

What is a Personal  
Care Assistant (PCA)  
& Who Can Be One?

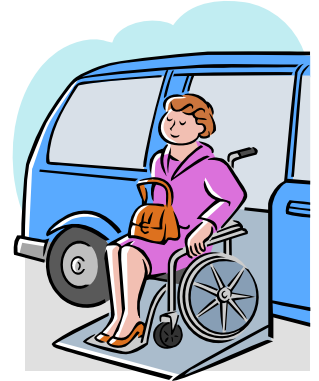
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## What Is A Personal Care Assistant (PCA)?

A Personal Care Assistant (PCA) helps you with some or all of your Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) and other tasks identified in your support plan.

Your PCA may need to be able to:

- ⇒ Push a manual wheelchair,
- ⇒ Drive a wheelchair accessible vehicle and be able to handle tie-downs,
- ⇒ Use a lift system in your residence,
- ⇒ Transfer you into and out of a wheelchair,
- ⇒ Help you with personal care tasks such as bathing, dressing and using the toilet,
- ⇒ Take care of your service animal,
- ⇒ Do light housekeeping,



- ⇒ Do simple repairs,
- ⇒ Wash clothes,
- ⇒ Make and change your bed,
- ⇒ Operate an electric bed,
- ⇒ Be prepared for emergency situations,
- ⇒ Prepare meals and feed you,

- ⇒ Assist with administration of some of your medications,
- ⇒ Apply dry dressings (only) to wounds, and / or
- ⇒ Help you pay your bills and assist with your banking affairs.

A PCA can also assist you in running errands, grocery shopping, driving you to special events, outings, or meetings, and accompanying you on vacations (depending on your needs and ability to pay).

As each individual has unique needs, you will need to train your PCA about your specific needs; however, there may be times when additional formal training is needed, such as training in first aid. If you are enrolled in a Medicaid waiver, your PCA cannot be compensated for time needed for outside training unless compensation is allowed under the particular waiver that you use.

## How Are PCAs Paid?

- ⇒ A PCA can be paid by Virginia's Department for Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) if you are enrolled in a Medicaid waiver. The PCA should not ask for more money, nor should you pay anything above what Medicaid pays the PCA.
- ⇒ A PCA can be paid by the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) if you participate in the state personal assistance services (PAS) program.
- ⇒ If you do not participate in a Medicaid waiver or the DRS PAS program, you may pay for your PCA privately.
- ⇒ You may choose to hire a PCA to work on a daily basis or to live with you, depending on your needs and ability to pay.

## Who Can Be A PCA?

- A PCA can be anyone of your choosing who is at least 18 years old, but Medicaid rules do not allow you to hire your spouse, nor may parents provide paid services to their minor child. PCAs must have a valid identification and Social Security number and pass a criminal background check.
- Any family member who meets the criteria above may be your PCA. Oftentimes, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc., work as PCAs for their family members. Generally, DMAS does not permit payment for family members who live in the same house as you; however, there are certain circumstances under which DMAS might allow you to hire a family member who lives with you. Basically, family members / caregivers living under the same roof may be paid by Medicaid if there is objective written documentation as to why there are no other providers available to provide the service for you. Check with your case manager or service facilitator to see if these special considerations apply to you.

## Advantages & Disadvantages Of Having A Family Member As Your PCA

Possible advantages of family members serving as your PCA are:

- They are likely to have your best interests at heart,
- They already know and understand your likes or dislikes,
- They will likely have a better understanding of your health history and could help you make more informed choices,
- You might feel more comfortable around family members,
- They may be more reliable,

- They may feel more committed to your support than a PCA who is not related to you,
- They may be more trustworthy,
- They may be more adaptable to immediate unforeseen changes in your plan of care, and/or
- You may feel less likely to be abused or mistreated.

Possible disadvantages of family members serving as your PCA are:

- You may feel a loss of independence and / or fear of losing your privacy,
- They could misuse your finances,
- You may feel overprotected or controlled. For example, an individual whose parent serves as a PCA may decide to move out of the home, and the parent may not want the individual to leave.
- You may find it difficult to insist on additional training or changes in the way the family member performs his or her work,
- They may take advantage of your relationship and expect extra privileges you wouldn't normally give to a non-family member,
- They may be less reliable because you are related,
- You may feel that you are imposing a burden on family members by asking them to serve as your PCA,
- They may feel more comfortable about helping themselves to your belongs without your consent, consideration and / or approval,
- If you ever need to fire them, it could be very difficult, and / or
- They could be abusive and keep you isolated from others. For this reason, it is a good idea for you to have another person to reach out to in case you get into an uncomfortable situation and need outside support. These other persons could be there to provide assistance if you need it. Examples of other persons include:

- ✓ A friend of yours
- ✓ Your case manager or service facilitator
- ✓ A peer counselor at a local Center for Independent Living
- ✓ Staff at the Department of Rehabilitative Services or the Department of Medical Assistance Services
- ✓ The Virginia Family Violence and Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-838-8238

If you think you are being abused or neglected and cannot report it, these other persons could call your local police department and Adult Protective Services at your local department of social services or the Adult Protective Services hotline at 1-888-832-3858 for you.

### *The Bottom Line*

Choosing the right PCA is one of the most important decisions you can make. If it is possible, you should interview several people and consider the advantages and disadvantages of each person before making a choice of who to hire. You may find it helpful to review *"How to Market Yourself, Advertise, and Hire a Personal Care Assistant (PCA)"* for additional tips on making the selection that is right for you.