

Family Caregiver Resource Guide

Where Do I Start?

It can be overwhelming to understand your options to provide care and to help your loved one (otherwise known as your “care partner”), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This guide can help you take a first step in ensuring the person you care for has the supports and services they need by helping guide you to available resources in your community.

The first place to start is **MassOptions**. MassOptions is a free state-sponsored resource that makes accessing community services and supports simple. It is specifically designed for people looking for help with aging and disability services. You can call, email or chat MassOptions to ensure that you and your care partner understand the options, make an informed choice, and decide on next steps together.



Call or chat online with a specialist Monday - Friday 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
(800) 243-4636
www.massoptions.org

When you call MassOptions, ask to speak to your local **Aging Services Access Point (ASAP)**, a non-profit elder care agency, so that you can speak with a specialist from the Family Caregiver Support Program. The **Family Caregiver Support Program** provides help to caregivers in a variety of ways – by sharing information and tips to help you navigate caregiving, suggesting local resources, providing respite care if you need a break, and lending a listening ear! Your Caregiver Specialist may explore the following options included in this guide (plus many more) to help you best support your care partner and yourself: **Home Care, Caregiver Support and Facility Care.**

Home Care Services

If your care partner can stay home, how do you arrange for services?

Home care services vary and can help with personal care (bathing, dressing, feeding) or supportive tasks to help someone maintain independence (grocery shopping, housekeeping). These services are provided through multiple sources, including the **State Home Care Program** (offered through the ASAP network) and private agencies. Finding the right providers and coordinating services can be daunting. Your ASAP and local Family Caregiver Support Program can help you understand your options.

Can you tell me more about the State Home Care Program?

The State Home Care Program provides care management and in-home support services to help eligible elders in Massachusetts successfully age in place. Eligibility for the Home Care Program is based on age, residence, income, and ability to carry out daily tasks such as bathing, dressing and meal preparation. There are six offerings within the State Home Care Program – some are open to all while others have specific eligibility requirements. Any older adult is eligible for a free in-home assessment and personalized package of information.



Caregiver Support & Self Care

Caregiving is a full-time job. How do you find time for you?

Taking care of yourself (getting enough sleep, eating healthfully, practicing self-care) is the best way you can help your care partner. Sometimes this seems easier said than done but remember—you are not alone. If you need help finding resources and support, the Massachusetts Family Caregiver Support Program can help you find information about support groups, memory cafés (a great community resource for someone living with Alzheimer’s and dementia), education and training programs, and other services. Many of these supports have been converted to virtual and online programming given the pandemic. Visit www.mass.gov/family-caregiver-support-program or call (800) 243-4636 and ask to speak with a Caregiver Specialist in your community to learn more.

Need a break? We all do!

Respite care brings temporary relief to primary caregivers – those who provide the highest levels of caregiving responsibility for their care partner. The purpose of respite is to allow the caregiver to rest, recharge, and remember that there is life beyond caregiving. Caregiver Specialists can help you find support services that are right for you and your family, often including services to provide care for your care partner while you recharge your batteries.

Remember, it’s okay to ask for help!

To find the courage to ask for help, understand that the quality of care you provide for someone else is directly impacted by the care you provide for yourself. Even when you are caring for someone who does not require extensive care, the job can be challenging. It is impossible to effectively care for another person without taking care of yourself. When you need assistance, know it is **okay to ask for help**.

While we might **normally reach out to family, friends, or neighbors** for help, they may not be as available during the pandemic due to social distancing -- we may need to get creative in how we engage them for help. For example, family members can still drop off prepared meals and leave them on your care partner’s doorstep though they should not come inside to eat with them. Remember, your loved ones often want to lend a helping hand, but they need your help in understanding their role and how they can be most helpful without “being a burden”. Generic offers to help are usually met with declines. Spend a few minutes thinking of who may be most helpful for what caregiving jobs so when people offer help, you are ready to start assigning tasks!

In addition, many local programs and non-profit organizations such as **Councils on Aging, otherwise known as COAs or Senior Centers**, are offering **free tele-friend services and virtual programming (e.g., chair yoga, book clubs)**, which may be an option to give yourself a break. Councils on Aging/ Senior Centers also have **Outreach Workers** that can assist you in finding appropriate resources right in your community. You can locate the COA in your city or town using the Massachusetts Council on Aging (MCOA) web-site <https://mcoaonline.com/> or by calling your Town Hall.



Facility Care

What can you do if you think your care partner needs more than in-home care?

Your Caregiver Specialist can help you explore options, and they may refer you to an **Options Counselor**, another resource available through your local ASAP. Options Counselors specialize in helping individuals assess and navigate transitions of care. You can work with these individuals to determine whether local nursing homes, assisted living facilities, independent living centers, or other group settings may be able to accept permanent or temporary stays. They can also help you decide what type of facility is right for your care partner and suggest questions to ask and criteria to research as you explore options.

- **Nursing Homes** are also referred to as "skilled" nursing facilities and offer comprehensive 24-hour supervision from nursing staff, who assist with daily living and medical care as needed.
- **Rest Homes** provide 24-hour supervision and supportive services for individuals who do not routinely need nursing or medical care. Rest homes provide housing, meals, activities, and administration of medications for individuals who need a supportive living arrangement.
- **Assisted Living Facilities** in Massachusetts provide housing and personal care services to residents. The personal care services include assistance with activities of daily living such as dressing, grooming, medication management, and in some communities, memory care.

As a caregiver, you know what services and supports your care partner needs. It is generally important to **tour facilities and interview staff** to ensure they provide the appropriate care. While it may not be possible to visit in person during the pandemic, the facility may offer alternatives such as **virtual tours, video-chats or conference calls**. Contact the facility directly to see how they can best accommodate you remotely. When you connect with the facility, it is helpful to have a **list of questions** or a **checklist** to ensure all of your care partner's needs will be met. It is also important to note that some facilities offer respite care – a temporary break – for family caregivers who would otherwise be with their care partner 24/7. While availability depends on each facility, many often accept 24-48 hour stays.

How can I learn more about these facilities?

Beyond consulting with ASAP staff, family caregivers can also do their own research online. Use the online resources below to research facilities in your desired area:

- **Nursing Homes** can be found using the Department of Public Health website. The site has an easy tool to find nursing homes by town. www.eohhs.ehs.state.ma.us/nursehome/default.aspx
- **Rest Homes** are not available on a specific state website. However, your Caregiver Specialist or Options Counselor should know of available rest homes in the area.
- **Assisted Living Facilities** can be found on the state's website. This site also has an easy locator tool. www.mass.gov/assisted-living

