

Personal Care Services and Medicaid

A “Did You Know? Now You Know!” Fact Sheet

What are personal care services?

Personal care services assist a child, youth or adult with daily activities. The services allow him or her to live well and safely within the community. Personal care services include but are not limited to assistance with:

- Feeding
- Toileting
- Bathing
- Dressing
- Light housekeeping
- Laundry
- Meal preparation

There are Medicaid rules for personal care services. For example, the child or adult must need the services for medical reasons. Medicaid must certify agencies before they provide services. Medicaid must approve a family’s plan of care before services begin. The approval is called “prior authorization.”

How do I get personal care services for my child?

- First, you need a prescription. A prescription is a “written order.” Your child’s primary care doctor or other doctor will write the prescription.
- Second, you need to work with a home health-care agency, a personal care agency, or the Independent Living Center (ILC) in your community. Need a list of agencies that work with children? Contact your county’s department of human services or Wisconsin First Step at 1-800-642-7837.

Now, let’s say that you have picked an agency. Agencies will use a tool — called the “functional screen” — to decide if services are needed and, if so, how many hours of services per day your child may receive. If your child qualifies for services, the agency will introduce you to a representative to work with; sometimes this person is a nurse.

You and the agency representative will create a “plan of care.” This plan is based on your child’s needs. This plan will state the type and amount of assistance for your child. The agency regularly reviews the plan of care. The plan may change if your child’s medical condition changes. The plan of care also may change if your child’s ability to function changes.

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Who provides personal care services?

Medicaid approves agencies to employ personal care workers. The agencies contract with personal care workers. Registered nurses train and supervise personal care workers.

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Your family may use a personal care worker who is an employee of a home health-care agency. You also may request that someone become an employee of an agency so that they can work as a personal care worker for your child. In addition, a parent may become a personal care worker for his or her child once the child reaches the age of 18 years.

Is “personal care” the same as “respite”?

No. Services are not designed to provide “time off” - or respite- for the child’s parents or other caregivers. A personal care worker is paid only for working directly with the child receiving services. Personal care, though, probably will provide great help to the family.

Must services be in the home?

Yes. Medicaid requires that the child or adult receives personal care services in his or her home.

What if I have more questions about personal care?

Let’s say your county human services department was not able to help you find an agency. Yet, your child still needs services. You can contact the Regional Centers for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN). The Wisconsin First Step Hotline will provide information for the Center in your region. Call them toll-free at 1-800-642-7837.

What if I get stuck getting personal care for my child?

- *“The agency says it doesn’t provide personal care services.”*
This might mean that the agency is too busy. Or, it is not able to help more families. Talk with your Regional Center for CYSHCN for more ideas.
- *“The agency says it doesn’t serve children. Medicaid doesn’t cover children.”*
This is not true. Medicaid does provide personal care services for children. However, this agency might not accept children as clients. Personal care agencies are private businesses and can decide who to serve. Talk with your Regional Center for more ideas.
- *“The agency says very young children are not eligible to receive services.”*
This is not true. But, it is harder to receive services for very young children. Why? Because parents typically provide daily care for their young children. If you have a young child who would benefit from services, you will need to clearly explain why he or she needs assistance, compared with other children of the same age.
- *“The agency says a parent must be home when services are delivered.”*
This is not a Medicaid rule. This might, however, be an agency rule. Talk with the agency to learn about its policies.