

THE **CHANGE**  
FOUNDATION  
ENGAGE, EXPLORE, EVOLVE

# ENHANCING CARE, ENHANCING LIFE

**Resident Views** of Residents' Councils  
and Family Councils in Ontario  
Long-Term Care Homes

October 2016



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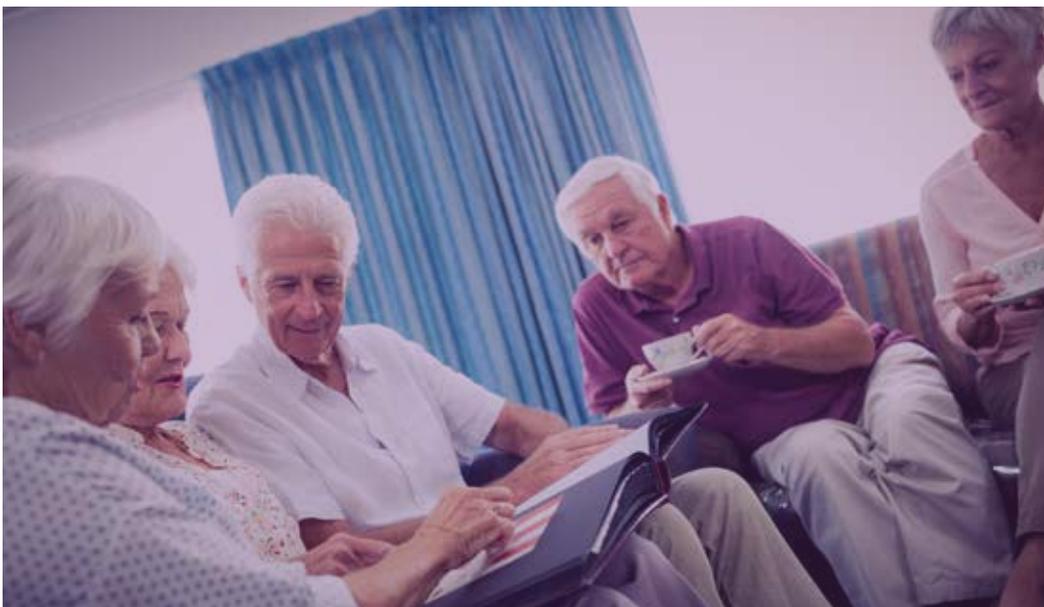
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# Project Overview

The Change Foundation has partnered with four organizations for a two-phase project—surveys and case studies—on Residents’ Councils and Family Councils in Ontario long-term care homes. The purpose of the project is to better understand the role, functioning, impact and leading practices of these councils, which are mandated for all homes in the province. This report presents detailed findings from our 2015 survey of residents of long-term care homes, about the Residents’ Councils. For an overview of the phase one findings and more information about the survey methods, please see our report, *Enhancing Care, Enhancing Life*.

Two groups of residents were surveyed across Ontario long-term care homes: residents who participate on the Residents’ Council in their home and residents who chose not to participate on the council. In total, 1,812 residents consented to completing this survey. Of these respondents, 1,268 (70%) said that they participate on the Residents’ Council and 544 (30%) do not.



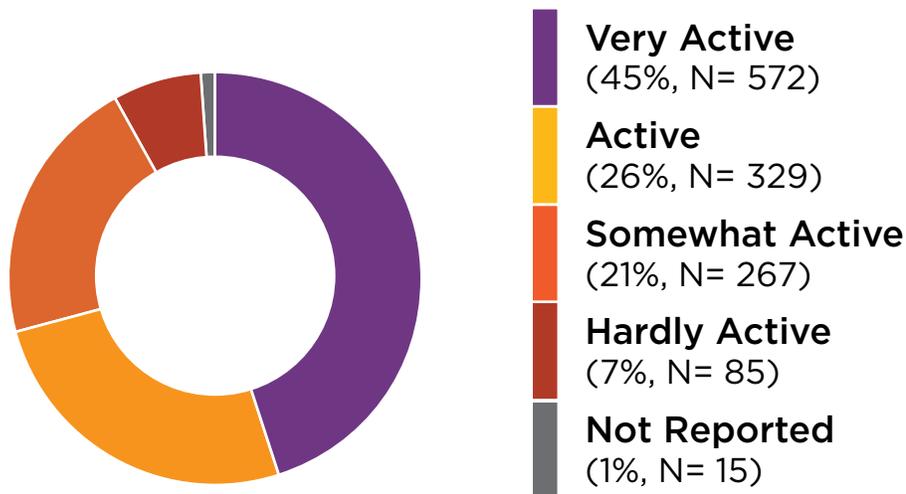
# Participating Residents

This section is a summary of responses from the 1,268 long-term care residents who reported participating on the Residents' Council in their long-term care home.

## ROLE / FUNCTION

The level of activeness of residents on council was determined by their participation in the council meetings. These meetings are generally an hour long and take place once a month. Of the respondents who participate on Residents' Councils, the majority (71%) described themselves as active or very active in these council meetings (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Residents' Activeness on Council**



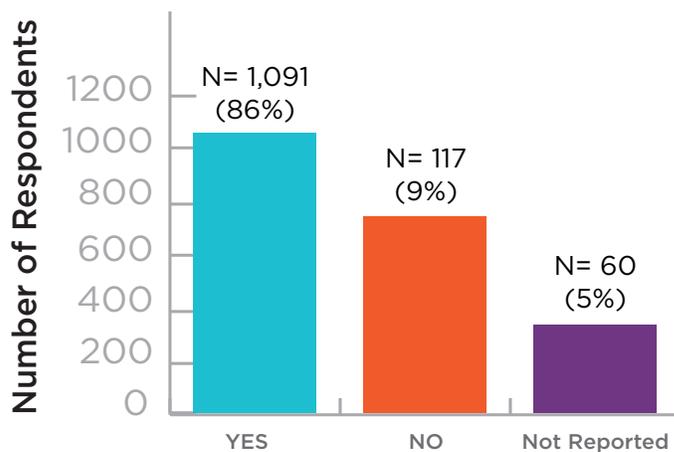
Nearly all residents (98%, N= 1,243) responded to the question about the main roles of the Residents' Council. By far the majority believed that information sharing, enhancing the quality of life for residents, and enhancing the quality of care for residents are the main roles of the council.

- 79% (N= 981) Information sharing
- 73% (N= 906) Enhancing quality of life for residents
- 67% (N= 837) Enhancing quality of care for residents
- 59% (N= 730) Program planning (i.e., planning recreational activities and events)
- 51% (N= 641) Peer support
- 48% (N= 593) Education
- 43% (N= 530) Advocacy
- 2% (N= 25) Not reported

Some residents added that the Residents' Council also provides a voice for residents, helps raise funds, creates social cohesion, and helps solve problems on various issues and topics.

A majority, 86% (N= 1,091), said that Residents' Council is fulfilling its role and function (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Residents' Belief That Council Is Fulfilling its Role and Function**



Residents who believed that the council is fulfilling its role and function reported the following reasons for this belief: there is good loop back to the council on all issues that are brought up; the president of the council is responsive to their needs and to the ideas they bring up; they get more information on certain topics of interest; they see their concerns being addressed; and they see action taken on their ideas and suggestions.

“Because we have seen things accomplished from having a meeting that wouldn’t have been otherwise.” – RESIDENT

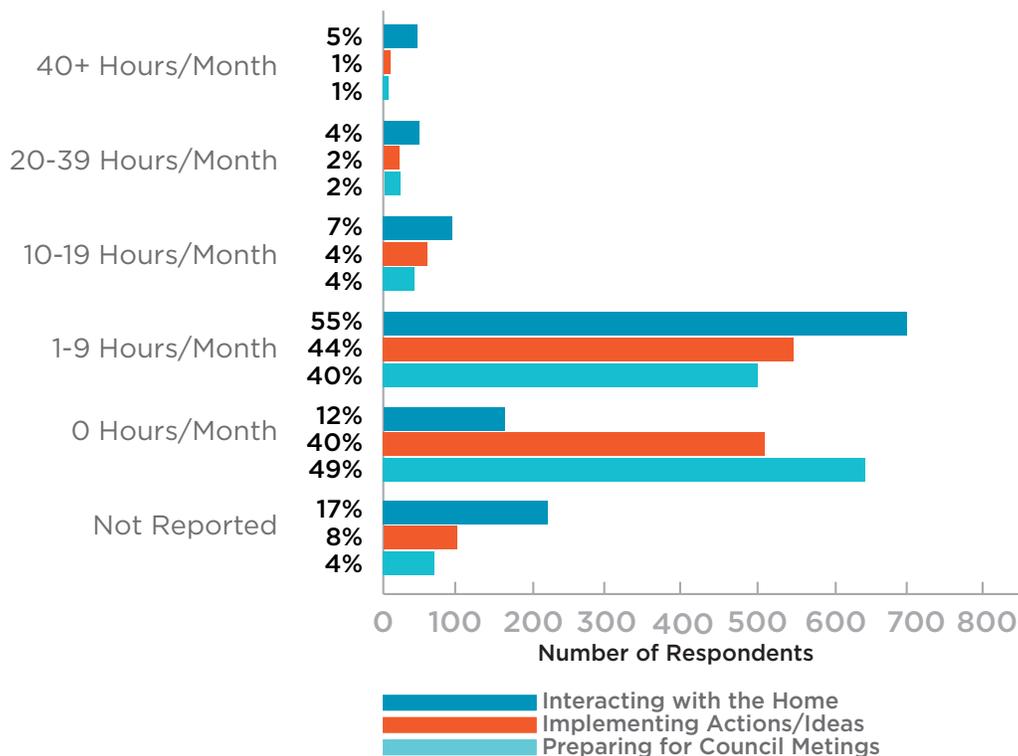
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## INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

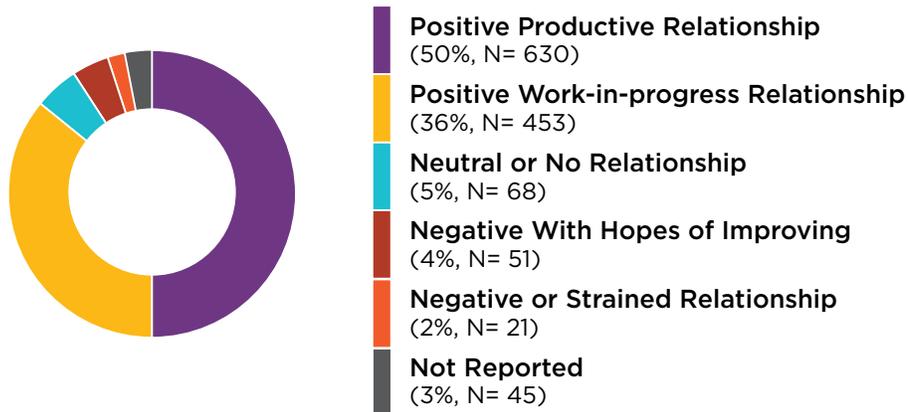
The time commitment required to participate on Residents' Council varies. Residents said they spend a range of hours preparing for the council meetings, implementing the ideas from the council, and interacting with the staff and administration regarding council activities. Residents reported spending the most time interacting with the home to implement ideas and prepare for meetings. One to nine hours per month is the amount of time most commonly spent on these activities (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Time Spent on Council Functions**



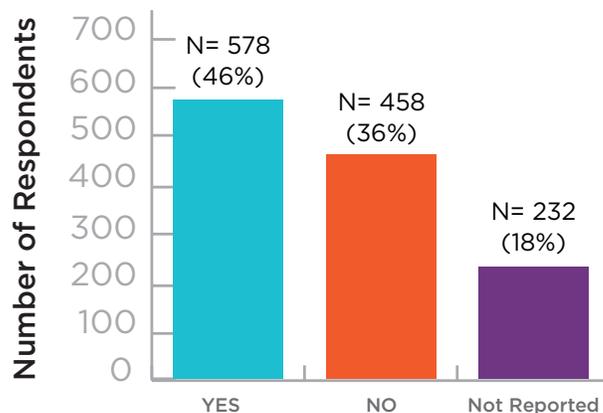
The majority of residents (86%) thought that the relationship between the Residents' Council and the home is positive. However, a few residents (6%) perceived the relationship to be a negative one (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Perceptions of Residents' Council Relationship with the Home**



Almost half of residents, 46% (N= 578), said their Residents' Council has a relationship with the home's Family Council (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Residents' Council Relationship with Family Council**



Of those who have a relationship with the Family Council, the majority (90%, N= 522) thought the relationship is a positive one—either “positive and productive” (48%, N= 278) or “positive but a work in progress” (42%, N= 244). Eight per cent (N= 48) said it is a negative relationship (2% did not report on the relationship).

## COMMUNICATION PRACTICES AND ENGAGEMENT

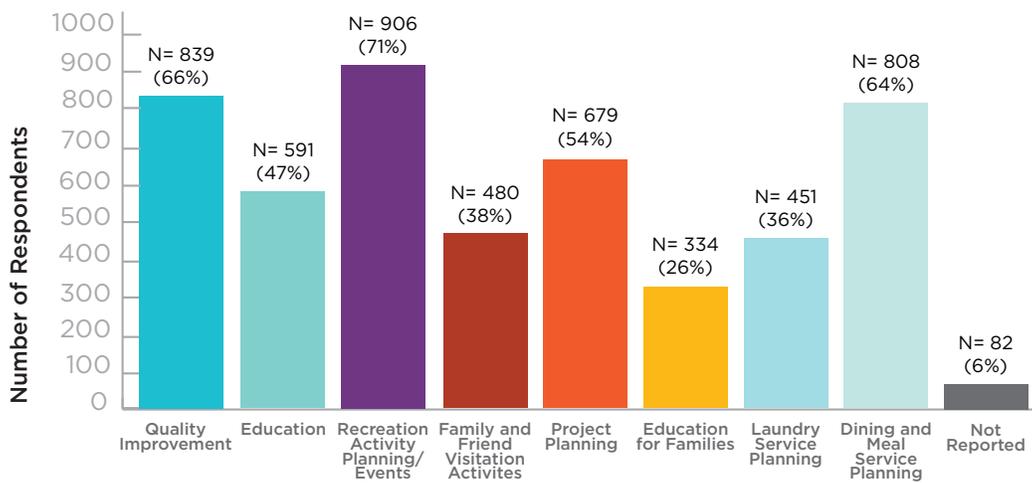
Residents reported using various methods to communicate about the council's activities. Some methods are used more than others, but the majority of residents communicate about the council in person.

- 91% (N= 1,160) In person
- 17% (N= 221) Bulletin board / flyer
- 10% (N= 131) Newsletter
- 10% (N= 128) Telephone
- 9% (N= 116) Written letter
- 6% (N= 82) Email

Other methods of communication included action planning forms, inviting management to the council meetings, and using meeting minutes.

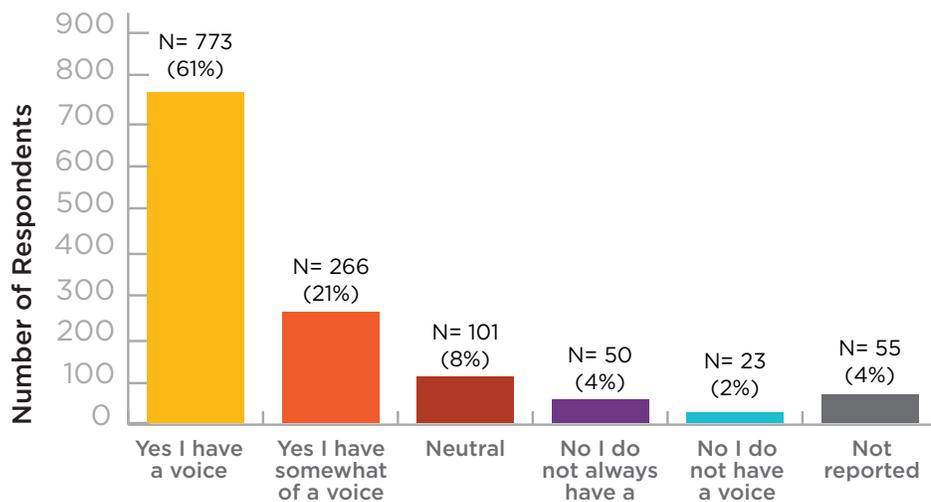
Residents reported that the top three areas of life at the home that Residents' Councils are involved in are recreational activity planning and events, quality improvement, and dining and meal service planning (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Residents' Council Involvement in Life at the Home**



The majority of Residents' Council members (82%) felt they have a voice through their participation on the council (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Residents' Perceptions of Their Voice Through the Residents' Council**



Residents who felt that council gives them a voice elaborated by saying that the council provides an avenue for them to make staff and administration aware of their needs, to express their opinions and ideas and for the home to act upon them.

Some residents felt they have a voice because they “pushed” it through at the council. Others said that the collective of residents does a good job of representing everyone. Some residents did express levels of discomfort with speaking up or leading the council. A few said they find it hard to relate or talk to the other residents, and a few commented that they do not need the council because they would go directly to staff or management themselves.

“As a group, things can be brought to management’s attention and it is not just an individual’s opinion.”

— PARTICIPATING RESIDENT

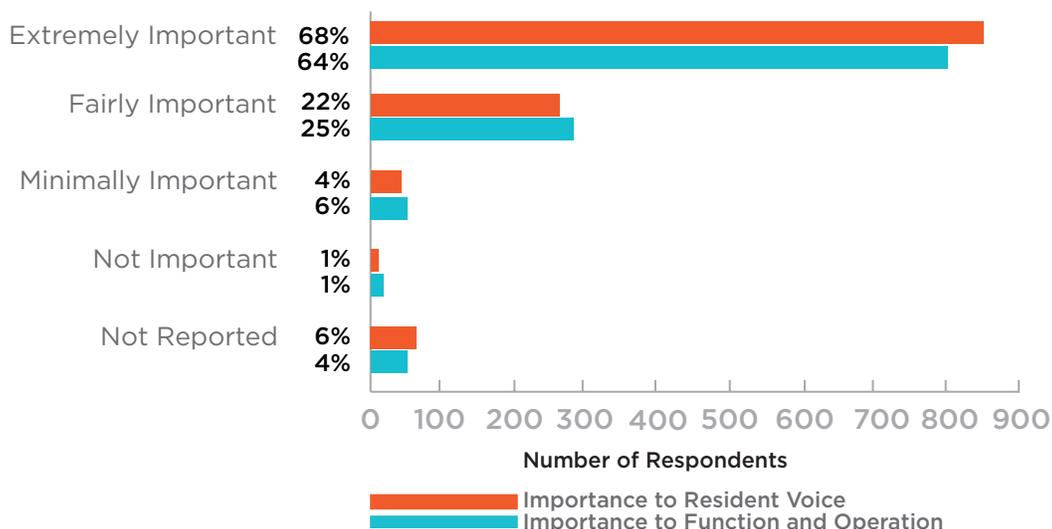
“I check to see if their suggestions are followed up and progress made on the suggestion so I can report the information back to Council.”

—PARTICIPATING RESIDENT

## RESIDENTS' COUNCIL IMPACT

Among participating residents, 90% believed the council to be important to providing a voice to all residents, and 89% said the council is important to the function and operation of the home (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Importance of Residents' Council



The residents provided a number of reasons as to why their Residents' Council is important to the function and operation of the home. For example, the council is a way to advocate for changes to the care and lifestyle at the home, and it helps implement changes to meet the needs of the residents.

Residents who thought the council is important in providing a voice for all residents said this is because the group speaks on behalf of those who are too timid or afraid to bring up an issue directly.

“Everyone in the home has a chance to get little unnoticeable things off their chest and to get a solution.”

—PARTICIPATING RESIDENT

“I’m a quiet person but at the Residents’ Council my voice can be heard through the group.”

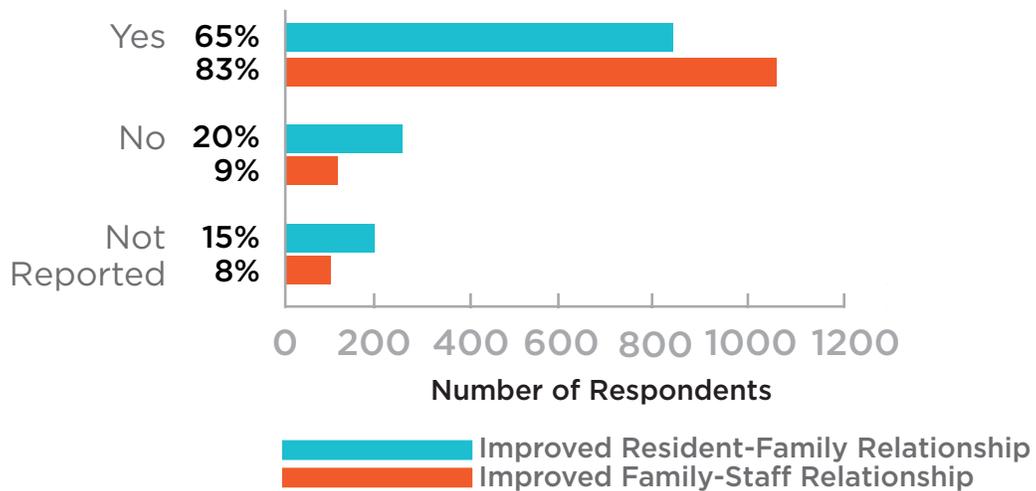
— PARTICIPATING RESIDENT

Residents described changes made as a result of the Residents' Council that benefited residents, family members and staff, and they saw these changes as proof of the impact that the council has had in their home. Overwhelmingly, residents mentioned meal planning and programming changes, among many other specific impacts:

- Programs
  - More programming with music
  - More evening entertainment
  - Pub nights
  - Summer barbecues
  
- Operations
  - Changes to the meal plan
  - Acquisition of a bus for outings
  - Changes to toilet paper
  - Addition of an information board highlighting daily activities
  
- Infrastructure / renovations
  - Changes to the decor of the home
  - Small garbage cans outside for ease of use
  - Purchase of new kitchen appliances
  - Landscaping (fixing courtyard and planting flowers)
  - Upgrade of the home's air conditioning
  - Repair/upgrade of bathrooms
  - More automatic doors
  - Improvements to the shower areas
  
- Relationships
  - Better relationship with management

The majority of residents thought that the council improved the relationship between residents and staff (83%). Fewer felt that the council improved the residents' relationship with family (65%) (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Perceptions of Residents' Council's Impact on Relationships**



# Non-Participating Residents

Of the 1,812 residents who consented to taking the survey, 544 residents (30%) chose not to participate on the Residents' Council of their long-term care home. This section is a summary of their responses.

Residents who do not participate on council were asked why they did not take part: 33% said they had no interest, 18% never considered the opportunity, and 8% had no time. Some residents (38%) gave other reasons for not participating: poor or declining health, a physical ability that didn't allow them to attend, conflicting time with care provision (e.g., hygiene, physiotherapy, checkups), not being aware that the council existed, not being comfortable going to the council, not being convinced that the council would accomplish anything, and being too busy with other events (e.g., weddings, travel, family).

This group of respondents identified three key roles for the council: information sharing (58%), enhancing the quality of life for residents (55%), and enhancing the quality of care for residents (53%). This matched the responses by those residents who do participate on council.

- 58% (N= 317) Information sharing
- 55% (N= 299) Enhancing the quality of life for residents
- 53% (N= 287) Enhancing the quality of care for residents
- 41% (N= 221) Program planning (i.e., planning recreational activities and events)
- 34% (N= 187) Education
- 34% (N= 184) Peer support
- 28% (N= 151) Advocacy

More than half of the non-participating residents, 61% (N= 331), felt that the council was fulfilling its role, while 22% (N=121) disagreed and 17% (N= 92) did not respond.

The non-participating residents did see changes around the home that they attributed to the council. These residents believed the council is fulfilling its role

because they notice improvements in residents' lives and in the care they receive.

However, some of the reasons residents did not believe the council is fulfilling its role included feeling that an issue is not being addressed, that no one is really listening to them, or that they are not being regularly updated by the council.

A majority of non-participating residents, 58% (N= 314), said they do not receive updates from the council, while 40% (N= 219) said they do receive updates (2%, N= 11 did not respond to the question). Of those who do not receive updates, 68% (N= 214) said yes, they would be interested in knowing what the council is working on and what improvements it is making, but 32% (N= 100) said no, they had no interest in receiving updates from the Residents' Council.

Over half of the residents who do not participate on council, 54% (N= 293), thought the council represents the views of all residents, and 31% (N=169) did not think their council represents the views of all residents (15%, N= 82, did not respond).

Those who did not feel the Residents' Council in their home represents the views of all residents were concerned that certain physically and/or cognitively impaired residents are unable to participate. This raises an important issue for Residents' Councils around effectively including residents who are physically or cognitively impaired.

“More care and kindness is implemented in the home due to these meetings.”

— NON-PARTICIPATING RESIDENT

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“Personally I did not feel it has much of an impact on the overall workings of the home. There are too many individual views, it would be impossible to represent all, so it's a matter of choosing.”

— NON-PARTICIPATING RESIDENT

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