

Writing an Effective Letter

If you have reached the point of writing an official letter to try and solve a problem, you are probably very frustrated and angry. Your anger may be entirely justified, but it won't help you solve the problem. If you need to, write a blistering letter describing just how you feel. Then tear it up. Take a deep breath and get ready to write a calm and constructive letter.

A good advocacy letter is no longer than two pages. It has the following parts:

1. Explain who you are and why you are writing the letter.
2. Briefly explain the background of the situation, why it is a problem, and what effect it is having on you and your family member.
3. Suggest a practical next step towards solving the problem.
4. Set a reasonable time frame for action or response.
5. Copy the letter to appropriate people or agencies who can assist.

There is a sample letter on the next page.

TIPS

- Have somebody read your letter over before you send it. They'll catch errors you didn't see.
- You can send your letter by e-mail, but it's also a good idea to mail a paper copy. Paper is not as easily lost or mislaid as e-mail.
- Check all names, addresses and phone numbers before you send the letter (including your own!). If your letter goes astray, it can't help you.
- Don't forget to keep a copy of your letter and any reply you get. (See *Advocacy Fact Sheet 2: Getting Organized.*)
- Follow up. It's a good idea to phone and check that your letter was received. Make sure that next steps to solving the problem are underway.

Rev: 2012 June

This is one of 10 **Advocacy Fact Sheets** prepared by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. These fact sheets offer tips on advocating for a family member with dementia. We suggest you read through the series, and then use the resources provided to find more specific information.

SAMPLE LETTER

June 4, 2012

Name

Address

City, B.C. Postal Code

Dear Ms. Care Facility Administrator:

On June 3, 2012, you told me that I may no longer come to the Sunny Haven Care Facility to visit my husband, Mr. Fred Citizen, who has been a resident there for the past two years.

I know that the nursing staff has expressed concerns in the past because my husband sometimes becomes agitated during my visits. This is very common for a person with dementia. Fred is lonely and confused, and he becomes upset when he sees me leaving without him.

I have been a frequent visitor to Sunny Haven over the last two years, usually coming every day and helping my husband eat lunch and dinner. I have often mentioned matters of concern to the nursing staff, such as the condition of his toenails, his missing dentures, and the need to remind him frequently to drink water so he does not become dehydrated. I realize that the staff thinks I am a nuisance, but I am not trying to be difficult; I am simply concerned that my husband receive the best possible care. My husband has dementia, so I must speak up for him because he can no longer speak for himself.

Fred and I have been married for almost 50 years and your decision to separate us is a terrible hardship for both of us. I insist that you reconsider.

I would like to have a meeting with you within the next two weeks to resolve this issue. I would like to bring my daughter, the Home and Community Care case manager, Fred's physician (Dr. Wong) and a friend who is assisting me, so that we can agree on an overall care plan for Fred that will include my visits.

I appreciate anything you can do to help us find a mutually acceptable solution.

Sincerely,

Mrs. E. Citizen

1234 Queen Street, New Westminster, B.C. V1X 1X1

Phone: (604) 555-5555 E-mail: ecitizen@email.com

cc: Sunny Haven Board of Directors
Sue Advocate, Alzheimer Society
Dr. Wong
Ms. Cathy Case Manager, local Health Authority

Alzheimer Society
BRITISH COLUMBIA