

Caring for Our Caregivers

Changes in the Law Provide Increased Caregiver Support



- A caregiver, age 55 or older, who has legal guardianship of, or is raising, a dependent child under the age of 18, to whom they are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, but who is not the caregiver's biological child; or
- A caregiver, age 55 or older, providing care to an individual with a disability, age 18–59, to whom they are related by blood, marriage, or adoption, and who may or may not be the caregiver's biological child.

Caregiver Supportive Services

Supportive services available to an eligible caregiver include benefits counseling, to review existing benefits and identify potential new ones, education and training for caregivers, and reimbursements of costs associated with caregiving.

Eligible costs include those incurred for:

- Respite care: a service that provides the caregiver with relief from normal caregiving duties and responsibilities. It is typically short-term support in home or overnight to provide the caregiver with a break from caregiving.
- Home modifications: expenses for reasonable modifications to a home for the purpose of reducing the caregiving burden on the primary caregiver, but do not include repairs. Home modifications may include things like ramps or stair lifts.
- Assistive devices: help the care receiver carry out tasks of daily living, such as grab bars or safety devices.
- Consumable supplies: such as incontinence pads.

The maximum monthly reimbursement is currently \$600 and is based on a sliding scale according to the care receiver's household income. The reimbursement is phased out entirely if the care receiver's household income exceeds 380 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Additionally, there is a \$5,000 lifetime cap on reimbursements for home modifications or assistive devices.

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The past few years have been challenging for many people, perhaps particularly so for those who have been serving in the role as a caregiver. Recent changes to the Pennsylvania Caregiver Support Act and the Older Americans Act of 1965 may provide some much-needed relief by expanding resources and assistance for caregivers in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Pro-Caregiver Amendments

The Pennsylvania Caregiver Support Act ("Caregiver Support Act"), following its initial enactment in 1990, provided financial assistance to unpaid primary caregivers who assumed responsibility for at-home care of functionally dependent older adults or other adults with dementia. The Caregiver Support Act provided for a reimbursement in an amount of up to \$200 per month for the caregiver's out-of-pocket expenses incurred in providing care.

Effective June 11, 2021, the Caregiver Support Act was amended to provide reimbursement not only to caregivers who provide care for older adults, but to certain older caregivers who provide care for non-biological children, related to the caregiver by blood, marriage or adoption and who reside with the caregiver, or for adults with a disability who reside with the caregiver. The reimbursement amount was increased from a maximum of \$200 per month to a maximum of \$600 per month.

At the federal level, the Older Americans Act of 1965 ("Older Americans Act") had been amended the prior year, effective March 25, 2020, to remove limits on state spending from federal fund allocations for grandparent or older relative caregivers. Coupled with the Caregiver Support Act amendments, the Pennsylvania Caregiver Support Program, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging, is now able to offer increased support to a broader range of caregivers.

Eligible Caregivers

Presently, there are three eligible categories of caregivers:

- A caregiver, age 18 or older, providing care to: 1) an individual age 60 and older with functional deficits or 2) an individual of any age with Alzheimer's or a related disorder; or