

# Personal Care Assistant



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**What are PCA services?** Personal Care Assistance (PCA) services are in-home services that help people with critical activities of daily living. PCA services help children and adults with disabilities, including those with mental illnesses, live independently or in their family home.

**How are PCA services funded?** PCA services are funded through Medical Assistance and the MinnesotaCare Expanded Benefit Set (pregnant women and children under 21).

**Who Uses PCA Services?** PCA services are available to children and adults who have a serious mental illness, physical disability or chronic illness that impairs their ability to manage basic tasks. To qualify for PCA services, a person must meet the following criteria:

- Eligible for Medical Assistance or MinnesotaCare Expanded Benefit Set;
- Have a stable medical condition;
- Have medical need for PCA services as determined by a doctor;
- Live in their own home, not in a hospital or other inpatient setting; and
- Need PCA services to live in the community.

**Why are PCA services important?** PCA services help children and adults with mental illnesses go about their daily routine and live relatively independent lives in their own homes. For some people living with a mental illness, their condition can seriously disrupt their day-to-day lives. Adults with serious mental illnesses may need assistance or cuing for day-to-day tasks such as grooming, dressing, meal planning, money management, shopping for essentials and basic household chores. For children with serious mental illnesses, PCA services help ensure they don't harm themselves or others and provide guidance with everyday activities like grooming and homework. PCA services are a crucial component of the larger support structure for children and adults with serious mental illnesses. PCA services are sometimes provided in conjunction with other community-based services such as Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS) or Children's Therapeutic Services and Supports (CTSS). However, these programs are focused on skill-building. PCA services compliment other services by offering daily support and assistance at home that can help a person sustain their recovery. PCA services also offer a great deal of flexibility. People receiving PCA services have the option to designate someone they know and trust to serve as their PCA. This allows people to select PCAs from their own culture and who speak their language.

In 2009, severe cuts were made to the PCA program. Beginning July 1, 2011, around 2,000 people will lose their PCA services. People who receive PCA services to help with one activity of daily living (grooming, dressing, cooking, etc.) and/or those who have a level-one (aggression, destroying property, etc.) will no longer be eligible for the program. These changes will primarily impact people from communities of color, children and young adults and people living with mental illnesses. Of the people who will lose PCA services, approximately half are people of color, 55% are younger than 23 and 64% live with a mental illness. NAMI Minnesota recently surveyed families in Ramsey County about how the loss of PCA services would impact their lives. Many of the families surveyed have loved ones with very serious needs. Nearly 45% of the respondents began receiving PCA services because their family member had been hospitalized or had experienced a mental health crisis. Another 24% sought out PCA services because the family could no longer adequately care for the person by themselves. Additionally, almost half of the families surveyed said their loved one used PCA services to address both level-one behaviors *and* to assist with one activity of daily living. The survey also revealed the

devastating impact losing PCA services would have on the families who rely on these services. Of the families who responded, 46% reported that they would be forced to place their family member in residential treatment, 21% said their family member would be placed in a nursing home and another 13% would have to place their loved one in foster care. Equally concerning, 37% said someone in the family would have to cut back their hours at work and 33% said they would need to quit their job in order to care for their loved one. It is vital that children and adults with serious mental illnesses be able to access PCA services. Without these services, many children and adults with serious mental illnesses will end up in residential treatment and hospital settings, at a much higher cost. PCA services are essential to the health and wellbeing of thousands who live with a serious mental illness and their families.

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