

How to Share the NASEM Report, *The National Imperative to Improve Nursing Home Quality*, with Public Audiences

Evidence-based framing guidance for care providers, administrators, researchers, policy advocates, and others working to build support for change

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) recently released much-anticipated recommendations in *The National Imperative to Improve Nursing Home Quality: Honoring Our Commitment to Residents, Families, and Staff*. This report underscores the need for transformational changes in how we finance, deliver, and regulate care in nursing homes. Its findings are relevant to everyone in our society and should be widely shared.

The following communications recommendations were developed through research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute and supported by The John A. Hartford Foundation. That work examined how Americans think about nursing home care, including where public understanding differs from the understanding of experts working in the field. Download the full strategic framing brief on *Communicating About Nursing Home Care*.

1. Start with a solution.

There is already widespread understanding that the nursing home care system is in crisis. Where the public conversation gets stuck is on what to do about it. Building communications around concrete solutions, rather than just problems, is critical to moving the conversation forward. Fortunately, the NASEM report lays out several specific policy recommendations. Center these actions in your communications.

- First, name a needed solution. Then, follow up with an explanation of the problem(s) it will help solve.
- Adopt a “we can do this” tone rather than a crisis tone.
- Avoid language that reinforces the already dominant idea that people only end up in nursing homes as a last resort.
- Remind audiences that the recommendations in the report have been thoroughly vetted and are realizable.

2. Focus on relationships.

Too many media stories pit the needs of residents against those of care providers, family members, or others, which prompts the public to want to “take a side.” Demonstrate that all people within the nursing home care system are interconnected and that it only works when everyone can thrive.

- Highlight interconnectedness rather than focusing on any single group (even residents).
- Explain that person-centered care involves many different kinds of people working in coordination.
- Feature residents as participants, not objects of care.
- Avoid invoking “vulnerability.”

3. Emphasize collective responsibility.

People tend to think of care giving as a private family concern, which limits our shared imagination about needed policy changes and system-level improvements. Appeal to the kind of society we want to build and live in together, not just the kind of care we want for our own loved ones.

- Address audiences as engaged citizens (not just consumers).
- Appeal to the values and aspirations we share as a community.
- Define health equity.
- Explain *systemic* racism, sexism, ageism, xenophobia, etc.

4. Paint a picture of quality care.

For the public to rally around the mission to transform the nursing home care system, they need to have a clear image in their minds of what we’re working toward. Connect proposed solutions and policy changes to the real-world experiences they will enhance and the many lives they will improve.

- Describe how quality care looks/feels/smells/sounds in its multiple forms.
- Offer concrete examples of what IS working.
- Connect these vivid details to a broadly shared vision for transformational change.
- Reference the NASEM report and comprehensive plan.

Remember, you are not your audience. Most people don’t know what you know. Take care to avoid jargon, spell out acronyms, provide clear definitions, and always explain critical processes. Use your communications purposefully and strategically—not to repeat well-known facts but to put new information on the public’s radar and advance a more productive narrative.

Sample Strategically Framed Communication

The following sample text was created to model evidence-based communications recommendations developed by the FrameWorks Institute with support from The John A. Hartford Foundation. (Note: It is not intended for use as a “ready-made script.”)

<p>Ensuring a registered nurse (RN) is on-site at every nursing home, 24-hours a day, is important to delivering high-quality care for all who live there.</p>	<p>Orange—Recommendation #1: Start with a solution, and then back it up with a “we can do this” tone throughout. (Avoid words like “crisis,” “end up,” “broken,” and “inefficient.”)</p>
<p>While hands-on care to nursing home residents is primarily given by certified nursing assistants (CNAs), these dedicated professionals work under the supervision of RNs. With advanced training, an RN is an important part of the care team, skilled and practiced in assessing patients, documenting medical needs, and making care plans actionable.</p>	<p>Purple—Recommendation #2: Focus on relationships rather than centering any single group. Highlight the interconnectedness and coordination required to realize the vision of person-centered care. (Avoid invoking “vulnerability,” which triggers us/them thinking and feeds ageist stereotypes about older people.)</p>
<p>Today, nursing homes are required to have an RN on-site only eight hours a day, but we all know that complex care needs don’t emerge on a schedule. Having an RN present at all times creates peace of mind for residents, their families, CNAs, and the entire nursing home staff. It means families can sleep well, knowing an RN is there to administer medication when a loved one’s physical pain is unbearable, or identify the trigger of a sudden spike in dementia-related anxiety and respond accordingly. Around-the-clock RN coverage also supports nursing assistants by enabling them to focus on what they’re skilled at doing: attending to the lifestyle preferences, routine needs, and overall comfort of residents—day and night.</p>	<p>Blue—Recommendation #3: Emphasize collective responsibility by engaging audiences as citizens, not merely consumers (or potential consumers) of nursing home care. Appeal to the kind of society we want to live in, not just the kind of care we want for our own loved ones.</p>
<p>Requiring that nursing homes ensure an RN is on-site every hour of every day is a step in the right direction. It’s part of a new comprehensive plan to improve the care we deliver and receive in nursing homes. Let’s talk to our neighbors and friends and make sure our community leaders, policymakers, and elected officials know that this is the standard of care we all expect and need.</p>	<p>Yellow—Recommendation #4: Paint a picture of quality care so that people can see and feel what’s possible. Connect vivid details that illustrate what’s working well now to the broader vision for where we need to go.</p>