



ADVANCING NURSING HOME RESEARCH: The Critical Role of Partner Workgroups

NEXT STEPs is a National Institute on Aging-funded initiative that is building a network of researchers, nursing homes, and other partners to advance evidence-based nursing home care through clinical trials research. A key element of NEXT STEPs is convening Partner Workgroups to hear firsthand from those directly affected by research and seek guidance on how researchers may best engage when interacting with residents, staff, and family members/care partners. As noted by several partners, *nursing homes are peoples' homes*; therefore, studies that will impact resident quality of life must include the voice of residents in study design.

In the inaugural year of NEXT STEPs, four distinct, diverse Partner Workgroups were convened, comprised of nursing home administrators, clinical staff, residents, and families/care partners. One virtual meeting was held each quarter with each workgroup, targeting topics and questions to the specific partners. Each meeting included 6-9 invited members, with 4-8 attending regularly. Members represented 20 States, reflecting geographic diversity across the country. Meetings were structured to optimize time for discussion and interaction among workgroup members.

Workgroup members offered important insights on numerous topics that were included in materials developed by NEXT STEPs to better inform research in nursing homes. Some of the topics they informed are listed below.

- Nursing home research priorities, conceptualizing research as an opportunity for quality improvement.
- How nursing home residents like to be addressed by researchers, focusing on respectful practices to build trust, avoid jargon, and honor privacy
- Guidance for researchers when they are in nursing homes, so they are better prepared and able to respect each nursing home's distinct culture.
- The importance of explaining research methodology to residents, staff, and families/care partners, including the purpose, risks, benefits, and outcomes of a given study.
- Meaningful ways to honor/recognize participants' contributions to research.

To summarize the development and structure of the partner workgroups, lessons learned during the first year, and how researchers can best engage with the workgroups in 2026-2027, a webinar was presented titled [Partner Workgroups in Practice: Lessons from NEXT STEPs](#). It highlighted the value of incorporating partner perspectives into nursing home research throughout the design process, about which workgroup members shared key insights first-hand experiences. The Partner Workgroup model promotes inclusion of recommendations from residents and others directly impacted by nursing home research. There is no substitute for hearing directly from key stakeholders from the outset and throughout research design and implementation.

Moving forward, NEXT STEPs plans to deepen partnerships and opportunities for researchers. Researchers interested in engaging with Partner Workgroups may do so by first joining a [research studio](#) to confer with the NEXT STEPs research team, and later attending Partner Workgroup meetings to seek feedback on research questions, draft materials such as interview guides, and other efforts.

For more information on how to engage with our Partner Workgroups, please contact us jt129@nyu.edu.