ASK NAAP?

Question: How do I handle resident voting practices and procedures?

Answer:

The federal regulations for long-term care communities, require communities to ensure residents have a right to a dignified existence, self-determination, and communication with and access to persons and services inside and outside the facility which includes voting. Tag F550 reads:

§483.10(b) Exercise of Rights.
The resident has the right to exercise his or her rights as a resident of the facility and as a citizen or resident of the United States.

§483.10(b)(1) The facility must ensure that the resident can exercise his or her rights without interference, coercion, discrimination, or reprisal from the facility.

§483.10(b)(2) The resident has the right to be free of interference, coercion, discrimination, and reprisal from the facility in exercising his or her rights and to be supported by the facility in the exercise of his or her rights as required under this subpart.

Long-term care communities must plan and prepare to allow residents to vote in person or by mail via absentee ballot. Generally, the planning and preparation falls onto the Activity Department staff.

The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care (https://theconsumervoice.org) has provided guidelines and support to assist communities with voter rights. They suggest the following for long-term care communities:

- Coordinating with their states to take advantage of existing programs to help residents to vote. This includes, mobile polling, and assistance in registering to vote, requesting an absentee ballot, or completing a ballot from an agent of the Resident's choosing, including family representative, LTC Ombudsman or nursing home staff.
- Transporting individuals to polling places.
- Providing access to stationery, postage, writing implements, and the ability to send mail.
- Helping residents promptly send and receive mail.

As Activity Professionals we should ask whether the resident is registered to vote and if so, would they want to vote while living in the facility. If the answer is yes, then we must coordinate for this to happen. We do not have the right to determine who is or is not eligible to vote. We also do not have the right to make suggestions on candidates. We must remain impartial.

Here are a few suggestions on what we can do:

- Ensure residents are registered to vote in the manner they desire whether it is via absentee-ballot or in-person.
- Provide transportation for early voting or polling places.
- Allow the resident to designate a person (if needed) to help them fill out their ballot or read information to them.
- Invite candidates from all parties to come into your community and speak to our residents on their campaign issues.
- Become a polling place! Talk to your local field registrars on how to become a polling place.
- When questions are on the ballot, take the time to review them with residents and let them decide.

Do you do something special around election time? Let us know at alisa@naap.info.