



**A**s our population ages, more Albertans are coming into contact with long term care services. Some people experience them firsthand as residents. Others, like family members of people living in nursing homes, provide a different perspective on the quality of care and services provided. These two surveys focus on what residents and families told us about their experience with the care and services provided in nursing homes across the province. In this report, we use the terms nursing home and long term care facility interchangeably.

### Why did we do the surveys?

Surveys are an integral part of the Health Quality Council of Alberta's (HQCA) legislated mandate to measure, monitor and report to Albertans about their experience and satisfaction with the quality and safety of health services they receive. In 2003 and 2004, we did a survey called *Satisfaction with Health Care Services: A Survey of Albertans*. The results told us Albertans are concerned about long term care services in the province. We also know that while many long term care providers and some health regions have done resident and family surveys, these are the first family and resident experience surveys of their kind to be done at the same time across the province.

In addition, the HQCA, long term care providers, health care professionals and policymakers recognize that resident and family experience is a key measure of quality and an important aspect of providing and improving care and services for nursing home residents.

### What did we want to learn?

The main reason we did the surveys was to get information about the resident and family experience that can be used to help Alberta Health Services, long term care operators and management, direct care providers, health professionals and Alberta Health and Wellness improve the quality of

resident care and services as well as aspects of residents' quality of life. We also wanted to:

- Identify areas of excellence and opportunities for improvement in the long term care sector.
- Get standardized and comparable information from across the province, health regions and service providers.
- Provide a beginning point or baseline for measuring and monitoring new long term care initiatives to improve quality.

### How did we do the surveys?

The HQCA formed a working group of long term care and quality improvement experts from the health regions, health professions and government. This group helped determine the surveys' scope and design and gave input throughout the process.

The surveys were conducted using the CAHPS Nursing Home Survey: Resident and Family Member Instruments developed by the U.S.-based Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).<sup>1</sup> Before we surveyed residents and family members, we evaluated the questionnaires for reliability and validity through a pilot study conducted in partnership with AHRQ.

For the resident survey, the HQCA trained a team of people that conducted face-to-face interviews with residents living

<sup>1</sup> CAHPS stands for Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems. This family of survey instruments has been developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to measure consumer perception of health care services. All instruments have been extensively validated and pilot tested in the target populations.

in 172 nursing homes across the province. Overall, 3,415 interviews were conducted, representing about 24% of long term care residents in Alberta. Because a large proportion of residents are not capable of completing a survey due to cognitive reasons, resident survey results represent the views of cognitively able residents only. As a consequence, facility sample sizes for the resident survey are often much smaller than for the family survey.

Agili-T Health Solutions Inc. conducted the family member survey under contract to the HQCA and followed Alberta privacy legislation requirements. Survey packages were mailed to 11,311 family members (or the most involved person) for residents living in 173 long term care facilities across Alberta from October 2007 to January 2008. Overall, 7,943 surveys were completed for a response rate of 70.2%. This high response resulted in a low margin of error of  $\pm 1.1\%$ .

### What were some of the key findings from the surveys?\*

\* Most questions in the resident survey asked respondents to answer on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is the worst possible and 10 is the best possible. For reporting purposes, a resident response of 9 to 10 is reported as a rating of excellent, 7 to 8 as average and 0 to 6 as poor. These ratings reflect the distribution of responses in Alberta.

### Resident Experience Survey

Overall, half of those residents surveyed (50%) rated the care they get from nursing home staff as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10). 32% rated the care as average (7 or 8 out of 10) and 18% rated the care as poor (0 to 6 out of 10). When asked how they would rate the nursing home on a scale of 0 to 10, 52% rated it as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10), 30% rated it as average (7 or 8 out of 10) and 18% rated it as poor (0 to 6 out of 10). Most residents (89%) said they would definitely (51%) or probably (38%) recommend the nursing home to others and 86% said they received the care they needed at the nursing home.

The survey found that from the residents' perspective, items related to communication and respect had the strongest relationship to the overall care rating. This includes how respectful staff are to residents, how well staff listen and how well they explain things to residents. Items related specifically to resident care (e.g., pain control, staff responsiveness and privacy) and the nursing home environment (e.g., food, cleanliness, safety and security) were also important.

<sup>2</sup> Quartiles are determined by listing the long term care facilities by their overall nursing home rating from highest to lowest. The list is then divided into roughly 4 equal groups called quartiles.



- About one half of residents (51%) rated the respectfulness of staff as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10), one-third (31%) rated it as average (7 or 8 out of 10) while about 2 out of 10 (18%) rated it as poor (0 to 6 out of 10).
- Approximately 4 out of 10 residents (42%) rated the ability of staff to explain things in a way that is easy to understand as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10), one-third (32%) rated it as average (7 or 8 out of 10) while about 3 out of 10 (26%) rated it as poor (0 to 6 out of 10).
- Of those residents who need help from staff to dress, shower or bathe, 9 out of 10 (90%) reported that staff ensured they had enough personal privacy. Of those residents who need help to stay clean, 90% said they received the help they needed.
- About 2 out of 10 residents (23%) rated the food at their nursing home as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10), about one-third (33%) rated it as average (7 or 8 out of 10) and nearly half (44%) rated it as poor (0 to 6 out of 10).
- About 3 out of 10 residents (28%) rated how quickly staff come when they call for help as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10), another third (33%) said it was average (7 or 8 out of 10) and about 4 out of 10 (38%) rated it as poor (0 to 6 out of 10).

The study also explored differences between facilities that received higher than average overall nursing home ratings (upper quartile<sup>2</sup> facilities) and those with lower overall nursing home ratings (lower quartile facilities).

- Staff from upper quartile facilities were perceived as more respectful and better listeners than staff from lower quartile facilities.
- Nearly every attribute related to the nursing home environment (food; mealtime enjoyment; nursing home

temperature; nursing home cleanliness; feelings of safety and security; quietness at night; noise during the day; privacy with visitors) received significantly better ratings from residents in upper quartile facilities than those in the lower quartile ones.

- Residents from upper quartile facilities rated the care they received from staff and the nursing home in general higher than residents from lower quartile facilities.

### What did residents say about communication and respect?

- About 5 out of 10 residents (51%) rated the respectfulness of staff as excellent, one-third (31%) rated it as average and nearly 2 out of 10 (18%) rated it as poor.
- 4 out of 10 residents (40%) rated how well nursing home staff listened to them as excellent, approximately one-third (33%) rated it as average and about another 3 out of 10 residents (27%) rated it as poor.
- Close to 4 out of 10 residents (42%) rated the ability of staff to explain things in a way that is easy to understand as excellent, about one-third (32%) rated it as average while about 3 out of 10 (26%) rated it as poor.
- About 6 out of 10 residents (58%) reported they are *not* unhappy with the care they get at the nursing home while about 2 out of 10 (15%) are unhappy with the care.
- Most residents (79%) feel free to speak to staff when they are unhappy with their care.

### What did residents say about the care they received at the nursing home?

- Of those residents who said they take medicine for aches or pain, about one-third (34%) gave a rating of excellent when asked how well their medicine worked. About 4 out of 10 residents (38%) rated it as average and nearly 3 out of 10 (28%) rated it as poor.
- When asked how well staff help when they have pain, about 5 out of 10 residents (46%) gave a rating of excellent while one-third (31%) said it was average and about 2 out of 10 (23%) said it was poor.
- About 3 out of 10 residents (28%) rated how quickly staff come when they call for help as excellent while another third (33%) said it was average and about 4 out of 10 (38%) reported it was poor.
- Of those residents who need help from staff to dress, bathe, shower or toilet, nearly half (47%) rated how gentle

staff are as excellent. Another third (33%) rated this as average while 2 out of 10 (21%) said it was poor.

- Of those residents who need help from staff to dress, shower or bathe, 9 out of 10 (90%) reported staff ensured they had enough personal privacy.
- Of those residents who need help to stay clean, 9 out of 10 (90%) said they received the help they needed.

### What did residents say about the nursing home environment?

- About 2 out of 10 residents (23%) rated the food at their nursing home as excellent, about one-third (33%) said it was average and almost half (44%) said it was poor.
- Of those residents who eat in the dining room, about 2 out of 10 (22%) rated how much they enjoyed mealtimes in the dining room as excellent, another third (34%) rated it as average while nearly half (44%) rated it as poor.
- About 3 out of 10 residents (28%) rated the comfort of the temperature in the nursing home as excellent, about one-third (34%) gave it an average rating and 4 in 10 (39%) rated it as poor.
- Half of those surveyed (51%) rated the cleanliness of the nursing home as excellent, one-third (32%) reported it as average and nearly 2 in 10 (17%) rated it as poor.
- Just over half of residents (53%) rated how safe and secure they feel in the nursing home as excellent, about 3 out of 10 (29%) rated it as average and 2 out of 10 (19%) rated it as poor.
- About 9 out of 10 residents (86%) reported being able to find a private place to visit.

### What about residents' freedom to make choices?

- 8 out of 10 residents (80%) said they can choose what time they want to go to bed.
- Most residents (89%) can choose the clothes they wear.
- About 9 out of 10 residents (86%) reported they can choose what activities they do.

### What about activities?

- Over one-third of residents (37%) reported there are *not* enough organized activities on weekends.
- Over three-quarters (77%) said there are enough organized activities during the week.

- About 7 out of 10 residents (72%) are satisfied with how their time is spent in the nursing home.

### What did residents say about medical and safety issues?

- For the majority of residents (74%), a doctor is available when they need one.
- Of those residents who cannot turn themselves over in bed, about one-third (33%) said they are left sitting or laying in the same position so long it hurts.
- Close to three-quarters of residents (72%) can reach something to drink by themselves while about 2 out of 10 (19%) are unable to do so.

### What about residents' quality of life?

- Over half of the residents surveyed (54%) reported feeling worried often (18%) or sometimes (36%).
- A majority (86%) felt happy often (50%) or sometimes (36%).
- Over half (54%) reported feeling bored often (20%) or sometimes (34%).
- Over half (53%) said they felt lonely often (21%) or sometimes (32%).
- About one-third (27%) rated their life now as excellent, 33% rated it as average and 40% rated it as poor.

### What did they say about end-of-life issues?

- More than half of those surveyed (56%) talked with their family and about 3 out of 10 (28%) spoke with a staff member or health care professional about what treatment they want if they become ill or cannot speak for themselves.
- The majority of residents (88%) said it is extremely, very or somewhat important to talk about end-of-life issues.

### What are the differences between upper quartile facilities and lower quartile facilities?<sup>3</sup>

- Staff at the upper quartile facilities were perceived by residents as more respectful and better listeners than staff from lower quartile facilities.
- Fewer residents were unhappy with the care they get from staff in upper quartile facilities compared to lower quartile ones.

<sup>3</sup> Quartiles are determined by listing the long term care facilities by their overall nursing home rating from highest to lowest. The list is then divided into roughly 4 equal groups called quartiles.

- Residents in upper quartile facilities rated how quickly staff come when they call for help higher than those in lower quartile facilities.
- More residents in upper quartile facilities reported getting the help they needed from staff to stay clean compared to lower quartile residents.
- Nearly every attribute related to the nursing home environment (food; mealtime enjoyment; nursing home temperature; nursing home cleanliness; feelings of safety and security; quietness at night; noise during the day; privacy with visitors) received significantly better ratings from residents in upper quartile facilities than those in the lower quartile ones.
- More residents from upper quartile facilities believed there are enough organized weekend and weekday activities and are satisfied with how they spend their time compared to residents in lower quartile facilities.
- More residents from upper quartile facilities reported no difficulties reaching their beverages compared to residents from lower quartile facilities.
- Residents from lower quartile facilities were bored more often compared to residents from upper quartile facilities.
- Residents from upper quartile facilities rated the care they received from staff and the nursing home in general higher than residents from lower quartile facilities.
- More residents from upper quartile facilities reported getting the care they need compared to lower quartile facilities.

### Family Member Experience Survey

Overall, nearly half of those family members (or most involved person) surveyed (45%) rated the care at the nursing home as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10). 41% rated the care as average (7 or 8 out of 10) and 14% rated the care as poor (0 to 6 out of 10). The survey also found that family members rated smaller nursing homes (those with fewer beds) more positively than large facilities.

The survey found what had the strongest relationship to family members' overall care rating were items related to nursing home staffing levels, care of residents' belongings and the nursing home environment.



- About 1 out of 10 of those surveyed (13%) said there were always enough nurses or aides in the nursing home. About 4 out of 10 (41%) said there were usually enough and close to 2 out of 10 (19%) said there were never enough.
- Nearly 4 out of 10 respondents (38%) said the resident always looked and smelled clean and about 5 out of 10 (51%) said this was usually the situation.
- About 5 out of 10 (49%) said the resident's room always looked and smelled clean and about 4 out of 10 (42%) said this was usually the case.
- One-third of those surveyed (33%) reported residents' personal medical belongings were damaged or lost in the last 6 months either once or two or more times.

The study also explored differences between facilities that received higher than average overall care ratings (upper quartile<sup>4</sup> facilities) and those with lower care ratings (lower quartile facilities).

- Upper quartile facilities received an overall care rating of 9.1 out of 10 from respondents compared to 7.1 for lower quartile facilities.
- Upper quartile facility respondents felt there were always or usually enough nurses/aides compared to lower quartile facility respondents. They were also more likely to find a nurse/aide when they wanted one.
- Residents' rooms in upper quartile facilities were more likely to always or usually look and smell clean compared to lower quartile facilities.

<sup>4</sup> Quartiles are determined by listing the long term care facilities by their overall care rating from highest to lowest. The list is then divided into roughly 4 equal groups called quartiles.

### What did family members say about the overall care residents received?

- About half of the respondents (45%) rated the care at the nursing home as excellent (9 or 10 out of 10). About 4 out of 10 (41%) rated the care as average (7 or 8 out of 10) and fewer than 2 out of 10 (14%) rated the care as poor (0 to 6 out of 10).
- Over 9 out of 10 of those surveyed (92%) would definitely (54%) or probably (38%) recommend the nursing home where their family member is living to others who need nursing home care.

### What did they say about nursing home staffing levels?

- About 8 out of 10 respondents (84%) who tried to find a nurse/aide during any of their visits said they were always (40%) or usually (44%) able to find a nurse/aide when they wanted one.
- More than 1 out of 10 of those surveyed (13%) said there were always enough nurses/aides in the nursing home. 4 out of 10 (41%) said this was usually the case.

### How were residents' belongings cared for?

- One-third of those surveyed (33%) reported residents' personal medical belongings were damaged or lost in the last 6 months either once or two or more times.
- Nearly 6 out of 10 respondents (59%) that used the nursing home laundry service said clothes were damaged or lost once, twice or three or more times.

### What did family members say about the nursing home environment?

- Nearly 4 out of 10 respondents (38%) reported the resident always looked and smelled clean and about half (51%) reported this was usually the situation.
- About half of the respondents (49%) said the resident's room always looked and smelled clean and about 4 out of 10 (42%) said this was usually the case.
- 6 out of 10 family members (59%) reported the public areas of the nursing home always looked and smelled

clean and about 4 out of 10 (36%) said this was usually the case.

- Most of those surveyed (92%) said the noise level around the resident's room was always or usually acceptable while 94% said they were always or usually able to find places to talk privately with the resident in the last 6 months.

### Were family members given information about, and encouraged to be involved with, residents?

- Nearly half of the respondents (47%) who had sought information about the resident from a nurse/aide reported they always received it as soon as they wanted; 4 out of 10 (40%) said this was usually the case.
- 9 out of 10 respondents (92%) that asked about payments and expenses always or usually received all the information they wanted.
- Over 6 out of 10 of those surveyed (64%) said nurses/aides always explained things in a way that was easy for them to understand; about 3 out of 10 (29%) said this usually occurred.
- Almost all of the respondents (97%) reported nurses/aides did *not* try to discourage them from asking questions about the resident.
- One-third of those surveyed (33%) said they were unhappy with the care the resident received at some time in the last 6 months; of that 33%, 31% said they stopped themselves from talking to staff about their concerns.
- Of those who were unhappy with the care and reported their concern, about half (54%) were always (10%) or usually (44%) satisfied with the way staff handled these problems.
- About 7 out of 10 respondents (71%) reported being part of a care conference in the last 12 months. Of the 30% who did not participate in a care conference, only 37% were actually given an opportunity to participate.
- A majority of respondents (80%) reported being involved in decisions about the resident's care in the last 6 months. Of that 80%, 90% said they were always or usually involved as much as they wanted to be.

### Did those surveyed believe staff treated residents and family members with kindness and respect?

- Almost 7 out of 10 respondents (67%) believed nurses/aides always treated residents with courtesy and respect in the last 6 months and close to 3 out of 10 (28%) believed this was usually the case.
- Slightly more than 6 out of 10 respondents (62%) always saw nurses/aides treat the resident with kindness in the last 6 months and one-third (31%) reported this was usually the practice.
- Almost half of those surveyed (47%) always felt nurses/aides really cared about the resident while 4 out of 10 family members (40%) reported this was usually the practice.
- The majority of respondents (87%) reported they did *not* see nurses/aides be rude to any resident (including their family member).
- 5 out of 10 respondents (50%) who saw residents behave in a way that made it hard for nurses/aides in the last 6 months felt nurses/aides always handled these situations appropriately and about 4 out of 10 (39%) reported this was usually the practice.
- Nearly all of those surveyed (95%) said they did *not* see nurses/aides fail to protect any resident's privacy while the resident was dressing, bathing or in a public area.
- Nearly 7 out of 10 family members (76%) said nurses/aides always treated them with courtesy and respect in the last 6 months. 2 out of 10 (22%) said this was usually the practice.

### Did family members believe the nursing home met residents' basic needs?

- 7 out of 10 respondents (70%) reported they helped care for the resident when they visited in the past 6 months; close to 2 out of 10 (17%) felt nursing home staff expected them to help.
- Over 4 out of 10 family members helped the resident with drinking (43%) or eating (44%) at least once in the last 6 months; over 2 out of 10 (24% drinking; 21% eating) helped because staff didn't help or the family member felt the resident had waited too long.
- Approximately 2 out of 10 of those surveyed (24%) helped the resident with toileting at least once in the last 6 months;

close to 5 out of 10 (48%) helped because staff didn't help or the family member felt the resident had waited too long.

### What are the differences between upper quartile facilities and lower quartile facilities?<sup>5</sup>

- Upper quartile facilities received an overall care rating of 9.1 out of 10 from respondents compared to 7.1 for the lower quartile facilities.
- Upper quartile facility respondents felt there were always or usually enough nurses/aides. They were also more likely to find a nurse/aide when they wanted one.
- Residents' clothing was damaged or lost to a lesser extent in upper quartile facilities than in lower quartile facilities.
- Residents' rooms in upper quartile facilities are more likely to always or usually look and smell clean compared to lower quartile facilities.
- Upper quartile facility respondents reported that nurses/aides really care about their resident to a greater extent compared to lower quartile facilities.
- Lower quartile facility respondents believed nurses/aides either didn't help or made residents wait too long for toileting, drinking and eating to a greater extent than upper quartile facility respondents.
- Lower quartile facility respondents are more likely to report they were unhappy with the care the resident received in the past 6 months compared to upper quartile facility respondents.

### In summary

The survey highlights areas of excellence and several quality of care issues as areas for focus and improvement in Alberta's long term care facilities.

Within the province, there is considerable variation in performance between facilities in all dimensions of care. We suggest organizations seeking to improve should look to those long term care facilities in the upper performing quartile as a valuable resource for sharing best practices, ideas and experience.

The survey found what had the strongest relationship to residents' overall care ratings were:

- Staff respect for residents

- How well staff listen to residents
- How well staff explain things to residents

From the families' perspective, it was the following:

- Nursing home staffing levels
- Care of residents' belongings
- Nursing home environment

From these perspectives, the following actions could be considered:

### Staff

- Improving the number and availability of long term care staff.
- Improving communication and respect between staff and residents.

### Environment

- Ensuring the cleanliness of residents, residents' personal space and public areas in the nursing home.
- Ensuring the safety and security of residents and their personal belongings.
- Improving the food and the residents' enjoyment of mealtimes.
- Making the nursing home temperature more comfortable.
- Creating environments similar to those found in smaller nursing homes.

### Care

- Improving the effectiveness of medication for, and how well staff help, those residents with pain.
- Improving staff responsiveness when residents call for help.
- Ensuring staff are gentle when they help residents with personal care activities such as bathing and dressing.

While these dimensions of care are important from the perspectives of residents and their families, we recognize that all dimensions of care are important. Individual facilities will need to determine where to focus their quality improvement efforts to best meet the care and service needs of their residents and family members.

<sup>5</sup> Quartiles are determined by listing the long term care facilities by their overall care rating from highest to lowest. The list is then divided into roughly 4 equal groups called quartiles.



### What happens next?

The HQCA did this survey to get information to help Alberta Health Services, long term care operators and management, direct care providers, health professionals and Alberta Health and Wellness improve the quality of resident care and services as well as aspects of residents' quality of life. We gave a detailed report to every long term care facility that participated in the survey so they can see what they are doing well and where they can improve. Our next step is to encourage stakeholders to use the survey findings to achieve improvements in the quality of care for Alberta's long term care residents.

### Acknowledgements

The HQCA thanks those residents and their families who participated in these surveys and provided us with valuable information. We also thank our working group for their time and expertise.

### Want more details about the surveys?

For a copy of the technical reports go to [www.hqca.ca](http://www.hqca.ca).

### Tell us what you think

Please take a moment to tell us what you think. You may also do this on our web site at [www.hqca.ca](http://www.hqca.ca).

1. How did you hear about the *Long Term Care Resident and Family Experience Surveys*?

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2. Did you find the information useful? Yes  No

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3. How could we improve future publications?

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4. What other topics would you like to see the HQCA focus on?

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5. Other comments?

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Fax your comments to **403.297.8258** or mail to:

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*Thank you for completing and returning this survey.*