

## **Ombudsman program advocates for rights**

For adults in long-term care facilities and their family members, an ombudsman can play a key role in ensuring quality care.

Established under the federal Older Americans Act (OAA), ombudsmen are tasked with investigating and resolving complaints made by residents of personal care homes, assisted living facilities, nursing facilities, and Dom Care homes, as well as those who receive in-home services or attend an adult day center or LIFE program. Inquiries to the ombudsman program may be made by individuals receiving services, family and friends, or government agencies. All ombudsman services are confidential and free.

“We encounter a variety of issues in our office, ranging from inadequate personal hygiene to outright violations of an individual’s rights,” said Toni Allen, supervisor of the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) ombudsman program. “Everything we do is consumer-directed. When we receive a complaint, we work with each consumer to find out how they want to proceed. It is never a one-size-fits-all situation.”

In addition to resolving complaints, the ombudsman office seeks to empower residents and their families to improve quality of care. Through educational outreach, the ombudsman program offers information about resident rights, long-term care facility options, and ombudsman services to residents, facility staff, families, and the public at large.

Currently, the Allegheny County ombudsman program consists of nine staff, including a supervisor, six full-time ombudsmen and two support staff. The program also has 27 trained and certified volunteer ombudsmen. In fiscal year 2016-2017, more than 3,000 of Allegheny County residents were served by the program.

To learn more about ombudsman services, visit <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Programs-Services/Older-Adults/Ombudsman.aspx>. To speak with the “ombudsman of the day” about a concern, please call 412.350.5791.