

Personal Care Assistants: Getting the Help You Need

What is a Personal Care Assistant (PCA)?

Personal Care Assistants (PCA) assist individuals with disabilities with performing activities of daily living, such as dressing, bathing, eating, and moving around. A PCA must be at least 18 years old (some special circumstances if 16 or 17 years old) and must pass a criminal background check and an online training course. They are hired by an agency and must be able to communicate effectively with the child, family, and agency they are working for. Once these steps are done, they must enroll with Department of Human Services as a PCA provider. The agency will provide a treatment plan and a qualified professional who will supervise the PCA. The PCA is responsible for keeping notes and filling out time sheets and forms for the agency.

How do I get PCA coverage for my child?

If your child is on MA, PCA services can be obtained through your managed care insurance company if they meet the criteria. In this circumstance, you would contact your insurance company and request an evaluation for PCA services. If your child is not on MA, they must enroll in either MA for disabilities or TEFRA. This process has been described in detail on our website and in other handouts. To start the process, you can call your local county office and request a MnCHOICES Assessment. Your child must be certified as disabled and meet the eligibility criteria for PCA. It is possible for children to be certified as disabled but not qualify for PCA services.

How will my child be assessed for PCA services?

PCA assessment is based on dependence in activities of daily living (ADLs). These include dressing, bathing, toileting, feeding, mobility, transfers, and grooming. Toileting, feeding, bathing, and transferring are considered critical ADLs and awarded extra time. Children can also be given additional time for Level 1 behaviors, defined as putting themselves, others, or property at risk. Other factors taken into consideration during the assessment include medical needs such as wound care, tube feeding, IV therapy, respiratory interventions, catheter, bowel program, neurological interventions such as seizures, and other congenital or acquired diseases.

For behaviors that occur at least four times a week, additional minutes can be added for physical aggression toward self or others; property destruction; vulnerability due to cognitive deficits or socially inappropriate behavior; and verbal aggression with resistance to care.

How can I advocate to receive PCA hours for my child?

Some of the criteria for PCA services are black and white. If your child has a feeding tube or an open wound, it simply needs to be recorded on the questionnaire by the assessor. For ADLs, it is sometimes obvious that a child, given their disability, may not be able to perform a task. In other situations, behaviors may prevent the child from performing the task independently. In these circumstances, the standard that the assessor is looking for is that the child requires “hands-on assistance” or “constant continuous cues” to complete a task. It is important to think about how your child performs most of the time and on their most difficult days. For instance, if they have sensory issues to food or clothes, and it takes a significant amount of time for them to get dressed or to complete a meal because they need constant encouragement or assistance, that will only be noted if you provide that level of detail in your response.

How old must my child be to qualify for PCA services?

At birth, all children are 100% dependent on their parents for their needs. PCA services are based on ADLs and other needs described above. During the assessment, your child will be compared to children their same age. When there is medical complexity or obvious physical abnormalities, the differences should be clear. For children with behavioral challenges who otherwise have typical physical development, it is often very difficult to obtain services before the age of five, as the differences noted during an assessment may be very difficult to discern. For example, a typical three year old may still need assistance with toileting or bathing.

How can I use my PCA hours?

PCA hours are flexible and the total number of hours within a six-month period can be used in the way that best meets your needs: daily after school, on weekends, or saved for use during summer or winter breaks.

What is the role of a PCA agency, and must I hire one?

Once you've been approved for PCA services and received notification of the amount of PCA time your child qualifies for, you are required to hire an agency. The agency provides payroll services to the PCA and some training. They will also develop a service plan for your child that defines their needs and describes services the PCA will provide. Agencies are "specialized" into two different kinds of services, straight PCA or PCA Choice.

What services can a PCA provide my child?

PCA services will be directed by the service plan from the agency. They will be able to assist with ADLs, perform health-related tasks, and redirect behaviors. They can participate in activities within the community, but they are not hired to be childcare providers or babysitters. They are not allowed to take care of other children in the home, unless they are hired as a "shared PCA" for another child with disabilities. They are not allowed to use restraints, perform home maintenance chores, or make any medical decisions. They are also not allowed to perform injections of medications or other sterile procedures.

Can I as a parent provide PCA care for my child and get paid?

The short answer is YES! If your child is on a waiver, this can be done through Consumer Directed Community Support (CDCS), but technically this is a different program from PCA and has its own set of rules. Parents can work up to 40 hours per week providing PCA-like services. There must be at least one ADL dependency, and an intermediary Financial Management Service hired to handle payroll.

If a family is on straight MA (not a managed care plan), they can write a Consumer Support Grant (CSG) and use those funds to be parent providers. Generally, CSG provides a limited amount of money. Children on a managed care plan who receive PCA services through their insurance company cannot have a parent provider.

Can other family members provide PCA services?

YES, family members can apply to an agency and enroll as a PCA through DHS, after completing testing and a background check.

For more information:

PACER's Health Information Center: [PACER.org/health/mnpca.asp](https://www.pacer.org/health/mnpca.asp)

Minnesota Department of Human Services – Personal Care Assistant Program Manual

https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectonMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=pca_home

Minnesota Department of Human Services – PCA Consumer Information

<https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/people-with-disabilities/services/home-community/programs-and-services/pca.jsp>