



Senior Services

Today there are many services designed to help older adults live more comfortably. This guide describes some basic services provided inside or outside the home that can aid seniors who live at home or with a caregiver.

Chore/Home Maintenance Services

Chore/maintenance workers perform tasks such as heavy cleaning (e.g., scrubbing floors and walls, hauling trash, washing windows), home repairs or maintenance (e.g., installing grab bars in the bathroom or handrails in the hallway) and yard work. Contact social service agencies, senior centers or religious organizations to find out if they offer these services, or check the Yellow Pages of your telephone directory. Before hiring anybody, find out what other people are paying for the same services and ask for references. Community volunteers may also be willing to help for free and some states may grant Medicaid waivers that pay for non-medical services (such as installment of grab bars) deemed necessary for Medicaid recipients.

Medicaid's home and community-based services waiver program (established in 1981 in some states) is designed to provide flexibility to use Medicaid funds to cover some supportive services (e.g., personal care, housekeeping, companionship, emergency response systems, meal delivery, home modifications, special equipment and respite care) previously not covered by Medicaid. If you or a loved one is currently receiving Medicaid, check with your state Medicaid office to find out if the waiver program is in effect in your state.

80-year-old Ed no longer drives because his vision is failing and he has difficulty moving without the aid of a walker. "I'm still fairly independent," explains Ed, "and I'm not ready to move out of my home but I could use some occasional help with transportation, meal preparation and housekeeping. Do you know of any services that can help?"

Grocery Delivery Services

Some grocery stores will deliver groceries to a person's home for a fee. Ask grocery stores in your area if they offer these services and at what rates. Many stores require minimum orders of approximately \$25, plus delivery fees (which are typically \$10-\$15). If you become a regular shop-from-home customer, some grocery delivery services may offer an annual membership fee and reduced delivery charges. Today, there are also grocery stores on the Internet that allow you to fill out a shopping list online and have your groceries delivered to your home for a fee. If the services are cost prohibitive, ask friends, neighbors or community volunteers if they can help with grocery shopping from time to time.

Home-Delivered Meals

Home-delivered meal programs offer an affordable solution to individuals who are too frail, ill or disabled to buy food or prepare meals for themselves. Volunteers deliver one or two nutritionally sound meals five or more days a week. Fees are usually determined according to an individual's financial situation, and many seniors receive this service for free.

Home-delivered meals help eliminate two common health risks among older people who live alone: malnutrition and dehydration. The programs also provide the homebound person an opportunity to socialize, even if only briefly, with the person who delivers the meal. Better yet,



most volunteers are trained to report back to the office if they suspect a problem with the meal recipient (if, for example, the person doesn't answer the door or seems ill). In this sense, home-delivered meal services can act as an extra safety measure. *Note*—If you or a loved one has special dietary needs, ask ahead of time if those needs can be accommodated.

Telephone Reassurance Services

Telephone reassurance services link a homebound person with the outside world via regular, pre-scheduled telephone calls. These services provide limited social interaction and, more importantly, an element of protection for people who live alone. For example, if the homebound person fails to answer the telephone at a pre-scheduled time, the caller implements a backup plan, notifying a family member, social service unit, or the police to check on the individual. Some telephone reassurance services will also provide reminder calls and/or wake-up calls.

These services are usually staffed by volunteers and are typically free or low cost. You may also set up your own telephone reassurance system whereby a friend or family member agrees to call at a specified time each day.

Visitor Services

Volunteers in visitor service programs visit homebound adults at pre-scheduled times to talk to, or engage in activities with, the participant. Volunteers are matched to the participants' needs, interests and location. The volunteer and the participant determine their own schedule regarding the frequency and duration of visits. A typical visit is one to two hours. These services provide an element of social interaction and a measure of safety and are typically free of charge.

The federal Administration on Aging provides general supervision to state Aging Offices as well as Area Agencies on Aging throughout the United States. These organizations can provide a wealth of information on supportive services. Additionally, most states maintain a toll-free hotline for information on state and federal programs for the aging—and many will send you free pamphlets on services offered within the state.

E-Mail Services

E-mail allows individuals to send and receive messages using a computer and the Internet. These services provide an element of social interaction; people can use e-mail to stay connected with friends and family, regardless of time and distance. Users can also send attachments, including documents, images, audio and video files and more.

Standard e-mail requires a computer and an Internet connection. Cost for purchasing a computer varies, depending on what you choose. A monthly service fee for Internet access applies thereafter. Setting up an e-mail account is usually free, and can be done through your Internet Service Provider. Many of the major Internet companies, such as Google, Yahoo, and Hotmail, also provide free e-mail services. If you are purchasing a computer for a loved one, you will likely have to show him or her how to use it.

Systems are available that allow people send and receive e-mail without a computer or Internet connection. These can be a good option for people who don't have a computer or who are uncomfortable with the technology. Generally a one-time fee is charged for the equipment and a monthly service fee applies thereafter.

Videoconferencing Systems

Videoconferencing systems use cameras connected to the Internet to allow individuals to interact via two-way video and audio transmissions. They have become a popular option for loved ones to stay connected long-distance. Options range from adding webcams and free web videoteleconferencing services/software to an existing computer to purchasing a videoconferencing system. Some videoconferencing systems are specifically designed for older adults and incorporate additional options allowing users to send photos and messages, and set up reminders that initiate audio alerts or require a response. There are also services designed for use by individuals with no, or minimal, computer skills that allow users to initiate videoconferences and adjust settings (picture, volume, etc.) remotely.

If you are purchasing one of these systems for a loved one, you may have to show him or her how to use it. Cost can vary considerably, depending on what options are chosen. In most cases there will be a start-up cost for equipment and/or installation and a monthly fee for service and Internet access.

Medication Management Systems

Medication management systems help older adults manage their medications safely and effectively. These include medication reminder systems as well as systems that combine reminders with medication storage and organization.

Telephonic reminder services call individuals to remind them to take their medications. These services also provide an element of security. If the person doesn't answer the phone or acknowledge the reminder, the caller notifies a designated contact. Electronic reminder services send reminders to a pager, computer, or Personal Digital Assistant (PDA).

Medication reminder software can be installed on a computer, PDA or cellphone to send alerts to take medication. Some of these programs allow can incorporate information on medication information and history and can manage complicated medication schedules.

Some emergency response systems include programmable medication reminders. If you are considering, or have purchased, an emergency response system ask if the company offers, or plans to offer, medication reminder services.

Electronic pillboxes integrate medication reminders into medication storage and organization. The pillboxes use alarms, lights, text and voice messages to remind users to take medication. Some can be programmed to dispense medication at specific times and require an acknowledgement that medication has been taken. Others include sensors that link to the Internet and allow the pillbox to be monitored remotely to track use and alert a call center or designated person if the pillbox is not opened at a certain time.

Costs for medication reminder systems can vary widely. Some insurance policies will not cover the cost of certain systems, check with your insurer to determine what coverage may be available. If you are purchasing one of these for a loved one, you may have to show him or her how to use it. Some systems may require a professional caregiver to do the loading and programming.

If you are unable to investigate care options for yourself or a loved one, or need more help, consider privately hiring a professional care manager, also known as a geriatric social worker. These professionals can assess an individual's situation, prepare a care plan, and provide supervision and monitoring services as necessary. A good professional care manager will work to keep an individual in the least restrictive environment for as long as possible while also anticipating future needs and preventing crisis situations.

Emergency Response Systems

Emergency response systems (ERS), also known as personal emergency response systems (PERS), are radio frequency transmitters worn by a senior (as a necklace, bracelet or attached to a belt) that enable him or her to signal for emergency help by pressing a button. When the emergency button is pushed, a signal is broadcast to a base unit in the wearer's home, which then sends the signal to a monitoring agency or emergency service such as a hospital, police station, physician, fire department (depending on the system). Some emergency response systems also include programmable medication reminders.

Typically, the receiver is provided with pertinent, pre-registered information about the sender (e.g., address, telephone number, medications, ailments, etc.), and responds by calling the sender or another designated person to check on him or her. Some services automatically send emergency help but since "false alarms" occur frequently, most services first attempt to make contact with the individual or a neighbor, friend or relative. Keep in mind that some services may charge a fee for "false alarms" so use these systems with caution.

The cost of emergency response systems varies, but typically a one-time fee is charged for the transmitter and a monthly service fee applies thereafter. Most insurance policies, including Medicare, do not cover the cost of these systems, however, some states allow Medicaid waivers for eligible Medicaid recipients. Check with your insurance provider to determine whether these systems are included in your coverage.

Before purchasing an emergency response system, ask the following questions:

- Who receives the call when the emergency button is pressed?
- What action is taken once the receiver is notified of an emergency?
- How much is the up-front fee?

- How much is the monthly fee?
- How much will it cost to replace the unit if it breaks?
- Is the unit waterproof?
- What happens if an emergency call is accidentally triggered?
- Are there any fees charged for "false alarms?"
- How difficult is the system to use?

Be sure to get a demonstration of any device you are considering. If you are purchasing a system for a loved one, show him or her how to use it, and periodically have him or her practice using the system. *Note*—An emergency response system may not be for everyone. Check with your doctor before purchasing such a system.

Tracking Systems

Ankle or wrist bracelets worn by your loved one can track his or her whereabouts based on predetermined limits, and provide a notification or sound an alarm when he or she goes out of range. For example, a limit of 50 feet and three minutes may give your loved one the freedom to move around the house and yard. But if he or she goes out of range (out to the street, for example) for more than three minutes—the base unit (kept in a central location in the house or worn on the wrist or ankle) sounds an alarm. Some systems will send alerts to caregivers via e-mail, text message, pager, fax or telephone calls, or will automatically notify the police or fire department. Rental units range from \$30 a month (if the alarm sounds in the caregiver's house) to \$80 a month or more (if the alarm alerts the police). Less expensive alternatives may be found at an electronics store.

Residential Monitoring

Residential monitoring uses a series of sensors placed strategically throughout an individual's residence to monitor activities

such as sleep and wake times, toilet habits, opening cabinets (to indicate medication is being taken or food is being prepared), room temperatures, etc. The data is transmitted to a monitoring company where pattern recognition programs identify behavior patterns and report on atypical activity. Activity data can usually be accessed remotely by caregivers and loved ones via secure web site.

Significant deviations, such as no movement in the residence approximate to the individual's usual wake time, or pre-determined conditions, such as the temperature in the home exceeding a designated range, trigger an alert to designated caregivers via e-mail, text message, pager, fax or phone. Depending on the system and level of service chosen, data may also be monitored by call center personnel who, if an alert is transmitted, will contact the individual to determine if he or she is alright, summon emergency personnel if needed, and contact designated caregivers.

In addition to monitoring status and ensuring safety, these systems can provide an early warning system by highlighting changes in activity—such as frequent nighttime trips to the bathroom—that may indicate a problem.

These services often include traditional home security elements such as door and window alarms, and smoke, fire, water and carbon monoxide detectors. Additional equipment such as cameras, fall detectors, bed sensors, appliance usage monitors, telephone call logs, emergency response transmitters, telehealth equipment and other options can be integrated into the system.

The cost of residential monitoring systems varies, but typically a one-time fee is charged for installation and a monthly service fee applies thereafter. Most insurance policies, including Medicare, do not cover the cost of these systems.

Transportation Services

Transportation services provide scheduled pick-ups and drop-offs to and from a particular destination. Private escort services provide transportation plus an escort who stays with the person at all times. Vans, mini-buses and taxis are usually provided for this purpose, and most are handicapped-accessible. (If you or your loved one require special provisions, ask if they can be accommodated.)

Since there is such a broad array of options from state to state, costs vary, but private escort services are typically more expensive than transportation services. Some transportation services for the elderly or disabled are subsidized by the state or federal government, and are available at either low or no cost. Given the demand for these services, however, some may require a physician's note and/or restrict transportation to doctor visits only, or to travel within a certain radius. Private-pay services are typically more expensive and will accommodate most transportation needs. Almost all transportation/escort services require advance notice or reservations.

Homemakers/Companions

Homemakers, commonly called companions, provide assistance to the elderly (usually homebound individuals who don't need hands-on medical care or assistance). Homemakers typically help with house cleaning, meal preparation, shopping, or simply provide companionship by taking walks, playing cards or socializing with an older adult. Although not a mandated service, many state Aging Offices offer homemaker services at low or no cost.

Senior Centers

Senior centers, which exist in most communities, can provide a place for seniors to emotionally recharge, make new friends and learn new skills. While services vary from center to center, approximately 75 percent of senior centers are defined by the federal Administration on Aging as “multi-purpose senior centers”—meaning they provide health, nutritional, educational, social and recreational activities specifically for adults aged 65 and older.

Senior center services may include:

- Educational opportunities (e.g., discussion groups, guest speakers, etc.)
- Health and wellness screenings and programs
- Social activities (e.g., bingo, dancing, music and card games)
- Therapeutic activities (e.g., art and music therapy)
- Meals and nutrition programs
- Transportation services
- Support groups/workshops
- Day trips
- Exposure to current events

Most services are free to seniors, although fees may be charged for special trips, dinners or other functions.

Helpful Resources

Community Transportation Association of America

National Transit Hotline: 800-891-0590
www.ctaa.org

The National Transit Hotline provides free information about how to locate community transportation services in your area.

Eldercare Locator Hotline

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
927 15th Street N.W., Sixth Floor
Washington, DC 20005
800-677-1116
202-296-8130
www.eldercare.gov

This nationwide service refers people to state and local organizations on aging. It is a public service of the United States Administration on Aging, administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (NAAAA) and the National State Units on Aging. The NAAAA web site listed above can link you to the Eldercare Hotline or you may call toll-free.

National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers

1604 N. Country Club Road
Tucson, AZ 85716
520-881-8008
www.caremanager.org

This organization can provide referrals to geriatric care managers nationwide who are members of this association.

National Council on Aging (NCOA)

300 D Street, S.W., Suite 801

Washington, DC 20024

202-479-1200

800-424-9046

www.ncoa.org

This organization can provide general information about aging and housing options—and referrals to local services and programs for elder care, including advocacy services and training programs for older workers. This web site also has a national listing of adult day care programs.

Meals on Wheels Association of America

203 Union Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

703-548-5558

www.mowaa.org

This organization, sponsors local Meals on Wheels programs, which deliver hot meals to home-bound elderly people. Visit the web site to find out about programs in your area.

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