



## TRI-VALLEY Help-line

January 2008

Tri-Valley receives many questions from area seniors, younger people with disabilities and caregivers and has created this monthly Help-line column to provide some assistance. We are also available five days a week to answer individual questions.

### The Secret PCA Program

**Q:** A friend of mine has a PCA? What is that?

**A:** The Personal Care Attendant (PCA) program is one of the best kept secrets in the state. The PCA program is for people on MassHealth (Medicaid) who have a chronic disability that requires them to have help living independently at home. Someone who needs help with two or more supports--like bathing and dressing--would qualify. One of the unusual features of this program is that the individual with disabilities gets to hire the person who helps take care of them. This “attendant” can be a friend, or even a family member. However, spouses, legal guardians, and parents of minors are currently not allowed to be a paid PCA.

These workers are able to provide for a wide range of personal care needs, like eating, bathing, dressing, walking, taking medications, etc. They can also help with shopping, cooking and cleaning.

The consumer has the power to hire and fire their worker, but the details of payroll and taxes are handled by an outside agency. This program is especially good for someone who wants to play a direct role in selecting the person who will provide their personal care support at home.

We say this is a “secret” program, because of the total enrollment, only 1 in 4 consumers are over the age of 65. The PCA program has been around since the 1970s,

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but today there are only 15,000 people using this help—and less than 4,000 of them are seniors. As the program becomes better known, more elders are enrolling.

The MassHealth program pays for this service, and around \$265 million in salaries are paid to PCAs in the Commonwealth. Today there are 28 agencies that manage this program for consumers---but the service is available regardless of where you live in Massachusetts.

In the spring of 2006, the state allowed family members for the first time to become paid caregivers under the PCA program. Today, more than 2,000 family members are being paid to be personal care attendants.

One of the most significant changes in the PCA program came in early November, when it was announced that 94% of the 22,000 PCA home care workers had voted to form a union. The state currently pays personal care assistants \$10.84 an hour, with no benefits or health insurance coverage, and no sick days or vacation time. This means that PCA workers will now negotiate wages directly with the state. Higher wages and benefits should improve the availability of workers, and make it easier for the disabled to find someone to care for them.

Call Tri-Valley, (508) 949-6640, and ask about our Personal Care Attendant program. Tri-Valley continues to be ready to assist you with other questions through its free information & referral HELP-LINE at (508) 949-6640 or 1-800-286-6640. You may also access Tri-Valley by E-mail: [info@tves.org](mailto:info@tves.org) or visit the agency's new website at: [www.trivalleyinc.org](http://www.trivalleyinc.org)

Tri-Valley, Inc. is a private non-profit agency providing in-home and community based services in 25 Southern Worcester County towns. The agency receives funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Federal financial support under the Older Americans Act furnished by the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Funds are also received from other public and private sources. All donations are welcome and memorials may be established. Marilyn L. Travinski is the executive director.

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