

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) Program

Revised 6/13/12

Q: What is the PCA program?

A: The PCA program is a consumer controlled and directed Masshealth funded program that allows eligible persons with disabilities hire others to assist them with daily living tasks for an approved amount of time each week and Masshealth will cover the costs for that time.

Q: Who is eligible for the PCA program?

A: A person with a chronic or permanent disability that has either Masshealth Standard or Commonhealth. They must also require physical assistance with at least two activities of daily living. Activities of daily living include mobility/transfers, medication administration, bathing/grooming, dressing/undressing, range of motion, eating, or bladder/bowel care. There are no age restrictions to be eligible for the PCA program.

Q: Who can be a PCA?

A: Anyone can be a PCA that is legally of age and eligible to work in the country and that is not a spouse, legal guardian, or PCA surrogate. Family members can also be PCAs. This includes adult children for a parent who has a disability, or a parent for an adult child with a disability, so as long as the PCA is not the legal guardian of the PCA consumer.

Q: How much PCA time can a consumer receive?

A: NILP's nurse will conduct an evaluation on the consumer and make a request for the amount of time she feels is appropriate. NILP will send that request to Masshealth for final approval. Masshealth frequently adjusts the amount of time our nurse requests and in more rare cases, denies the consumer for the PCA program if they do not believe them to require the need for it.

Q: Can I appeal Masshealth's decision if my application for the PCA program is denied?

A: Yes, when you receive your decision letter stating that you were denied for the program or if your PCA hours were modified from what NILP requested, it will contain instructions on how to appeal Masshealth's decision. A PCA Skills Trainer can assist you with requesting an appeal.

Q: Can someone receive PCA hours for cueing or supervision?

A: No, PCA time is only approved for actual physical assistance. For instance, if a consumer needs assistance with showering, Masshealth will only approve for the time it takes to transfer in and out of a shower and any time they need physical assistance while in the shower. There will be no PCA time approved for the time that a PCA is supervising the consumer while in the shower.

Q: How long does it take for a consumer to be approved for PCA services?

A: Generally, from the time a skills trainer meets with the consumer for a PCA intake to the time of Masshealth's approval is about 5-6 weeks. If a consumer is in a nursing facility and being discharged, we are usually able to get an expedited approval for PCA services in those situations.

Q: Who hires my PCA and sets the schedule?

A: The PCA consumer or their PCA surrogate manages the program. They find and hire the PCAs themselves and can set the schedule however they wish according to the amount of time Masshealth has approved them for.

Q: What if a consumer cannot manage the PCA program on their own? Can they still be on the PCA program?

A: Yes, if a consumer can identify a responsible person to act as their "surrogate," they can have that person manage the PCA program for them. Again, a surrogate cannot also be their PCA.

Q: Where can I find a PCA?

A: There is a PCA directory called www.mass.gov/findpca that consumers have had luck finding PCAs on. Newspaper ads, contacting local colleges, and help wanted ads are also good ideas. A Skills Trainer will *assist* the consumer if they are having difficulties with the PCA search. As a policy, skills trainers cannot refer or direct you to specific PCAs.

Q: Is the PCA required to have any type of license or training?

A: No, a PCA just needs to be willing to assist the consumer with their daily living tasks. However, if a consumer wants to require that their PCA be trained or experienced in the field, they can choose to do so.

Q: Does a PCA work for NILP or Stavros?

A: A PCA does not work for NILP or Stavros. The PCA works for the consumer themselves. It is very important for the consumer to understand that they will be the employer and manage their program themselves and not an agency or Masshealth.

Q: How does a PCA get paid?

A: The PCA employer (consumer) or surrogate fills out time sheets every two weeks and will send or fax them into Stavros Fiscal Intermediary in Amherst. Stavros will process the payroll and usually get the PCA's check back to the consumer within a week. The check will be sent to the consumer's address but in the PCA's name. A PCA can also have direct deposit if they wish.

Q: How much does a PCA get paid?

A: The current rate of pay for a PCA is \$12.48 per hour. Since PCA's are now unionized, there are union dues deducted from the PCA's paycheck. How much is deducted depends upon several factors including whether the PCA voted to be included in the union and whether the PCA works for more than one consumer and how many hours they work.

Q: Does a PCA have to pay taxes on their PCA income and who handles the employer taxes?

A: Yes, a personal care attendant is an actual job and must pay the appropriate taxes as they would for any other job they had. Stavros Fiscal Intermediary, if the consumer chooses, will handle all of the payroll processing and be responsible for the employer taxes.