

## What does a Caregiver do?



The need for a caregiver can occur unexpectedly, after an accident, a major life event, or illness that leaves a person in clear need of assistance. The need for a caregiver can also occur more slowly, over time, and can be harder to recognize. When an individual's ability to take care of him/herself gradually decreases, individuals can find themselves wondering how they can remain independent. A caregiver can make a significant difference in the quality of life for people in need of temporary and long term assistance.

### 1. Who can be a caregiver?

Caregivers can be family members, partners or friends caring for an elder or a person with a disability. Caregivers can also be professionals you hire to provide skilled care, home care, companionship and other services, wherever the elder or person with a disability lives.

### 2. What does a caregiver do?

Caregivers provide assistance with personal care such as bathing and dressing; help with things like cooking, shopping, laundry, housekeeping, transportation; companionship; social support; and managing schedules and appointments.

### 3. What's the difference between a family caregiver and a professional caregiver?

Family caregivers often take on the role of caregiver because of a desire to keep a loved one at home who may not otherwise be able to live at home independently. Family caregivers provide care based on love and respect for their loved one. They learn about their loved one's care needs as they go. Family caregivers may or may not be paid depending on the program eligibility. Professional caregivers are trained in how to provide care to someone who needs assistance and are paid for their services. Professional caregivers can and do also develop loving and respectful relationships with the person they care for.

### 4. When should a person or family consider a professional caregiver?

A family member may not always be available to provide care to someone who needs it. Or the person receiving care may not want to receive care from family due to a desire to maintain privacy or independence, or feeling like they don't want to burden family. Additionally, sometimes a person's care needs are greater than a family member can manage. In these instances, a professional caregiver might be the right choice.

### 5. Do caregivers make health care decisions for the person they are caring for?

A caregiver has decision making authority if named as the person's Health Care Agent AND the attending physician makes a medical determination that the person does not have the ability to make health care decisions and enters that finding into the medical record. A caregiver may also have decision making authority for the person they are caring for when appointed as the Guardian by a Judge in a court hearing. Otherwise the person retains his/her rights to make all health care decisions.

### 6. How does a caregiver work with a Health Care Agent, family members, and doctors?

Caregivers should think of those involved with their loved one's care as part of a care team. Provided the person receiving care has authorized sharing of information with family members and doctors, there should be collaboration across the team so that everyone is on the same page and communication is happening regularly. All members of the team may be able to contribute to decision making about care and plans for the future. The person receiving care is the ultimate decision maker about his/her own care needs and future care planning.

### 7. Where can I find a professional caregiver?

There are various public and private agencies in every community in Massachusetts that provide professional caregiving services. While this is good news because there are many resources available, knowing where to start or how to find the right service can be overwhelming. A good place to start is to ask your health care provider. The social worker or case manager in your doctor's office or clinic may be able to recommend good organizations in your area. MassOptions ([massoptions.org](http://massoptions.org)) is a free resource for Massachusetts residents designed to link elders, individuals with disabilities, caregivers, and family members to services that help support independent living in all settings. Assistance is targeted at helping people in need of a caregiver to find the right service and agency without having to make numerous phone calls.

### 8. How do I pay for a professional caregiver?

Some professional caregiving services such as skilled nursing and therapy services provided by home health care agencies or in skilled nursing facilities can be covered by health insurance or long term care insurance, but some professional caregiving services are not covered by insurance and require individuals to pay out of pocket. A call to the health or long term care insurance provider is an important thing to do before deciding on which professional caregiving service to use. Utilizing MassOptions to help understand which programs you may be eligible for is also recommended.

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#### About Caregiver Homes of Massachusetts:

"Since 2005, Caregiver Homes of Massachusetts' community-based program has helped families provide high-quality, 24-hour care at home for elders and people with disabilities in need of physical care and assistance. We help make it possible for a family member or friend to become the primary in-home caregiver by providing them with the support and financial assistance they need. In Massachusetts, our Structured Family Caregiving model is known as Enhanced Adult Foster Care." To learn more about Caregiver Homes of Massachusetts, please visit [www.caregiverhomes.com](http://www.caregiverhomes.com)