

Residential Care Facilities with Six or Fewer Ambulatory, Non-Ambulatory, or Bedridden Clients

PURPOSE

This guideline is intended to facilitate compliance with the appropriate requirements for residentially based care facilities. Regulations regarding residentially based care facilities are found in the California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 19, as well as the 2025 California Fire Code (CFC), 2025 California Building Code (CBC), and 2025 California Residential Code, Section 335.

SCOPE

This guideline is intended to provide the minimum requirements necessary for review and approval of care facilities licensed by the Department of Social Services to house six or fewer ambulatory, non-ambulatory, or bedridden clients in a single-family residence (Routinely classified as a R3.1 occupancy) located within the jurisdiction of the Sacramento Fire Department (SFD).

This document does not include all regulations that may apply to residentially based care facilities—it is only intended to provide guidance on issues and questions commonly encountered during fire clearance inspections.

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

The Sacramento Fire Department encourages a pre-inspection/consultation of your facility. Upon receipt of the information outlined in the SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS section of this guideline and the INSPECTION/CONSULTATION REQUEST form, Sacramento Fire Department staff will complete the inspection and provide written requirements necessary to obtain Sacramento Fire Clearance. SFD may charge a fee for this inspection.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) Fire Clearance Form - STD 850 must be forwarded to the licensing field office for the area where the facility is located. This form is sent directly to the Sacramento Fire Department by the assigned evaluator representing the licensing agency (DSS) prior to scheduling your fire clearance inspection. Upon completion of the inspection, SFD will complete the 850 form and return it to DSS. **Please review this guideline thoroughly prior to your inspection to facilitate fire clearance sign-off by the Sacramento Fire Department.**

Prior to your scheduled fire clearance inspection date, you must submit site and floor plans to the local Licensing Office serving the area in which your proposed facility is located. Your fire clearance inspection request cannot

The floor plan must include the information listed below:

- **Building Address:** Street name and number, city, zip code
- **Occupancy Classification:** R-3.1
- **Original date of construction of the home.**
- **Site Plan (8-1/2" X 11" or larger):** Show the following:
 - An outline of the home and any other structures on the property (detached garages, sheds, etc.).
 - Exit pathways from the home to the street—note the dimensions of the narrowest point along the exit path.
 - Fences, walls, and similar potential egress path obstructions.
 - Gates—note the clear opening width.
- **Floor Plan (8-1/2" X 11" or larger):** Show the following:
 - All rooms in the home—label each room with its function (bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, etc.) and clearly identify which spaces are proposed for clients and their ambulatory status (ambulatory, non-ambulatory, and bedridden); indicate how many clients will reside in each sleeping room.
 - Attached garages—show doors, windows, or other openings between the garage and the rest of the home.
 - Interior and exterior doors—note the clear height/width of each door.
 - Width of all hallways in client areas
 - The location of all smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.
- **Sprinkler System:** Note if the home is equipped with a fire sprinkler system. A fire sprinkler system is required if more than one client is bedridden, if any non-ambulatory clients are housed on the second or higher story, or if any clients are housed on the third or higher story. (CBC 903.2.8)

BUILDING PERMITS AND BUSINESS LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

Proposed uses as an R-3.1 Licensed Care Facility may be considered as a “Change of Occupancy/ Use” which requires specific Building Department permitting in compliance with CA Residential and Building Codes.

Proposed uses of ambulatory care only may not require specific permitting and can be completed at the sole discretion of the local fire authority. Be sure to get confirmation from the local Building Department of this possibility.

For all proposed uses, including modifications of existing licenses to increase the level of care for clients to now include, or to increase the number of Non-Ambulatory or Bedridden clients; Building Permits for Change of Occupancy or Use; and/or any required interior and exterior modifications, **may be required.** *It is recommended that applicants seek a “FIRE PRE-INSPECTION/CONSULTATION REQUEST” to discuss the potential impacts of such considerations.

CAUTION: Fire clearance from the Sacramento Fire Department does not constitute approval from other agencies that may also have jurisdiction over this facility. Contact the applicable County or City building or planning department regarding their zoning, construction, and permit requirements (if any).

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

Residentially based care facilities shall comply with these requirements.

□ **Smoke Alarms/ Detector Placement:**

- Smoke alarms are required within each room used for sleeping purposes.
- Smoke alarms are required outside of each separate sleeping area (e.g., hallways or similar spaces leading to bedrooms).
- Not less than one smoke alarm is also required in each story and basement of the dwelling, regardless of the presence of a bedroom, and within all habitable living areas - living room, dining room, den, foyer, and similar spaces. Alarms are **not required** in kitchens, bathrooms, closets, garages, or unfinished attics or crawl spaces.
- Smoke alarm devices shall be installed in accordance with the manufacturer's published guidelines/instructions.

(CBC 907.2.11.2)

All smoke alarm devices must be interconnected to each other, either physically or wirelessly, so that when one activates, they all sound an alarm simultaneously. When activated, smoke alarms shall be clearly audible throughout the home. (CFC 907.2.11.5)

In new construction and where existing homes are converted into residential care facilities, smoke alarms shall be hardwired to the home's primary power supply and be equipped with a battery backup. They shall not be on an electrical circuit with a shut-off switch other than that required for overcurrent protection. Electrical work shall be approved by the applicable building department. (CFC 907.2.11.6)

Smoke alarms shall be UL-listed and California State Fire Marshal-approved and shall be tested and maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Smoke alarms that no longer function and/or are older than ten years shall be replaced; replace the device if a manufacturer's date cannot be found. (CFC 907.2.11.2.4 and NFPA 72 14.4.5.6)

Protective social care facilities that house persons who are hearing-impaired shall be provided with notification appliances for the hearing-impaired installed in accordance with NFPA 72. Such devices must activate upon initiation of the smoke alarms (CFC 907.5.2.3.4).

Definition of Protective Social Care: *The housing and care of any person of any age when such person is referred to or placed within such home or facility for care and supervision services by any governmental agency.*

- ### □ **Carbon Monoxide Detectors/Alarms:** Carbon monoxide (CO) detection is required in dwellings with gas or wood-burning fireplaces, gas or fuel-oil forced-air furnaces, or homes with an attached garage that has a door, duct, or other opening between the garage and the rest of the home.

Devices shall be provided in the following locations:

1. In the room or space leading to each separate bedroom/sleeping area in the home (for example, in the hallway serving one or more bedrooms)
2. On every occupiable level, including basements.
3. In every bedroom or sleeping area where there is a fireplace or other fuel-burning appliance located within the space or an attached bathroom.

CO devices shall be hardwired to the home's electrical system and shall have battery backup. All CO devices shall be interconnected, either physically or wirelessly, so that if one activates, they all sound an alarm simultaneously.

Exception: Battery-operated devices are permitted in homes built prior to January 1, 2011, if any work done on the home does not result in exposure of the structure in the areas where devices are required.

Install CO devices in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. CO devices shall be UL-listed and California State Fire Marshal-approved. Combination smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are permissible. Electrical work shall be approved by the local building department. (CBC 915)

Carbon Monoxide alarms shall be replaced when their end-of-life signal is activated, or the manufacturer's replacement date is reached. (NFPA 72 14.4.5.7)

- **General Exiting:** There shall be a minimum of two approved exits from the dwelling that are remotely located from each other. Exit doors serving clients shall be at least 6 feet 8 inches in height with at least 32 inches of clearance when opened at a 90-degree angle. For double doors, if the secondary door leaf requires operation of anything other than a doorknob or handle to open, such as slide bolts or pins, measurements shall be taken with the secondary leaf closed and only the normally active leaf open. Sliding doors may be used as required exits if they meet the 32-inch unobstructed opening width. (CBC 435.8.3, 1010.1.1)

Finished floors or landings at exterior exits shall not be greater than 1-1/2 inches lower than the top of the threshold. Exception: Landings outside of the exit door shall not be more than 7-3/4 inches below the top of the threshold, provided the door does not swing over the landing. Where exterior landings or floors serving an exit door are not at grade, they shall be provided with access to grade by means of a ramp in accordance with CRC Section 311.8 or stairs in accordance with CRC Section 311.7.

NOTE: Consult with the local Building Department for construction requirements.

Hallways serving clients and exterior exits shall not be less than 36 inches wide. Exit paths both inside and outside the home shall be maintained clear with no furniture, equipment, storage, or other obstructions that could hinder immediate use. (CBC Table 1020.2, 1005.7, 1003.6)

The exit path from common spaces serving clients to an exterior exit door shall not pass through more than one intervening room, nor shall it pass through storerooms, closets, garages, or spaces used for similar purposes. The egress path shall not pass through kitchens where building construction separates the kitchen from other rooms. (CBC 435.8.3.4)

All lockable doors and gates along the paths of exit travel shall be equipped with hardware that does not require any special effort or knowledge, nor require the use of a key or other tool, to operate in the direction of exit travel. Where the total occupant load of the facility (clients, staff, caretakers, and other individuals normally working or residing at the home) is greater than 10, operation of the primary doorknob shall also simultaneously unlock the dead bolt. Security chains are allowed on exterior exit doors in facilities with 10 or fewer occupants, provided they do not require the use of a key or tool. Manually operated flush or slide bolts are not permitted regardless of occupant load. (CBC 435.8.3, 1010.2.4)

Emergency escape and rescue openings shall be maintained free of any interior or exterior obstructions other than those noted below and shall be operational from the inside of the room without the use of keys, tools, or special knowledge. Bars, grilles, covers, screens, or similar devices are permitted to be placed over emergency escape and rescue openings, provided the minimum net clear opening size is not obstructed and such devices can be released or removed from the inside without the use of a key, tool, special knowledge, or force greater than that which is required for normal operation of the emergency escape and rescue opening. The release mechanism shall be maintained operable at all times. Such bars, grills, grates, or any similar devices shall be equipped with an approved exterior release device for use by the fire department. (CBC 1031)

- **Exiting from Client Rooms in a Fire Sprinklered Home:** Bedrooms serving bedridden and/or non-ambulatory clients shall be provided with an exit path that conforms to at least **one** of the following (Refer to Attachment 1):

1. From the client's bedroom directly to the exterior.
2. From the client's bedroom into an adjacent bedroom, then directly to the exterior.
3. From the client's bedroom into a hallway, then directly to the exterior.
4. From the client's bedroom into a hallway, then into another client's bedroom, then directly to the exterior.

Where a hallway serves as part of the exit path, as in conditions 3 and 4 above, the hallway shall be separated from other parts of the home, such as living and dining rooms, kitchens, foyers, and other similar spaces by a solid wall consistent with the construction of other interior walls in the dwelling; the doorway through this wall shall be protected with a solid wood door that is at least 1-3/8 inches thick. The door shall be self-closing or shall close automatically upon activation of a smoke detector. (See Attachment 1). (CBC 435.8.3.2)

Bedrooms serving bedridden clients shall be located on the first floor only. (CBC 435.3.2)

- **Exiting from Client Rooms in a Non-Fire Sprinklered Home:** When the home is not protected by a fire sprinkler system, exiting requirements differ for non-ambulatory and bedridden clients.

Non-ambulatory clients: Bedrooms servicing non-ambulatory clients shall be provided with an exit path that conforms to at least **one** of the following (Refer to Attachment 1):

1. From the client's bedroom directly to the exterior.
2. From the client's bedroom into an adjacent bedroom, then directly to the exterior.
3. From the client's bedroom into a hallway, then directly to the exterior.
4. From the client's bedroom into a hallway, then into another client's bedroom, then to the exterior.

Where a hallway serves as part of the exit path, as in conditions 3 and 4 above, the hallway shall be separated from other parts of the home, such as living and dining rooms, kitchens, foyers, and other similar spaces by solid walls consistent with the construction of other interior walls in the dwelling; the doorway through this wall shall be protected with a solid wood door that is at least 1-3/8 inches thick. The door shall be self-closing or shall close automatically upon activation of a smoke detector. (See Attachment 1). (CBC 435.8.3.2)

Bedridden client: Only a single, bedridden client can be housed in a home without fire sprinklers.

That bedroom shall be provided with **all** of the following (Refer to Attachment 1):

1. A direct exit to the exterior of the home.
2. Doors to the room shall be 1-3/8" thick, solid wood.
3. Door openings shall be provided with a gasket along the jamb on both sides and at the top to inhibit the passage of smoke.
4. Doors to the room shall be self-closing or shall close automatically upon activation of a smoke detector.
5. Doors leading to other interior spaces, such as hallways, living or dining spaces, or similar general-use areas of the home, shall not be provided with a night latch, dead bolt, security chain, or any similar locking device.
6. The exterior exit door in a bedridden client's bedroom shall be operable from both the interior and exterior of the home.
7. The door shall provide at least 32 inches of clear width with the door open at 90 degrees.
8. The bedroom shall be located on the first story.

(See Attachment 1). (CBC 435.8.3.3)

- **Use of floors other than the 1st story:** Where non-ambulatory clients are housed above the 1st floor in a non-sprinklered home, construction is required to prevent the migration of smoke between stories. Construction of this floor separation shall be equivalent to 1/2-inch gypsum wallboard on at least one side of the building's framing. Openings in this smoke separation shall be protected with solid wood doors at least 1-3/8 inches thick. Doors shall be positive-latching and shall have a smoke gasket along the jambs at the sides and the top of the opening. The door shall be self-closing or automatically close upon detection of smoke. Glazing in the door shall be limited to 1,296 square inches and no more than 54 inches in any dimension. This floor separation is not required where there is at least one exterior exit door from the floor(s) occupied by tenants. (CBC 435.8.7)

Use of existing stairs, except for spiral and winding stairs, is permitted provided that the stairs have a maximum rise of 8 inches with a minimum run of 9 inches. Minimum stairway width is 30 inches. (CBC 435.8.6.2)

Where the home has three or more stories and/or more than 3,000 square feet of area above the first story, non-ambulatory clients shall not be housed in spaces above the first floor unless the home is built of at least 1-hour fire-resistant construction throughout. Please be aware that most homes do not meet this requirement as originally constructed. (CBC 435.3.2)

Bedridden client sleeping rooms **shall not** be located above or below the first story. (CBC 435.3.2)

- **Interior Wall Finish for Bedridden:** Interior wall and ceiling finish in Group R-3.1 occupancies housing 1 or more bedridden client(s) shall comply with the interior wall and ceiling finish requirements specified for Group I-2 occupancies in CBC Table 803.13 and CRC 335.4.1. This requirement is satisfied when typical painted drywall is installed throughout the home. However, the presence of wood paneling or other types of flammable wall coverings may not comply with this requirement unless the flame spread rating can be demonstrated by the supplied manufacturer specifications as meeting a Class A or B flame spread rating as defined by CBC Section 803.1.2.

- **Other Requirements:**

1. Provide a minimum of four (4) inch address numbers that contrast with their background. Address numbers are required to be attached to the structure and visible from the street. Address numbers shall be internally or externally illuminated to facilitate emergency response personnel in locating the residence. (CFC 505.1)
2. Provide a fire extinguisher with a minimum classification/rating of 2A:10B:C. The extinguisher is required to be securely attached to a wall in a visible and readily accessible location, with the top of the extinguisher mounted no more than 5 feet above finished floor level, with the bottom at least 4" above the floor. A current annual service tag is required to be attached to the fire extinguisher, or if the extinguisher was purchased within the last year, proof of purchase date is required. Review the manufacturer's guidelines for additional requirements and instructions on using the extinguisher. (CBC 906.1 item 7, 906.9)
3. Maintain combustible material storage clearance around water heaters as per the manufacturer's specifications. (CFC 305.1)
4. All fire and smoke-rated construction separating the garage and the dwelling must be maintained in good condition with no open penetrations. (CFC 703.1)
5. If the garage is attached to the dwelling unit, doors between the dwelling and the garage shall be equipped with a self-closing device and be positive latching. The door shall be either solid wood or a solid- or honeycomb-core steel door that is a minimum of 1-3/8 inches thick; a 20-minute rated door equipped with a smoke gasket is also acceptable. There shall be no openings from the garage into any of the sleeping areas. (CBC 406.3.2.1)
6. The garage shall not be used as living or sleeping quarters unless this conversion has been approved by the building department. (CBC 105.1)
7. Changes in elevation inside the home that are between 1/4-inch and 1/2 -inch high shall be beveled at a slope not to exceed 1 unit in vertical distance for every 2 units in horizontal distance. Changes in interior elevation between 1/2 inch and 12 inches shall be accomplished by means of a ramp. (CBC 435.8.5)

8. Exterior floor or landing elevations at exits shall comply with CRC Section 311.3.1.
9. Evacuation signs shall be posted in locations where they will be readily visible to clients and care providers. The signs shall, at a minimum, include a floor plan showing the location of exits, how to identify a fire alarm (i.e., the sound and, if visual alarm notification devices are provided, appearance), and state "In case of emergency, dial 9-1-1." (CCR Title 19, 3.13)

TEMPORARILY BEDRIDDEN CLIENTS

Clients who become temporarily bedridden may continue to be housed on any story in homes classified as Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFE). Every RCFE admitting or retaining a bedridden resident shall, within 48 hours of the resident's admission or retention in the facility, notify the SFD local field office of the estimated length of time the resident will retain his or her bedridden status in the facility. (CBC 435.3.2, CBC 435.10).

The following regulatory information has been extracted from the California Health & Safety Code (H&S). These regulations are provided to assist RCFE operators in understanding applicable requirements when a client becomes bedridden. These regulations are enforced by the licensing agency. However, the licensing agency frequently defers the determination of item #3 to the SFD.

Definition of Bedridden: CA H&S Code Section 87101 (b) – *"Bedridden person" means a person who is "non-ambulatory" as specified in Section 87101(n); and who either requires assistance in turning and repositioning in bed, or is unable to independently transfer to and from bed, as specified in H&S Code Section 1569.72(b)(1)*

Temporary Bedridden Extension: CA H&S 1569.72 – *"A bedridden resident may be retained in a residential care facility for the elderly in excess of 14 days if all of the following requirements are satisfied:*

1. The facility notifies the department **in writing** regarding the temporary illness or recovery from surgery.
2. The facility submits to the department, **with notification**, a physician **and** surgeon's written statement to the effect that the resident's illness or recovery will end or upon which the resident will no longer be confined to a bed.
3. The department determines that the health and safety of the resident is adequately protected in that facility and that transfer to a higher level of care is not necessary.
4. This section does not expand the scope of care and supervision of a residential care facility for the elderly.

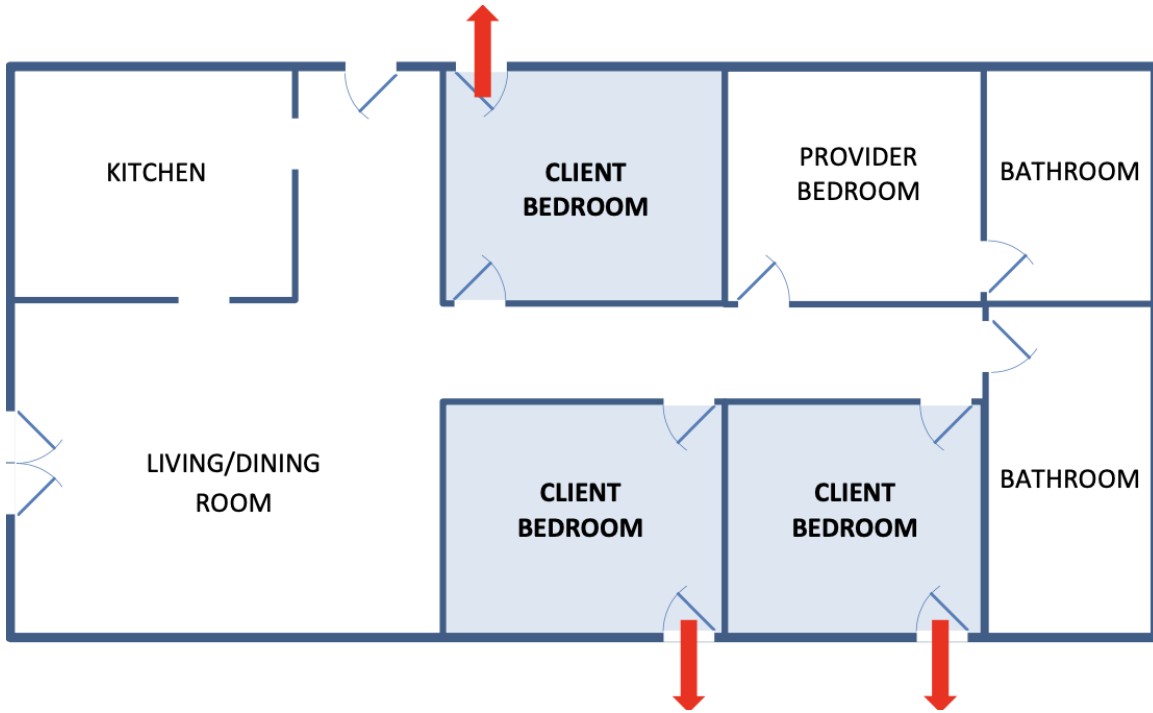
In most instances, the Fire Inspector will work with the RCFE operator to identify a first-floor bedroom with a complying direct exit to the exterior as a temporary solution until either all safety requirements are met or other accommodations are arranged.

Attachment 1

Exiting Configurations for Client Bedrooms

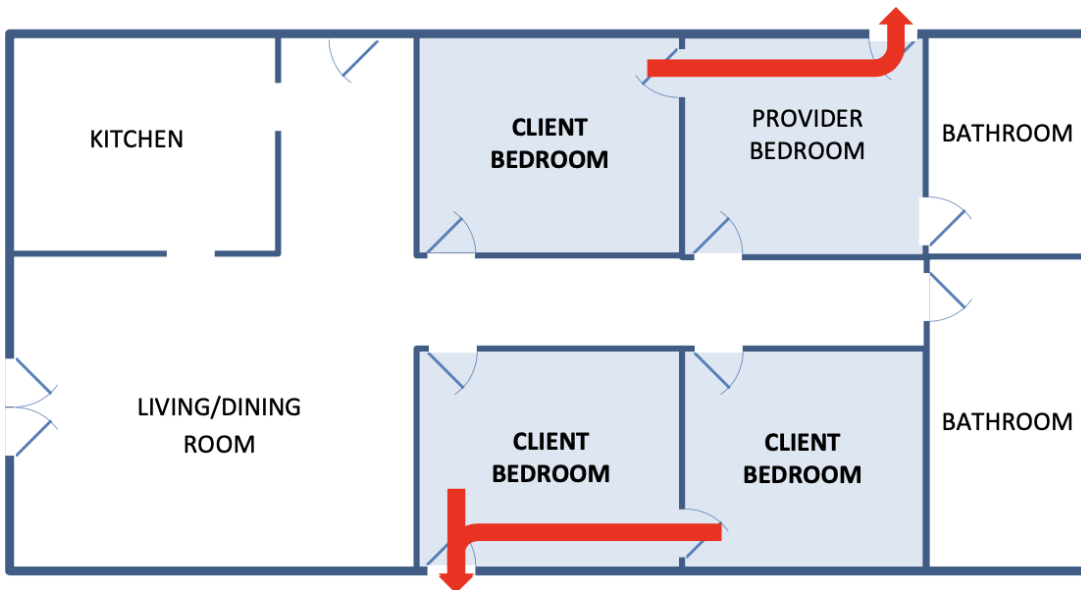
Condition #1

Exit from Bedroom Directly to Exterior



Condition #2

Exit Through Adjacent Bedroom, then to Exterior

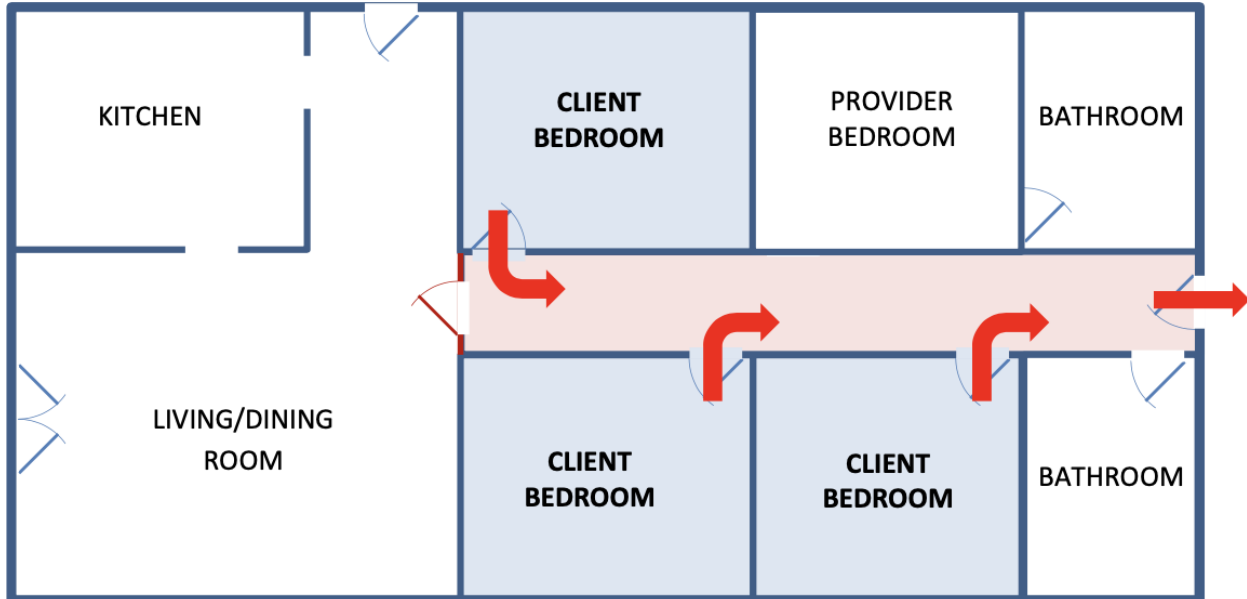


Attachment 1 (continued)

Condition #3

Exit from Bedroom into Hallway, then to Exterior

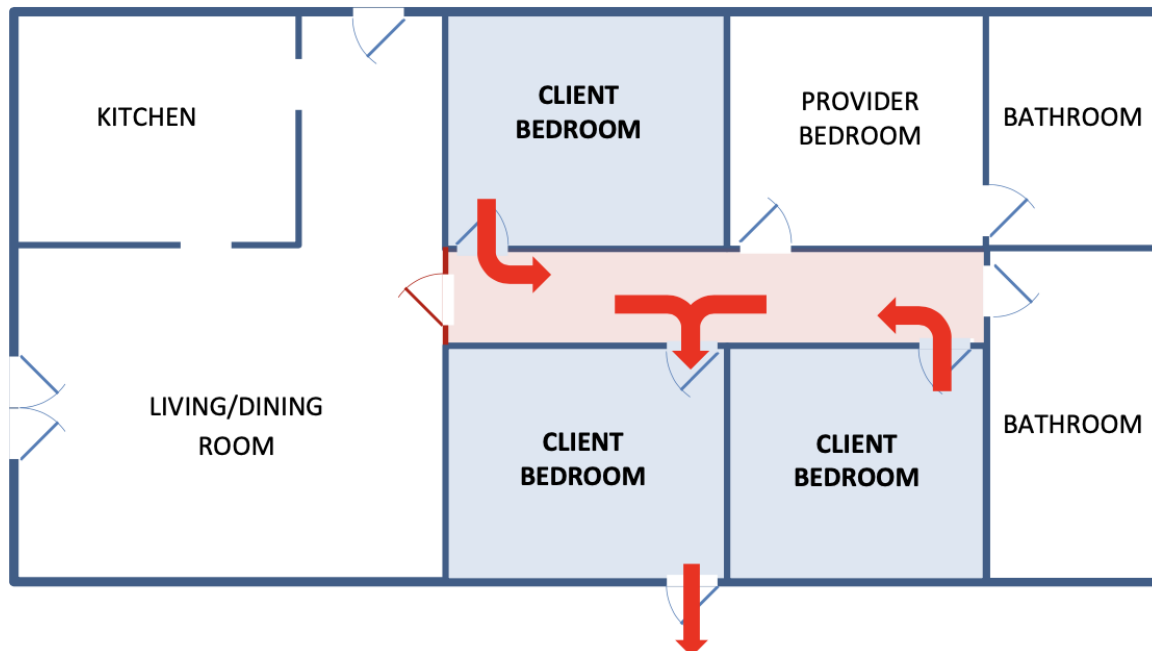
NOTE: When the hallway is part of the exit path, it must be separated from the rest of the home.



Condition #4

Exit from Bedroom into Hallway, then to another Bedroom, then to Exterior

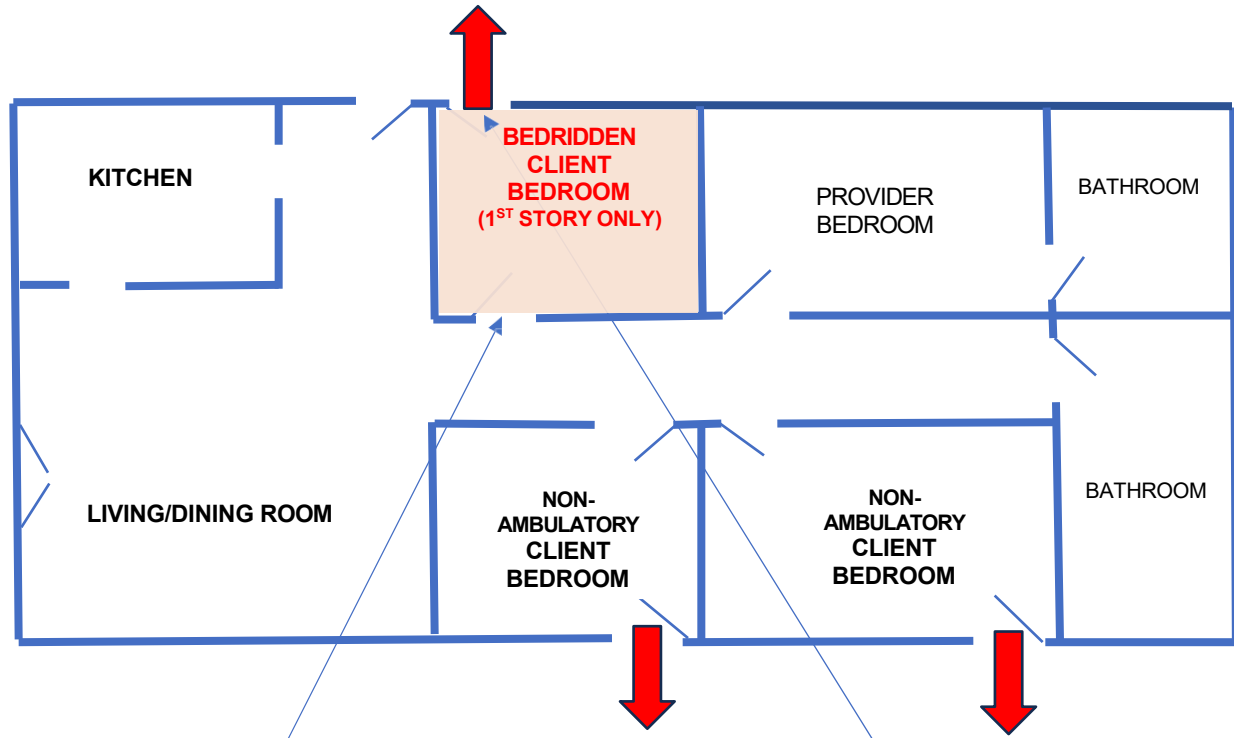
NOTE: When the hallway is part of the exit path, it must be separated from the rest of the home.



Attachment 1 (continued)

Condition #5

Exit from Bedroom Directly to Exterior (**Bedridden Client**)



- 1-3/8" thick solid wood door
- Door opening provided with a smoke gasket (sides and top of jamb)
- Door is self-closing or closes automatically via activation of a smoke detector.
- No night latch, dead-bolt, security chain

- Door operable from both sides (handles/ lockset)
- 32" clear width with the door open at 90 degrees

Attachment 2 Business Owner Pre-inspection Checklist

Use this checklist in conjunction with this guideline to prepare your home for a fire-clearance inspection by the Sacramento Fire Department. As the design and use of individual homes can vary, this checklist is not all-inclusive, and other requirements that are not included herein may apply.

GENERAL

- Building modifications have been approved by the building department.
- Garage is not used for a living space, unless approved as one by the building department.
- Home has minimum 4" high address numbers clearly visible from the street.
- No bedridden client rooms are located above or below the first floor.
- Non-ambulatory clients shall not use spaces above the first floor in homes with 3+ stories or >3,000 ft² unless the building is of 1-hour construction.

DETECTORS/ALARMS

- Smoke alarms installed in all habitable spaces.
- Smoke alarms are interconnected to each other.
- Smoke alarms are hardwired with battery backup.
- Smoke alarms are audible throughout the home.
- Carbon monoxide alarms are installed and functional.

EXITING

- Two exit paths from the home to the street are provided; they are clear of obstructions.
- Two exit doors from the interior of the home are remotely located from one another.
- Each exit path serving common areas in the home goes through no more than one intervening space before reaching an exterior exit door.
- Exit paths do not pass through storerooms, closets, garages, or similar spaces.
- Exit paths do not pass through the kitchen unless the kitchen is completely open to the adjoining room.
- Keys are not required to open exit doors/gates in the direction of exit travel.
- If there are more than 10 occupants in the home, single-action hardware is installed on all exit doors and gates.
- All exit doors have a minimum 32" clear opening width.
- The exit path from each client room matches one of the four required configurations.
- Basements and sleeping rooms have emergency escape/rescue openings.
- Emergency escape/rescue openings lead to the public way and are accessible to firefighters.
- Bars/grills over emergency escape/rescue openings are openable from the inside.

HALLWAY SEPARATION (when non-ambulatory or bedridden clients are present)

- If the hallway is part of the exit path from client rooms, it is separated from the rest of the home.
- The hallway separation door is self-closing or closes automatically upon activation of a smoke detector.
- The hallway separation door is solid-core wood, minimum 1-3/8" thick.

FLOOR SEPARATION FOR CLIENTS ON THE 2nd + FLOOR

- Smoke separation has been provided between stories.
- The smoke separation door is solid-core wood, minimum 1-3/8" thick.
- The smoke separation door is positive-latching and features a smoke seal.
- The smoke separation door automatically closes when a smoke detector is activated.
- Door glazing is limited to 1,296 square inches and no more than 54 inches in any dimension.

Note: If an exterior exit door is provided on the story with clients; if so, the five (5) requirements above do not apply.

BEDRIDDEN CLIENT IN NON-SPRINKLERED HOME

- The bedroom has a direct exit to the exterior; the door is operable from both the interior and exterior.
- The bedroom door is self-closing or closes automatically upon activation of a smoke detector.
- The bedroom door has smoke seals.
- Doors to the room shall be 1-3/8" thick solid wood.
- Doors from the bedroom to other interior spaces do not have night latches, deadbolts, security chains, or any other similar locking devices.

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

- 2A:10BC fire extinguisher has been provided.
- Extinguisher is new or has been serviced in the last year.
- Extinguisher is mounted to the wall in a visible and accessible location.

GENERAL FIRE SAFETY

- No combustibles are stored near water heaters or other sources of ignition.
- Door between the dwelling space and garage is in good condition.
- Door between the dwelling space and garage is self-closing and latching.
- Door between the dwelling space and garage is of proper type.
- There are no dog doors, windows, or openings other than an approved door and permitted ducting between the garage and the dwelling space.