meaningful change in motion. Team members (staff) and resident peers created a safe space where Brenda's abilities and interests were valued. This encouraged her to openly discuss her experience with dementia.

Brenda's self-disclosure and observations that dementia affects many residents prompted Meadow Park to connect with the local Alzheimer's Society, who came into the home to deliver an education session for both residents and team members (staff). Brenda stated, "I think it should be brought up more because most people... haven't really talked to anybody about it, and it's a scary thing. I chose to let it out there." This partnership deepened understanding and empathy around dementia within the home, reducing stigma and fostering belonging. Inspired by this experience, Brenda helped to lead an annual Alzheimer's Society fundraiser within Meadow Park. Under her guidance, the event grew each year, drawing in local community members, raising awareness of the home, and attracting new volunteers.



This welcoming, person-centred approach didn't stop with Brenda. Residents now regularly serve as catalysts for meaningful connections with community organizations.

By focusing on residents' strengths and creating an environment where disclosure feels safe, Meadow Park connects its residents with the world beyond its walls—fostering belonging, encouraging advocacy, and sustaining vital links with the broader community.

Spotlight 9:

Eastholme's Emergency Preparedness Planning with Residents

When Eastholme Home for The Aged in Powassan, Ontario, introduced the idea of Residents' Council involvement in emergency planning, residents initially questioned their role. The home leadership worked with residents to make this legislatively required activity meaningful.

Emergency preparedness is now included as a standing agenda item at monthly Residents' Council meetings. Residents are invited to provide input to enhance Eastholme's programs and they regularly participate in mock emergency scenarios. For example, during a Code Orange simulation, they practiced evacuations, and in a Code Yellow exercise, a resident acted as a 'missing resident.' This hands-on involvement has helped residents, including former Council President Wayne D. become more familiar with emergency codes and understand the importance of communication and collaboration for safety.



Adapt This to Your Home

Residents have different levels of understanding about policies and unique preferences for how they learn and engage.

- ➔ Explore different strategies for involving residents in emergency preparedness. Some residents prefer written materials, like colour-coded reference cards or emergency outlines. Others might favour presentations or direct participation in drills.

“I don’t know which policies I should engage residents in.”

- ➔ Ask the residents what they are interested in or have previous experience with. Consider starting by gauging their interest in shaping policies that directly affect them. For example, policies about infection prevention and control (IPAC), palliative care, the home’s visiting program, smoking, or even pets.

Residents want transparent communication.

- ➔ Experienced Resident Leaders can offer reassurance to their peers and support during drills, especially when alarms and announcements are used.
- ➔ Ensure thorough follow up and debriefing after each drill or emergency. After a drill or actual emergency, meet with the Residents’ Council to debrief, discuss lessons learned, and gather resident feedback to improve home practices. This is also a legislative requirement.

Spotlight 10:

Co-creating and Showcasing a New Mission Statement at Huron Lodge

At Huron Lodge in Windsor, Ontario, the residents, home leadership, and team members (staff) helped to create a welcoming home environment by working together on a new mission and vision statement for the home.

Their process involved regular meetings between the home's Administrator and the Residents' Council, with the Administrator posing open-ended questions to generate discussion and to capture what residents expressed as being priorities. They placed emphasis on involving inclusive and person-centred language. After crafting their new statement, the residents suggested

displaying it proudly in the form of a wall graphic located at the front of their home. Residents worked with a designer to select their preferred design, text style, and colours. Now, permanently displayed is a beautiful statement that begins with the message that "Huron Lodge is first and foremost the home of our residents as they represent the core of our vision for the future."



Spotlight 11:

Resident Roles on Norview Lodge Tour Teams

Residents are the true experts when it comes to life in LTC homes, making them a vital part of tour teams. At Norview Lodge in Simcoe, Ontario, the Resident Greeter Program includes residents in the tour and move-in (admission) process.

Co-developed by a Resident Leader, Social Worker, and Supervisor of Programs and Volunteer Services, this program helps current residents to connect with new and prospective residents and care partners on home tours. Marion C., a former community volunteer and resident at Norview, reported that she found great purpose in serving as one of the home's first Resident Greeters.

The home continues to receive positive feedback from tour participants who share that hearing directly from residents helped to put them at ease, and made their tour experience more meaningful.

“

I really like being able to talk to people about Norview Lodge and telling them what it is like to live here. It makes me happy to know that people want to hear what I have to say, and I consider this my job, and I don't ever like to miss a tour.

”



- Donna L.,
volunteer
Resident Greeter

Adapt This to Your Home

Residents have varying abilities and comfort levels.

- ➔ Greeter activities can vary: some residents may lead full tours, others may meet in the lobby and answer questions or use their rooms as “show suites.”
- ➔ Include a message from Resident Greeters in tours, even if they can’t be present, through written statements in promotional materials.
- ➔ Build the residents’ confidence through practice tours and by having your home’s tour lead work with the Resident Greeter to develop a shared narrative about the home.



Resident Engagement: How Are We Doing?

This Organizational Resident Engagement Assessment is designed to help you determine if, where, how, and to what extent residents' voices are considered in decision-making processes in your LTC home. Results may also help to prioritize and tailor strategies to improve resident engagement in your home.

For each aspect of your home, select the method(s) your home leadership and team members (staff) use to engage residents and your current level of engagement ([see page 6](#)). For example, home leadership and the Residents' Council could complete this assessment independently, then come together to

compare and discuss their answers to understand if their views align and to identify areas for development. The goal is not always to increase the number of areas, methods, or levels of engagement. Rather, to work with residents to determine the goals that are relevant and meaningful for your home.



Organizational Resident Engagement Assessment

By Aspect of the Home and Method for Engagement

		Level of Engagement					
		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Not Applicable
1: Food and Dining Experience							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						
2: Physical Environment							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						
3: Recreation and Occupational Activities							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						
4: Quality Improvement							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						

Organizational Resident Engagement Assessment

By Aspect of the Home and Method for Engagement

		Level of Engagement					
		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Not Applicable
5: Day-to-day Operations							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						
6: Human Resources							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						
7: Finances							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						
8: Community							
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box						
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects						

Organizational Resident Engagement Assessment

By Aspect of the Home and Method for Engagement

Level of Engagement					
Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Not Applicable

9: Policies						
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects					
10: Services						
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects					
11: Resident Complaints						
Method for Engagement	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual feedback					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Residents' Council					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other committees and scope-specific meetings					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident-to-resident					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Town hall					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion box					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research projects					
NOTES						

Guiding Questions for Planning Engagement

Home leadership, team members (staff), and residents should discuss these questions together when planning engagement activities.

Objectives

- What are the key goals, desired outcomes, and changes we are agreeing to work towards?

Level of Engagement

- What is our current level of resident engagement?
- What level of resident engagement are we aiming for? ([see page 6](#)).

Communication

- What are some ways residents can express themselves in this process? ([see page 16](#)).
- How will we share information and keep everyone informed of new developments and progress?

Safety & Inclusion

- How will we ensure a safe and inclusive process?
- What will help residents feel comfortable and safe to share their input freely?
- How will we reduce barriers to engagement?

Background & Scope

- What key limitations or concepts should we review and discuss in advance (e.g., government regulations that must be followed)?
- How will we ensure the sustainability of our engagement activities (if applicable)?

Evaluation

- How will we measure our success in our engagement activities?
- How will we measure our success in implementing positive change and achieving objectives?

Teamwork

- What unique challenges and strengths do residents, team members (staff), and others involved bring to this process?
- How will we address challenges and build on strengths?
- How will we work to reduce power imbalances?

Adapted from:

- Health Quality Ontario <https://www.hqontario.ca/Portals/0/documents/qi/choosing-methods-pce.pdf>
- Patient Voices Network, BC <https://patientvoicesbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/PVNTipsBaltimore.pdf>

Promising Practices for Accessible Meetings

Meetings, whether they are a town hall, formal committee meetings, or closed Residents' Council meetings, are important avenues for resident engagement. However, residents may have many reasons for not attending a meeting. This can be because of disinterest, being unaware of meetings, the accessibility of the meeting (e.g., the time, location, or way the meeting is conducted).

The following strategies, developed in collaboration with residents, are intended to help address some of the identified barriers:

- Include more than one resident on a committee. This makes participation less intimidating and builds capacity in potential resident volunteers to sustain the initiative.
- Use plain, accessible language. Minimize the use of jargon and acronyms wherever possible. Take the time to explain commonly used terms and consider giving residents a glossary they can refer to.
- Consider alternating the meeting location on different floors, if possible, so residents from different areas of the home can have a chance to participate.
- Account for residents' schedules and availability.
- Encourage residents who are on home committees and other volunteer roles to share details about their learnings and experiences at Residents' Council meetings. This raises awareness and inspires others to get involved, based on their interests and strengths.
- Provide options for residents to attend a portion of a meeting if the full length of a meeting feels too long, or if they have a scheduling conflict. Wherever possible, structure meeting agendas to accommodate this by discussing resident-identified priorities first.

Verbal Communication

- Support residents to access assistive devices such as microphones, speakers, hearing aids, personal amplifiers (e.g. Pocketalkers), and visual aids to address individual needs.
- Provide spaces in the room with clear sightlines of speakers and screens.
- Use a notepad or digital device to capture feedback and follow up.
- Wherever possible, explore translation/interpretation services for residents who speak different languages to ensure they can fully participate. Translation can be through formal services, volunteers (including residents), or technology (i.e. Google Translate and other applications). If this cannot be accommodated during a meeting, explore options to meet with interested residents before or after the meeting to collect and relay feedback.

Written Communication

- Offer meeting materials in different font sizes, including large print. Check that the document is Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) compliant. You may use the CNIB guidelines (<https://cnib.ca/sites/default/files/2018-07/CNIB%20Clear%20Print%20Guide.pdf>) as a reference.
- Translate communications into the residents' preferred language.
- If a resident wears glasses or uses a magnifier device, ensure that these items are available to them at the meeting to support their participation.
- Include visual aids to supplement text.
- Use OARC's fully customizable Communications Template (https://www.ontarc.com/tools/20250221GeneralCom_Template.docx) to communicate updates in the home. Populate it with information from home leadership and distribute to residents to support understanding.
- When posting information, ensure that communications documents are placed at an accessible height so that all residents, including those using mobility aids such as wheelchairs, can read the written material.
- Seek resident input when creating surveys. Simplify questions and scales where possible.

Communicating with People Living with Cognitive Changes

- Reduce distractions in the environment, such as turning off the television or radio. Use a quiet and private space where possible, to maximize residents' comfort.
- Sit face-to-face when speaking. Look for signs in their expression, tone of voice, and body language.
- Be flexible.
- Match their pace.



Adapted from Alzheimer Society Canada:

<https://alzheimer.ca/en/whats-happening/news/5-communication-tips-conversations-people-living-dementia>

Making and Evaluating Changes with Residents

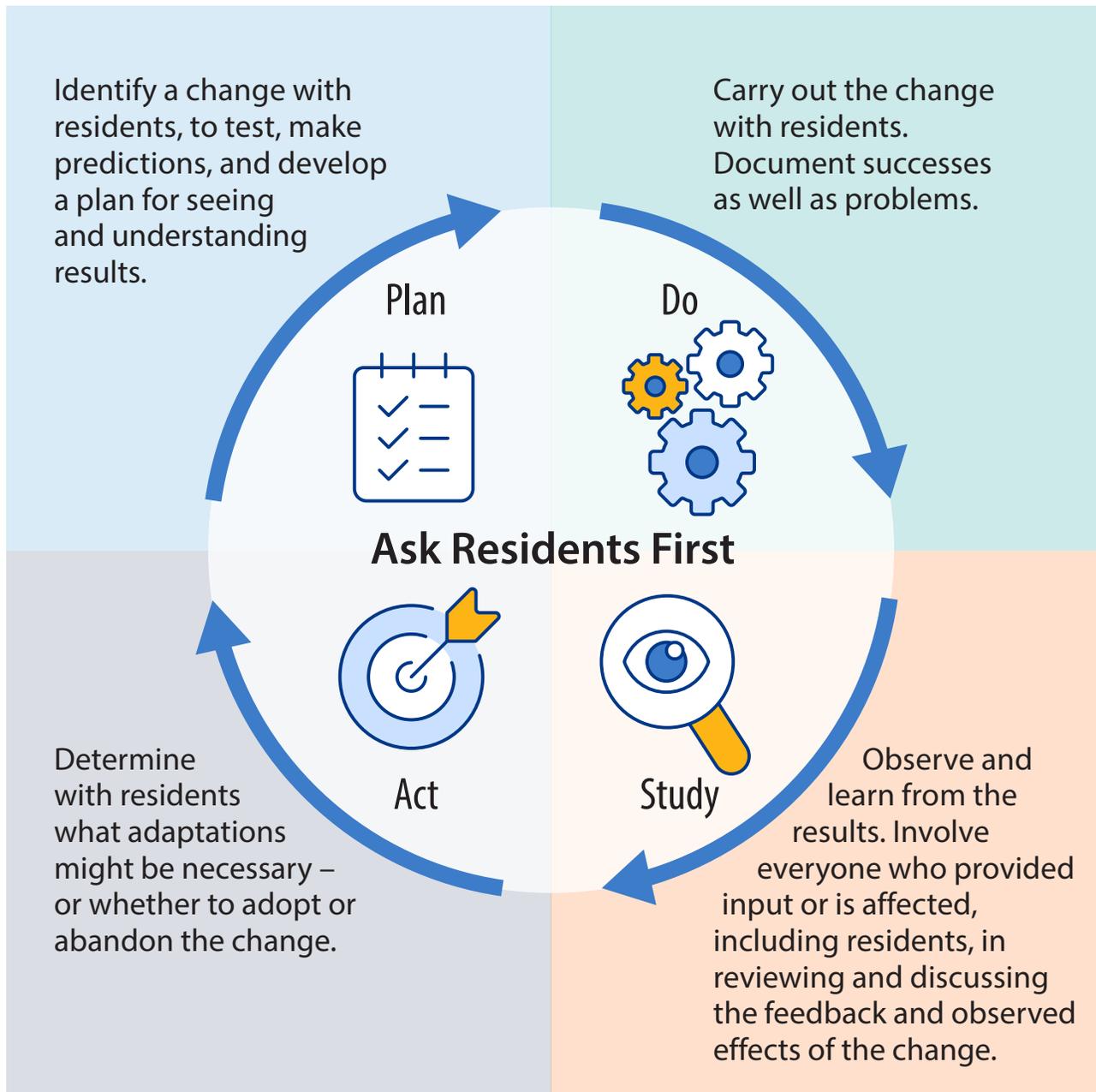
Resident engagement is an opportunity to introduce change into your LTC home. It is also an opportunity to stop and reflect, with residents, on what is working well and what might need to change.

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) is a tool in quality improvement work. It can help identify opportunities for these changes and document the impacts they have on residents and others in the home. PDSA is an iterative cycle, where changes can

be tested and activities can be refined throughout the process. The adapted PDSA cycle is described with four steps, with the foundation of each step being “ask residents first.”



Adapted PDSA Cycle



Adapted from PDSA: Plan-Do-Study-Act Instruction:
<https://www.hqontario.ca/portals/0/Documents/qi/rf-document-pdsa-cycles1-en.pdf>



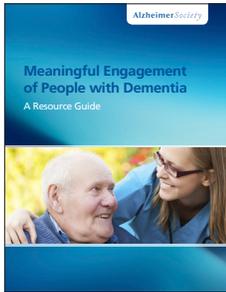
Evaluation is part of the PDSA cycle. Evaluation can help initiate conversations within your home. Consider assessing the processes and outcomes, such as the residents' influence, participation, and feelings of respect and trust or the effects on residents' quality of life and the home overall (e.g., new policies). Evaluations can be completed formally (e.g., through satisfaction surveys, and interviews) or informally. Consider observing changes in attendance at meetings or activities, the reactions of residents, team members (staff), and care partners affected by the change or unintended effects. Be sure to consider different perspectives and plan strategies to understand the experiences of all residents.

For those seeking a structured approach to evaluating the resident engagement process, consider using the [Public and Patient Engagement Evaluation Tool](#)¹ by McMaster University. The tool contains a set of questionnaires for participants/residents, project planners, and the organization/home leadership. Although this tool was not developed for the LTC home setting, it is adaptable.

1 The Public and Patient Engagement Evaluation Tool has been licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License. ©2018, Julia Abelson and the PPEET Research-Practice Collaborative. McMaster University. All rights reserved.

Other Tools to Support Resident Engagement

For more information about adapting engagement to people with dementia:



- ➔ Meaningful Engagement of People with Dementia: A Resource Guide, Alzheimer Society Canada, 2015. <https://alzheimer.ca/sites/default/files/documents/meaningful-engagement-of-people-with-dementia.pdf>
- ➔ Checklist for Change, DementiAbility Methods – The Montessori Way, 2016. <https://dementiability.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Checklist-Final-April-21-2016-FINAL-FINAL-THIS-IS-IT.pdf>

For more information and ideas for inclusive engagement:



- ➔ Embracing Diversity: A Toolkit for Supporting Inclusion in Long-Term Care Homes, Ontario Centres for Learning, Research & Innovation in Long-Term Care (CLRI), 2020. <https://clri-ltc.ca/resource/embracingdiversity/>
- ➔ Diversity and Inclusion Digital Calendar, Ontario CLRI, ND. <https://clri-ltc.ca/resource/diversitycalendar/>
- ➔ Meaningful Engagement Resource, Behavioural Supports Ontario, 2025. <https://brainxchange.ca/Public/Special-Pages/BSO/Files/MERG/BSO-Meaningful-Engagement-Resource-Guide.aspx>

For more information about engaging residents in research:



- ➔ Partnering for Progress: A Guide for Meaningful Engagement of Residents and Caregivers in Long-Term Care Research, Perley Health, 2025. <https://www.perleyhealth.ca/upload/documents/coe/pfp-guide-june-17-2025.pdf>

How Was This Toolkit Created?

This toolkit was developed through a three-stage research process. In stage 1, we conducted a scoping review (a thorough review of the literature) to synthesize existing knowledge on approaches to resident engagement, as well as explore barriers, challenges, and facilitators of engagement, considerations for diversity and cognitive change, and approaches to evaluation. In stage 2, we interviewed residents, team members (staff) and home leadership to assess community capacity. In stage 3, we used the findings and worked with residents, home leadership, team members (staff), and other LTC sector partners to co-design this toolkit.

Publications

[1] Lee C, Tripp D, McVie M, Fineczko J, Ramsden G, Hothi S, Langston J, Gilhuly J, Collingwood B, McAiney C, McGilton KS, Bethell J. Empowering Ontario's long-term care residents to shape the place they call home: a codesign protocol. *BMJ Open*. 2024 Feb 6;14(2): e077791.

[2] Hutchinson M, Gilhuly J, Ramsden G, Lee C, Tripp D, Collingwood B, Fineczko J, McAiney C, McGilton KS, McVie M, Bethell J. Listened to but Rarely Heard: A Scoping Review of Resident Engagement in the Organizational Design and Governance of their Long-Term Care Homes. *Can J Aging*. 2025 Oct 6:1-13.

Presentations of Preliminary Findings

- Canadian Association on Gerontology, Montreal (2025)
- McMaster Collaborative Conversations Series [Webinar](#), Virtual (2025)
- [Ontario Association of Residents' Councils Webinar, Virtual \(2024\)](#)
- This is Long-Term Care, Toronto (2024)
- AWARD network [Webinar](#), Virtual (2024)
- Walk with Me, Ottawa (2024)
- [brainXchange Webinar, Virtual \(2024\)](#)
- Canadian Association on Gerontology, Toronto (2023)

Acknowledgements

This toolkit was co-developed by the Ontario Association of Residents' Councils (OARC) and a core group of residents and researchers:

- Jennifer Bethell, Scientist, KITE Research Institute, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute – University Health Network
- Beryl Collingwood, Retired. Former Senior Leader, Southbridge Care Homes
- Julia Fineczko, Doctor of Nursing Graduate, Lawrence Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto
- Jim Gilhuly, REAL Member and Board Director, OARC
- Jennifer Langston, Operations and Project Manager, OARC
- Melissa Matheson, Education and Home Support Manager, OARC
- Carrie McAiney, Associate Professor, School of Public Health Sciences, University of Waterloo and Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging
- Katherine McGilton, Senior Scientist, KITE Research Institute, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute – University Health Network
- Melissa McVie, Director of Communications, OARC
- Gale Ramsden, REAL Co-Chair and Board Director, OARC
- Dee Tripp, Executive Director, OARC
- Stephanie Ventura, Director of Education, OARC
- Chloe Yeung, Evaluation and Quality Manager, OARC

Funding Support

The development of this toolkit was supported through research funding provided by the Canadian Frailty Network, Perley Health, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

The content and views expressed in this toolkit are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the funding organizations.



We would also like to thank the following individuals for their expert review of this resource.

- Jennifer Blaik, Psychogeriatric Resource Consultant, The Regional Municipality of York
- Rosemary Crisp, Former Director of Care, Extendicare.
- Joan Devine, Retired. Former Director of Education, Pioneer Network/AgingIN.
- Ada DiFlavio, Administrator, Deer Park Villa and Suites
- Michelle Fleming, Senior Knowledge Broker, Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in Long-Term Care at Bruyère Health
- Sadie Friesner, Executive Director, Mill Creek Care Centre
- Jennifer Killing, VP Quality Research and Strategic Partnerships, peopleCare Communities
- Sheila Novek, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Health Studies, Brandon University – Winnipeg Campus
- Sam Peck, CEO, Family Councils Ontario
- Liane Pelissier, Deputy Director, Family Councils Ontario
- Courtney Stasiuk-Mohr, Project Specialist, Behavioural Supports Ontario Provincial Coordinating Office

We would like to acknowledge those who participated in a series of focus groups with home leadership and OARC's provincial advisory group, the Resident Experts, Advisors and Leaders (REAL) Group. We would also like to thank all the homes featured as examples and spotlights for sharing your story with us. A heartfelt thank you to the residents and team at Weston Terrace Community for graciously welcoming OARC into your home and allowing us to capture many of the photos featured in this toolkit.

Opportunities to Promote Resident Engagement

Share Your Story

We invite LTC homes from across Ontario to share their stories of resident engagement with other Ontario LTC homes through OARC's communications. Share stories where you made a positive impact, overcame challenges, or demonstrated creativity and collaboration. Please contact **Melissa McVie**, Director of Communications mmcvie@ontarc.com

Share Your Feedback

We invite your ongoing feedback to help us enhance this resource. Please share your thoughts on any aspect of this toolkit, including suggestions for tools that could help other LTC homes engage residents more effectively. Please contact **Chloe Yeung**, Quality and Evaluation Manager, cyeung@ontarc.com or complete this short survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ResEngToolkit>





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