



Pennsylvania
Department of Aging

The First 5 Steps

PA CareKit

Daniel and Maria's Story

Daniel is a retired teacher, and he has lived in the same home in Pennsylvania since he was a child. He is close with his neighbors, especially Maria, a longtime family friend.

Maria now lives alone. As she got older, Daniel noticed she was having trouble keeping up with household tasks, so he started helping with chores like taking out the trash and picking up her medications. Over the past year, Maria has become more forgetful and stopped enjoying activities she used to love, like baking. Sometimes, she even seems confused about who Daniel is, even though they have been friends for 50 years.

What started as small favors has become a bigger responsibility. After finding moldy food in her fridge, Daniel and his wife began bringing Maria groceries and meals several times a week. He is also worried about her money. Last month, someone pretending to be calling from Maria's bank tricked her, leading to fake charges on her debit card. Daniel spent hours helping her fix the issue. As Maria's needs grow, Daniel is worried she may soon need full-time care.

The PA CareKit offers several opportunities for Daniel. He could contact the local Area Agency on Aging, which could set Maria up with a care manager. The AAA could also help Daniel learn more about different in-home care options to explain them to Maria. Daniel could arrange for meals to be delivered to Maria by the AAA. Daniel and Maria could learn more about getting and checking



her credit reports and recognizing fraud and handling unexpected phone calls to avoid future scams. Caregiving is hard, but the PA CareKit offers resources and support to make it a little easier.



Step 1 | Understanding your Role

Before you begin, take time to reflect on your role as a caregiver.

- **What kind of support does the person you are caring for need?** Physical, emotional, financial, or a combination? Make a list.
- **What does your care receiver still know how to do without assistance, and what do you have to help them with?** What do you have to help them with? Write down tasks you're handling now.
- **What responsibilities will evolve over time?** Be prepared for your role to grow as needs change.
- **What motivated you to take on this responsibility?** Reflect on this commitment and acknowledge the importance of your role.
- **How has caregiving changed your relationship?** Take time to think about the changes and how those changes make you feel. Consider sharing them with the person you are caring for when appropriate.
- **What areas of caregiving feel most challenging or overwhelming for you?** Identify difficult activities, like lifting, giving medical care, or dealing with relationship changes. Then, prioritize tasks, seek help, or delegate responsibilities to others.
- **What aspects of caregiving feel rewarding to you?** Identify the positive moments that bring purpose to your caregiving journey.
- **What activities help you connect?** Engage in meaningful activities like listening to music, looking through photos, or doing simple crafts together.

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Step 2 Gather Information

Being informed will empower you to make decisions with confidence.

- **What does the person you are caring for value the most in this stage of their life?** Have a candid conversation about their priorities and wishes to learn what truly matters to them.
- **How can you best support their emotional and physical well-being?** Identify specific ways to meet their needs, such as encouraging hobbies, maintaining social connections, or addressing health and mobility challenges.
- **How do you simplify communication and handle misunderstandings?** Use short, clear sentences, maintain eye contact, and allow time for them to process and respond. Stay calm and redirect conversations rather than correcting or arguing.
- **Where can you learn more about dementia?** Seek reputable resources like the healthcare providers and specialists.
- **What benefits or financial aid are available?** Learn about their coverage details for Medicare, Medicaid, or private health coverage. Research public benefits that offer financial assistance.
- **What stage of dementia is the person you are caring for living with?** Learn about the progression of the disease to anticipate and adapt to their changing needs.
- **How does dementia affect their behavior?** Understand common symptoms like confusion, mood swings, or agitation to better respond with patience and empathy.

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Step 3 Strengthen the Support System

Caregiving is not a solo journey. Build a team to help.

- **Who can offer help?** List family, friends, neighbors, or others.
- **What kind of help can they offer?** Transportation, meal preparation, or companionship? Make a list.
- **When can they help?** Coordinate responsibilities.
- **Who can offer emotional support?** Identify friends, neighbors, or online support groups where you can share your experiences and feelings.
- **What information do you need from health providers?** Prepare a list of questions.
- **Are you communicating openly with your support system?** Hold regular family meetings to discuss challenges, share updates, and plan for the future.
- **What community or professional resources are available to you?** Research agencies that offer transportation, meal delivery, housekeeping, or companionship.
- **Do you know where to seek additional help?**



Contact the PA Link for Aging and Disability Resources by calling 800-753-8827 or email carelink@pa.gov. Learn more about the PA Link at pa.gov/PALink.

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Step 4 Make a Plan

Planning reduces stress and ensures no detail is overlooked, especially in an emergency.

- **What does a typical day look like for you and the person you are caring for?** Document daily activities like meals, hygiene, medications, and appointments.
- **How can you make daily activities more efficient?** Group similar tasks like meal prep. Try to multitask and automate things when you can. Plan ahead to cut down on stress and save time.
- **What are their long-term care needs?** Consider housing, mobility, and financial planning.
- **When are the next medical appointments?** Keep a calendar and attend with questions ready.
- **How do you prevent accidents in their living space?** Remove hazards, add grab bars, improve lighting, and use safety tools like alarms or locks to reduce risks.
- **How will the person you are caring for be supported in an emergency or if you are unavailable?** Create an emergency plan with contacts, medications, and procedures.
- **What are their wishes for their care in the future?** Document their preferences about medical care and end-of-life decisions.

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Take Care of Yourself

- **How do you manage stress?** Explore breathing exercises, hobbies, journaling or talking to a friend.
- **Are you eating healthy and exercising?** Simple changes like balanced meals and walks can make a difference.
- **Are you sleeping well?** Sleep is crucial for your mental and physical health.
- **Are you taking time for yourself?** Arrange for respite care or ask family members to step in so you can schedule time for hobbies and other activities that help you recharge.
- **What support do you need to feel balanced?** Explore counseling, support groups, or talking with a trusted friend to share your experiences.
- **Do you know where to seek additional help?** Connect with caregiver support groups, counseling services, or local respite care providers if you feel overwhelmed. Look into the Caregiver Support Program for additional help.
- **Are you celebrating your successes?** Recognize and reward yourself for the hard work you do, balancing caregiving with personal growth.

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Resources for Caregivers

Local Area Agencies on Aging: Your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is the front door for aging services in your community. Your AAA is staffed with skilled workers who can provide information about services and also help in getting access to those services. Find your local AAA at pa.gov/aging/AAA.

Adult Day Centers: Adult Day Centers (ADC) provide a safe and supervised place for older adults and those with conditions like dementia or Parkinson's Disease. They offer personal care, nursing, social services, activities, meals, and emergency care. Some centers also provide physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and other medical services. These centers help support caregivers by offering an alternative to living in a care facility. Find a local ADC at pa.gov/aging/ADC.

Senior Community Centers: Senior Community Centers (SCC) are located throughout the state. In addition to providing a nutritious meal, Centers offer social activities, a range of informative programs, creative arts, exercise, volunteer opportunities, community services, and other special events which are unique to individual centers. Find a SCC in your area at pa.gov/aging/SCC.

The PA Link to Aging and Disability Resources: The PA Link helps people living with disabilities and older adults find information to connect them to supports and services in their community. Call the PA Link at 800-753-8827 or by email at carelink@pa.gov. Learn about the PA Link at pa.gov/PALink.

Caregiver Support Program: Pennsylvania's Caregiver Support Program (CSP) offers resources and assistance to support caregivers and help them maintain a healthy, ongoing relationship with the person they are caring for. Apply for CSP by contacting your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA). Learn more at pa.gov/aging/caregiver.

Helpful Printables

Worksheets and checklists can help to keep you and the person you care for organized. Find the following printables at pa.gov/CareKit.

- Budget Worksheet
- Care Needs Worksheet
- Caregiver Coordination Worksheet
- Caregiver Decisions Worksheet
- Emergency Preparedness Worksheet
- End-of-Life Planning Worksheet
- Funeral Planning Worksheet
- Home Health Hiring Worksheet
- Home Safety Worksheet
- Important Documents Worksheet
- In-person Visit Worksheet
- Long-term Care Facility Worksheet
- Managing Medications and Supplements Worksheet
- Medical Appointment Worksheet
- Older Adult Housing Needs Worksheet



This booklet is a product of Aging Our Way, PA – Pennsylvania’s 10-year strategic plan to transform the infrastructure and supports for older adults as we age.

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**For more caregiving information and resources,
find the PA CareKit at pa.gov/CareKit.**