

**135C.2 Purpose — rules — special classifications — protection and advocacy agency.**

1. The purpose of [this chapter](#) is to promote and encourage adequate and safe care and housing for individuals who are aged or who, regardless of age, are infirm, convalescent, or mentally or physically dependent, by both public and private agencies by providing for the adoption and enforcement of rules and standards for all of the following:

a. The housing, care, and treatment of individuals in health care facilities.

b. The location, construction, maintenance, renovation, and sanitary operation of such health care facilities which will promote safe and adequate care of individuals in such homes so as to further the health, welfare, and safety of such individuals.

2. Rules and standards prescribed, promulgated, and enforced under [this chapter](#) shall not be arbitrary, unreasonable, or confiscatory and the department or agency prescribing, promulgating, or enforcing such rules or standards shall have the burden of proof to establish that such rules or standards meet such requirements and are consistent with the economic problems and conditions involved in the care and housing of persons in health care facilities.

3. a. The department shall establish by administrative rule the following special classifications:

(1) Within the residential care facility category, a special license classification for residential facilities intended to serve persons with mental illness.

(2) Within the nursing facility category, a special license classification for nursing facilities which designate and dedicate the facility or a special unit within the facility to provide care for persons who suffer from chronic confusion or a dementing illness. A nursing facility which designates and dedicates the facility or a special unit within the facility for the care of persons who suffer from chronic confusion or a dementing illness shall be specially licensed. For the purposes of [this subsection](#), “*designate*” means to identify by a distinctive title or label and “*dedicate*” means to set apart for a definite use or purpose and to promote that purpose.

b. The department may also establish by administrative rule special classifications within the residential care facility, intermediate care facility for persons with mental illness, intermediate care facility for persons with an intellectual disability, or nursing facility categories, for facilities intended to serve individuals who have special health care problems or conditions in common. Rules establishing a special classification shall define the problem or condition to which the special classification is relevant and establish requirements for an approved program of care commensurate with the problem or condition. The rules may grant special variances or considerations to facilities licensed within the special classification.

c. The rules adopted for intermediate care facilities for persons with an intellectual disability shall be consistent with, but no more restrictive than, the federal standards for intermediate care facilities for persons with an intellectual disability established pursuant to the federal Social Security Act, §1905(c)(d), as codified in 42 U.S.C. §1396d, in effect on January 1, 1989. However, in order for an intermediate care facility for persons with an intellectual disability to be licensed, the director must certify to the department that the facility meets the applicable provisions of the rules adopted for such facilities by the director. The director’s rules shall be based upon such a facility’s compliance with either the provisions applicable to health care occupancies or residential board and care occupancies of the life safety code of the national fire protection association, 2000 edition. The department shall adopt additional rules for intermediate care facilities for persons with an intellectual disability pursuant to [section 135C.14, subsection 8](#).

d. Notwithstanding the limitations set out in [this subsection](#) regarding rules for intermediate care facilities for persons with an intellectual disability, the department shall consider the federal interpretive guidelines issued by the federal centers for Medicare and Medicaid services when interpreting the department’s rules for intermediate care facilities for persons with an intellectual disability. This use of the guidelines is not subject to the rulemaking provisions of [sections 17A.4 and 17A.5](#), but the guidelines shall be published in the Iowa administrative bulletin and the Iowa administrative code.

4. The protection and advocacy agency designated in the state, under Pub. L. No. 98-527, the Developmental Disabilities Act of 1984, Pub. L. No. 99-319, the Protection and Advocacy for Mentally Ill Individuals Act of 1986, and Pub. L. No. 100-146, the federal Developmental

Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act Amendments of 1987, is recognized as an agency legally authorized and constituted to ensure the implementation of the purposes of [this chapter](#) for populations under its authority and in the manner designated by Pub. L. No. 98-527, Pub. L. No. 99-319, and Pub. L. No. 100-146 and in the assurances of the governor of the state.

5. The department shall establish a special classification within the residential care facility category in order to foster the development of residential care facilities which serve persons with an intellectual disability, chronic mental illness, a developmental disability, or brain injury, and which contain five or fewer residents. A facility within the special classification established pursuant to [this subsection](#) is exempt from the requirements of [section 135.62](#). The department shall adopt rules which are consistent with rules previously developed for the demonstration waiver project pursuant to [1986 Iowa Acts, ch. 1246, §206](#), and which include all of the following provisions:

a. A facility provider under the special classification must comply with rules adopted by the department for the special classification. However, a facility provider which has been accredited by the council on quality and leadership shall be deemed to be in compliance with the rules adopted by the department.

b. A facility must be located in an area zoned for single or multiple-family housing or in an unincorporated area and must be constructed in compliance with applicable local requirements and the rules adopted for the special classification by the director in accordance with the concept of the least restrictive environment for the facility residents. Local requirements shall not be more restrictive than the rules adopted for the special classification by the director and the state building code requirements for single or multiple-family housing, under [section 103A.7](#).

c. Facility provider plans for the facility's accessibility to residents must be in place.

d. A written plan must be in place which documents that a facility meets the needs of the facility's residents pursuant to individual program plans developed according to age appropriate and least restrictive program requirements.

e. A written plan must be in place which documents that a facility's residents have reasonable access to employment or employment-related training, education, generic community resources, and integrated opportunities to promote interaction with the community.

f. The facilities licensed under [this subsection](#) shall be eligible for funding utilized by other licensed residential care facilities for persons with an intellectual disability, or licensed residential care facilities for persons with mental illness, including but not limited to funding under or from the federal social services block grant, the state supplementary assistance program, state mental health and developmental disabilities services funds, and county funding provisions.

6. The department shall establish a special classification within the residential care facility category for residential care facilities which have the primary purpose of serving pediatric palliative care patients and that only provides respite care services and the services of a hospice program as defined in [section 135J.1](#). A facility within the special classification established pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall be exempt from [section 135.62](#). The department shall adopt rules pursuant to [chapter 17A](#) which shall include but not be limited to all of the following:

a. A residential care facility within the special classification established pursuant to [this subsection](#) may be referred to as a pediatric palliative care center.

b. A licensed residential care facility within the special classification established pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall be eligible for funding available to hospice programs licensed under [chapter 135J](#), and licensed residential care facilities that treat individuals with an illness or disability, including but not limited to funding from the federal social services block grant, the state supplementary assistance program, the hospice respite benefit, home and community-based services waivers, any funding source under [chapter 249A](#), and any benefit a nursing facility may be eligible for related to respite care services.

7. a. [This chapter](#) shall not apply to adult day services provided in a health care facility.

However, adult day services shall not be provided by a health care facility to persons requiring a level of care which is higher than the level of care the facility is licensed to provide.

b. The level of care certification provisions pursuant to [sections 135C.3 and 135C.4](#), the license application and fee provisions pursuant to [section 135C.7](#), and the involuntary discharge provisions pursuant to [section 135C.14, subsection 8](#), shall not apply to respite care services provided in a health care facility. However, respite care services shall not be provided by a health care facility to persons requiring a level of care which is higher than the level of care the facility is licensed to provide.

c. The department shall adopt rules to implement [this subsection](#).

8. The rules adopted by the department regarding nursing facilities shall provide that a nursing facility may choose to be inspected either by the department or by the joint commission. The rules regarding acceptance of inspection by the joint commission shall include recognition, in lieu of inspection by the department, of comparable inspections and inspection findings of the joint commission, if the department is provided with copies of all requested materials relating to the inspection process.\*

[C50, 54, §135C.5; C58, 62, 66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §135C.2]

[85 Acts, ch 114, §1](#); [87 Acts, ch 234, §426](#); [88 Acts, ch 1249, §3](#); [89 Acts, ch 115, §1](#); [89 Acts, ch 269, §1](#); [90 Acts, ch 1039, §6](#); [90 Acts, ch 1267, §27](#); [91 Acts, ch 267, §139](#); [92 Acts, ch 1241, §48](#); [94 Acts, ch 1151, §2, 3](#); [94 Acts, ch 1170, §7, 22](#); [95 Acts, ch 67, §11](#); [96 Acts, ch 1053, §1](#); [96 Acts, ch 1129, §25, 26, 113](#); [98 Acts, ch 1119, §12](#); [99 Acts, ch 141, §11](#); [2001 Acts, ch 64, §3](#); [2002 Acts, ch 1050, §17](#); [2003 Acts, ch 44, §114](#); [2003 Acts, ch 101, §1, 4](#); [2012 Acts, ch 1019, §12 – 14](#); [2013 Acts, ch 30, §32](#); [2014 Acts, ch 1026, §143](#); [2022 Acts, ch 1021, §43](#); [2023 Acts, ch 19, §1610, 1611](#); [2024 Acts, ch 1161, §22, 137](#); [2025 Acts, ch 86, §52](#); [2025 Acts, ch 117, §3, 5](#); [2025 Acts, ch 120, §68](#)

Referred to in [§135B.9](#), [135C.37](#), [135C.38](#), [155.1](#), [235A.15](#), [235B.6](#), [235F.6](#)

\*Subsection 8 is effective contingent upon passage of federal legislation; see [96 Acts, ch 1053, §3](#)

See Code editor's note on simple harmonization at the beginning of this Code volume

Subsection 5, unnumbered paragraph 1 amended

NEW subsection 6 and former subsection 6 renumbered as 7

Former subsection 7 amended and renumbered as 8