

More Than a Visitor: A Family Caregiver's Guide to Long-Term Care in BC



**Family Caregivers
of British Columbia**

— Let us help —



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“Caregiving doesn’t end when someone moves into long-term care. Instead, it continues in new ways.”



Introduction

Moving the person you care for into long-term care can feel overwhelming. Whether you are waiting for placement or adjusting to the first days and weeks in a care home, this transition often brings uncertainty, strong emotions, and many questions. This guide is for family and friend caregivers in British Columbia who are navigating long-term care for a loved one.

Caregiving does not end when someone moves into long-term care. Instead, it continues in new ways. Your role evolves rather than ends, and your involvement continues to support your loved one’s well-being as part of the care team. Your presence, knowledge, advocacy, and emotional connection continue to shape their quality of life. In this guide, we refer to this role as *Partner in Care*. A Partner in Care is more than a visitor and is an important part of the care team.

This flipbook offers practical information, lived experience, and BC-specific resources to help you:



- ♥ Understand how long-term care works in BC.
- ♥ Prepare for admission and early adjustment.
- ♥ Navigate communication and advocacy.
- ♥ Support your loved one while also caring for yourself.

This guide is designed to be used accompanying worksheets, which can help you prepare for care conferences, track contacts, and record important information. Throughout, we use ‘loved one’ to refer to the person you are caring for, but you can use the language that best fits your relationship.

Remember, you are not alone — and your role still matters.

What Is Long-Term Care in British Columbia?

Long-term care (LTC) is part of the healthcare system's continuum of care, providing different levels of support as health, mobility, and cognitive needs change. For many families, moving into long-term care is not a sudden decision. It often follows months or years of adapting, adding supports, and reassessing what is safe and sustainable. Understanding where long-term care fits within this continuum can help caregivers and the person they care for feel more prepared and make informed decisions. In BC, care options include:

Independent Living

Independent living is for people who can live on their own but choose to use community supports such as home support, meal programs, transportation, or social services. People may live in a private home or within a supportive housing or retirement community that offers independent living options.

Assisted Living

Assisted living supports people who can make their own decisions but need help with some daily tasks, such as meals, housekeeping, or medication assistance. It is often offered within the same communities as independent living, allowing people to remain in familiar surroundings as their needs change. Assisted living does not include 24-hour nursing care or continuous supervision.

Long-Term Care

Long-term care is for people whose needs can no longer be safely supported at home or in assisted living. This typically includes people who require:

- ♥ 24/7 supervision.
- ♥ Regular nursing care.
- ♥ Support with most daily activities.
- ♥ Ongoing health and safety monitoring.

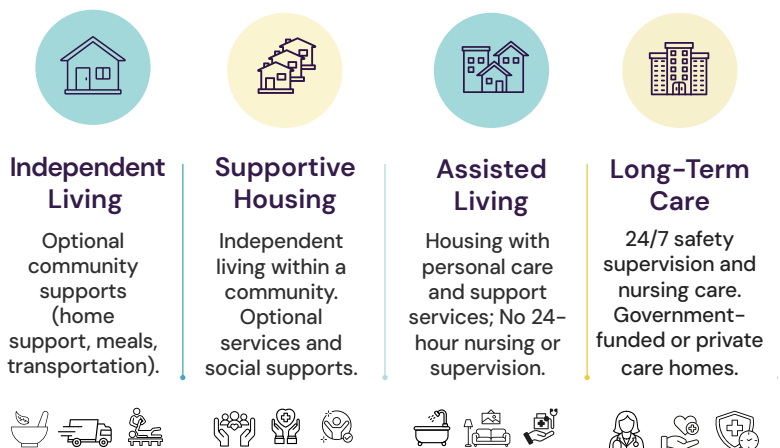
Long-term care homes provide accommodation, meals, personal and nursing care, and social activities in a shared living environment. While it is a healthcare setting, it is also your loved one's home, where they live, build relationships, and experience moments of connection. Many families find it helpful to see it as a community that supports care and quality of life.

Spectrum of Supportive Living Options:



Understanding Privacy Differences

As care needs increase, personal space becomes more shared and supervision rises. In independent and assisted living, residents usually have a private apartment or suite with a lockable door. In long-term care, rooms are often shared, and most areas are communal, so privacy is much lower.



When to Start Thinking About Long-Term Care







Signs It's Time to Plan for Long-Term Care

Many caregivers begin exploring long-term care during a stressful time or crisis. Care needs often increase gradually until the situation is no longer safe or sustainable. While crisis decisions are sometimes unavoidable, starting the conversation earlier can reduce pressure and allow time to prepare emotionally and practically.

Planning for long-term care is rarely about one single event. It often comes from recognizing when caregiving demands are growing and the risks to both the caregiver and care recipient are increasing.

Key signs it may be time to plan for long-term care include:

-  Care needs are increasing or becoming unpredictable.
-  Safety at home is a concern (such as falls, wandering, or medication errors).
-  Cognitive or behavioural changes are becoming more serious.
-  Caregiving feels physically, emotionally, or mentally overwhelming.

Navigating Long-Term Care Access in BC

In BC, assessments and placement for publicly funded long-term care are coordinated through Home and Community Care within your regional Health Authority. A care coordinator or case manager guides the assessment, explains eligibility, and outlines next steps, including waitlists, interim supports, and placement options.

While waiting for placement, caregiving often becomes more demanding, with many caregivers balancing increased responsibilities alongside work, family, and their own well-being.

Understanding how the system works and using common healthcare terms can help caregivers have clearer, more effective conversations with providers. Many homes also offer a welcome or orientation package; caregivers should ask for this, as it provides helpful information about values, daily routines, communication practices, and family involvement.

Questions to Ask When Researching Long-Term Care Facilities

When exploring long-term care options, asking thoughtful questions can help families better understand how a home communicates, supports residents' daily lives, and involves caregivers in care.



Communication

- ♥ Who will be my primary contact for updates, changes in care, or concerns?
- ♥ How will I be notified about changes, incidents, or health concerns?
- ♥ How is information about my loved one's routines and preferences shared with staff?



Care Planning

- ♥ How are family caregivers involved in care planning?
- ♥ How is information about my loved one's routines and preferences shared with staff?
- ♥ How are goals for care identified and tracked over time?



Family Involvement

- ♥ Is there a family council or other way for families to stay connected?
- ♥ How can families provide feedback or raise concerns?
- ♥ Is there a social worker?
- ♥ Is there a Spiritual Health Practitioner?



Daily Life

- ♥ What would a typical day look like for my loved one?
- ♥ How are meals, activities, and personal routines supported?
- ♥ What types of additional leisure or supports are available (recreation, hair salon, bathing tubs, occupational and physical therapy if needed)?

Who to Contact

When questions or concerns arise about long-term care placement, knowing who to contact can help reduce stress and connect you with the right support.

Home & Community Care

For long-term care assessments, eligibility, and placement processes, including support with navigating services and understanding care options.

Care Coordinator or Case Manager

Your main contact for publicly funded home and community care who assesses needs, coordinates services, eligibility for supports and long-term care.

Family Caregivers of BC Support Line

For help thinking things through, navigating next steps, or finding the right questions to ask. You can reach us at: **1-877-520-3267, Monday to Friday, 8:30 am – 4:00 pm.**



Navigating Your Changing Caregiving Role

Moving a loved one into long-term care is a significant transition emotionally, practically, and relationally. Caregivers are often surprised by the shift in their role and its ongoing importance.

In long-term care, family and friend caregivers continue to play a vital role as a Partner in Care (sometimes called Essential Care Partners). This role is about contributing what only you can bring as a caregiver; your knowledge, history with your loved one, emotional and physical connection, and a sense of continuity in partnership with the care team.



As a Partner in Care, your involvement includes:

- ♥ **Personalized Care:** Provide insight into your loved one’s life, including their history, routines, preferences, culture, and values to help staff provide personalized care.
- ♥ **Support Communication:** Help facilitate clear dialogue between your loved one, staff, and the broader care team.
- ♥ **Offer Emotional Comfort:** Provide familiarity, reassurance, and a sense of continuity during transitions.
- ♥ **Preserve Identity and Dignity:** Maintain a sense of who your loved one is beyond their care needs, supporting their individuality and quality of life.

Try Our Essential Care Partner E-Learning Course



FCBC developed an e-learning course with Fraser Health for caregivers, exploring the role of an Essential Care Partner in healthcare. Scan the QR code or [learn more here](#).



Caregiver Tip:

Being a *Partner in Care* means staying involved and supporting your loved one, but it doesn’t mean doing everything, being available at all times, or neglecting your own well-being.

Common Challenges in Long-Term Care



"I thought the hardest part was making the decision. I didn't expect how much adjusting there would still be for the both of us." – Family Caregiver



Moving into long-term care can bring reassurance about safety and support, but many caregivers say adjusting to life after the move takes time.

Adjusting to the Transition

Entering long-term care is a major change for both caregivers and the person receiving care. Caregivers often experience:

- Emotional strain, including guilt, grief, relief, worry, or sadness.
- Loss of familiar routines as caregiving tasks shift.
- Feeling unsure of their new role or boundaries.

Navigating Healthcare Systems

Long-term care homes operate within a complex healthcare system. Caregivers often need time to learn staff roles, communication pathways, and procedures. Some challenges include:

- Staffing shortages affecting consistency and communication.
- Changing policies or procedures.
- Uncertainty about who to contact or what staff roles are involved.

Communication

Clear communication is a common concern for caregivers after placement. Families often want updates about changes in health or behaviour, falls, acute medical issues, and medications. It can help to ask the lead clinician how incidents will be communicated to family caregivers, including:

- Who will notify me, how quickly and how?
- What information or documentation is available for me to read?
- How can you provide regular input?

Family Councils

Connecting with other families can help caregivers feel informed, supported, and less alone. For examples, family councils can:

- Provide a way for families to share concerns and information.
- Support collaboration with care homes.
- Help families understand their roles and rights.

If a council doesn't exist, families can ask how to join or start one. In BC, the Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC offers guidance.

Learn More About Family Councils



Learn more about resident and family councils in long-term care by scanning the QR code or clicking the button below:

[Learn More](#)

“Advocacy doesn’t have to be confrontational. When I started approaching it as a partnership, conversations felt more productive.”

– Family Caregiver



Being a Partner in Care

Collaborating with the Care Team

Advocacy in Long-Term Care

Advocacy in long-term care is about building relationships, communicating openly, and sharing responsibility. For many caregivers, advocacy begins with recognizing that they remain an important part of the care team.

As a family caregiver, you continue to play a meaningful role as a **Partner in Care**, working alongside staff to support your loved one’s well-being, dignity, and quality of life. This role is not about doing everything or constantly watching for problems. It is about sharing insight, asking questions, and staying connected in ways that feel respectful and sustainable.

In practice, advocacy that is collaborative and based on open communication often builds trust and makes it easier to raise concerns when needed.

Effective advocacy is often:

- ♥ Collaborative rather than confrontational.
- ♥ Rooted in communication rather than assumptions.
- ♥ Focused on shared goals such as safety, comfort, and quality of life.

Starting from a place of partnership can lead to stronger relationships and clearer conversations over time.

Caregiver Tip:



Advocacy doesn’t require expertise or perfect wording. Asking thoughtful questions, sharing what you notice, and staying engaged (at a pace and level that works for you) are often the best ways to support your loved one in care.

Role and Rights



Policies may vary between care homes, but caregivers in British Columbia have the right to be involved in their loved one's care. This includes the right to:

- ♥ Participate in care planning and conferences.
- ♥ Receive updates on incidents or significant changes in health or care.
- ♥ Ask questions and share routines, preferences, and values.
- ♥ Be treated with respect as part of the care team, with your contributions acknowledged and valued.

Understanding these rights can help caregivers advocate with greater confidence, especially during times of change or uncertainty.



Building Staff Relationships

Positive relationships with staff can improve day-to-day care and communication for both you and your loved one. Caregivers often find it helpful to:

- ♥ Learn the names and roles of staff involved in your loved one's care.
- ♥ Thank staff when things are going well.
- ♥ Begin conversations with curiosity, not concern, and keep brief notes to organize your questions.

Small and consistent efforts can help build trust and support open dialogue, even when challenges arise.



Annual Care Conferences

Most long-term care homes hold annual care conferences, and sometimes more often. These meetings provide an opportunity to review care and plan together. Topics may include:

- ♥ Health, comfort, and care goals.
- ♥ Nutrition, mobility, and daily routines.
- ♥ Recreation, social engagement, and quality of life.



Quick FYI: Care Conferences

Annual care conferences are brief meetings to share updates and review key documents like the MOST form. They don't cover everything, so caregivers may find it helpful to confirm the time, focus on key questions, and stay in touch with the care team.

Safety, Autonomy & Planning

Balancing safety and autonomy is an ongoing conversation in long-term care. Caregivers can help ensure care decisions reflect their loved one's values and wishes. You may wish to ask about:

- ♥ Policies related to restraints and other safety measures.
- ♥ Medical Orders for Scope of Treatment (MOST).
- ♥ Advance care planning directives.

These conversations can feel difficult, but support clarity, dignity, and shared understanding over time.



Helpful Hint: MOST Form



The MOST form is reviewed at the end of the annual care conference. Ask for a copy in advance so you understand the different levels. Choose the one that best fits your loved one's needs. You don't have to use every option, but it helps to identify them.

[Download here or scan the QR code.](#)



Referenced Resources and Other Sources

Family Caregivers of British Columbia (FCBC)

- ♥ [FCBC Podcasts](#) (includes episodes on long-term care transitions and caregiver roles).
- ♥ [FCBC Webinars](#) (includes long-term care navigation, advocacy, and Partner in Care)

Government of British Columbia

- ♥ [Home and Community Care](#)
- ♥ [Long-Term Care Services](#)
- ♥ [Planning for Your Care Needs: Help in Selecting a Residential Care Facility](#)

BC Health Authorities

- ♥ Island Health | [Long-Term Care Services](#)
- ♥ Vancouver Coastal Health | [Long-Term Care Homes](#)
- ♥ Fraser Health | [Long-Term Care](#)
- ♥ Interior Health | [Deciding to Move into Long-Term Care](#) and [MOST Form](#)
- ♥ Northern Health | [Long-Term Care Homes](#)

BC Oversight and Advocacy Bodies

- ♥ BC Ombudsperson | [Learn more](#)
- ♥ Office of the Seniors Advocate, British Columbia | [Learn more](#)

Caregiver and Elder Law Resources

- ♥ Canadian Centre for Elder Law (CCEL) | Resources on decision-making, consent, and family involvement in care | [Learn more](#)
- ♥ Nidus | Personal Planning Resources in BC | [Learn more](#)

Family Councils

- ♥ LTC Family Councils of BC | Support for joining or establishing Family Councils in long-term care homes | [Learn more](#)

Acknowledgement:

We would like to thank Robyn McCorquodale, Janice DesJardins, and Lisa Dawson of the Vancouver Coastal Association of Family Councils (VCAFC) and the Independent Long-Term Care Councils Association of BC (ILTCCABC) for sharing their time, knowledge, and lived experience to help inform this resource. Their thoughtful feedback helped strengthen the content and ensure it reflects the realities of caregiving in long-term care.

Your Long-Term Care Transition Support Plan



A move into long-term care doesn't just change where and how care happens, it also changes how caregiving looks and feels. Many caregivers tell us they're so focused on their loved one's needs that they don't have time to pause and think about what they need during this transition.

A LTC Transition Support Plan is one way to reflect, prepare, and create some stability and support during a time of change. It's not about doing more; it's about pausing, reflecting, and getting clear about your role, your boundaries, and the supports that will help you continue to care.

You can return to this plan over time. As circumstances change, your answers and needs may change too.

Part 1: My LTC Transition Support Plan

A worksheet for Caregivers Navigating Long-Term Care



This LTC Transition Support Plan is designed to help you pause, reflect, and prepare. It can support conversations with the care team, help you clarify expectations, and remind you to consider your own well-being as you continue to care. You can complete this worksheet on your own, revisit it over time, or use parts of it to prepare for meetings or care conferences.

Preparing While Waiting for Long-Term Care

This section focuses on what you would need during the waiting period for long term care placement.

My Role as a Partner in Care

Parts of caregiving I am currently providing that feel most important:

Parts of caregiving that feel hardest or most unsustainable:

Boundaries or supports I need while waiting:

Key Contacts

Home & Community Care Case Manager:

Other key supports (e.g., family, friends, professionals):

If I feel overwhelmed or unsure, my next step will be:

My Own Supports While Waiting

People or supports that help me cope right now:

Breaks, rest, or respite I need during this phase:

One small step I can take to protect my wellbeing:

Part 2: After Moving into Long-Term Care

A worksheet for Caregivers Navigating Long-Term Care



My Role as a Partner in Care

Parts of caregiving I would like to continue:

Parts of caregiving I may be ready to step back from or share:

How I want to stay involved in a way that feels sustainable:

Contacts and Communication

Primary nurse or clinical lead: _____

Care home leadership (e.g., General Manager): _____

Recreation or social engagement lead: _____

Financial or billing contact: _____

How I would like to receive updates: (phone, email, scheduled check-ins): _____

Incident Response Planning: _____

If something unexpected happens, I would like clarity on: _____

How I expect to be notified: _____

What information I want documented or shared: _____

Who I should contact with follow-up questions: _____

My Ongoing Supports

People or supports that help me cope now: _____

Breaks, rest, or boundaries I need to stay well: _____

One thing that would help this feel more sustainable: _____

This plan is for you. It doesn't need to be complete or perfect. Even naming one or two priorities can help you as a caregiver during change.

About This Worksheet

This Transition Support Plan is informed by Family Caregivers of BC education resources, caregiver support conversations, and publicly available guidance on long-term care in British Columbia and Canada. It reflects common practices related to care planning, communication, family involvement, and caregiver wellbeing in long-term care settings in BC as of 2025-26.



Reaching out to us for support

For caregiving-related questions and support, call our B.C. Caregiver Support Line at **1-877-520-3267**. We are available **Mon-Fri, 8:30 am- 4 pm**.

To receive news and information by email, [sign up](#) for our Caregiver Connect newsletter and monthly enews. Visit our online [Caregiver Learning Centre](#) for resources and tools to support you on your journey.

[Join a family caregiver support group](#). We are continually expanding our list of community caregiver support groups around BC. Call our toll-free Caregiver Support Line, to find one near you and get together with people who “get it”. Learn from other family caregivers and share your advice to help others.

Doing everything on your own can make you feel like you’re alone. It helps to have someone to talk to.

Visit our online Caregiver Learning Centre:

www.familycaregiversbc.ca



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