

Skilled Nursing

What is skilled nursing and when might this level of care be necessary?

Skilled nursing in Illinois refers to care provided in a licensed facility (commonly called a nursing home or skilled nursing facility, “SNF”) that offers 24-hour nursing care, medical treatment and supervision.

These facilities serve individuals who cannot safely be cared for at home (or in less intensive settings) because of complex medical needs, frequent monitoring, rehabilitation, wound care, IVs, etc.

Services provided:

- Around-the-clock nursing care (RNs, LPNs, CNAs) for residents who need skilled oversight.
- Medical services: The facility must have access to physicians (on staff or on-call), perform regular examinations, develop care plans, review and update plans as residents’ conditions change.
- Rehabilitation services (or “rehab”): Many SNFs provide physical, occupational, and speech therapy, to help residents recover function or adapt to limitations.
- Specialty care: For example, wound care, IV therapy, complex medication management, or ventilator care.
- Daily living support: Although the primary focus is on skilled care, these facilities also provide personal care (bathing, dressing, eating) for those whose medical condition doesn’t allow independence.

Skilled nursing can be short term or long term. Short-term rehab often occurs after a hospitalization and provides additional support and recovery before being discharged back home. In fact, it has become the norm after a hospitalization for someone to go to rehab first. Older adults can quickly become weakened after a hospitalization, and a short rehab stay can increase the likelihood of a successful return home once one has regained their strength. Hospital stays are also much shorter than they once were, so individuals often finish their recovery in a rehab setting. Long-term skilled nursing means one is a resident of the facility and requires full-time care.

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Medicare usually covers short-term rehab at a skilled nursing facility as long as one has stayed 3 overnights at a hospital and meets medical criteria for short-term rehab. One can also pay privately for rehab if Medicare stops covering care.

Long-term care in a nursing home is not covered by Medicare but can be covered by Medicaid for those who don't have the resources to pay privately and meet financial Medicaid criteria. Not all SNFs accept Medicaid so be sure to ask if a facility takes Medicaid before applying. If one doesn't meet Medicaid criteria, they will usually pay privately, unless they have long-term care insurance to cover all or a portion of the cost.

FAQs

How do I know if I need skilled nursing or if I can continue to live at home?

Everyone's situation is different but often the catalyst for moving to skilled nursing is when one needs a "2-person assist", meaning 2 caregivers are required to move someone since mobility is so limited. Inability to manage bowel or bladder incontinence at home and frequent falls are other primary reasons for needing full-time care in another setting. Further, for those who are receiving less than 24-hour care at home, and if they can no longer be safely at home for other reasons, such as cognitive changes that make it unsafe to be left alone, nursing home care may be necessary. Talk to your doctor and your care manager about an appropriate level of care. The goal is always for one's care needs to be met in the least restrictive setting that can meet their needs. The SNFs also do their own assessments to make sure one is appropriate for their level of care.

How do I find a good nursing home?

Medicare has an online tool to help search for nursing homes by location with ratings and details provided. Optimally, one should try to avoid facilities with fewer than a 3-star rating and/or a "red hand" icon as that means the facility has been fined for poor care in some capacity. These ratings can change over time as nursing facilities are frequently evaluated for quality of care. Always tour if possible to get a sense of a place. You can tour facilities at any time with no commitment, but do call ahead.

<https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/?providerType=NursingHome>

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