

BY PROGRESSIVE CENTER *Forward*

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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MEDICAID

RYANN M. SICLARI, ESQ



For people with disabilities, Medicaid can serve as a critical lifeline for receiving treatment and services that provide quality of life. Medicaid is also a prerequisite for receiving services through the Division of Developmental Disabilities (“DDD”). In other words, if a person with developmental disabilities becomes ineligible for Medicaid, they will lose not only their health insurance coverage but also their DDD benefits.

When the lock down, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, began in March of 2020, the loss of Medicaid benefits, along with access to medical treatment, was a paramount concern. For example, an individual who was receiving Medicaid through the WorkAbility program, was required to work to receive continued benefits; however, people were being laid off from their jobs in droves. Without action, someone in this position risked losing their eligibility for Medicaid, and by proxy DDD, when the pandemic began.

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Independent Living and
Mercer County ADRC*

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MEDICAID

▪ *Continued on from page 1.*

In response to this and many other COVID-19 related issues, Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (“FFCRA”) on March 18, 2020. One provision within FFCRA is now commonly referred to as the Medicaid Moratorium. The Medicaid Moratorium provides States with additional federal funding in exchange for their agreement that no person can be terminated from Medicaid for any reason, other than death, moving out-of-State, or voluntary disenrollment, between March 18, 2020, and the end of the Public Health Emergency. In other words, any individual who was on Medicaid effective March 18, 2020, or who became eligible for Medicaid after March 18, 2020, cannot be terminated even if they no longer meet the Medicaid eligibility criteria. Using our example from before, the person who was receiving Medicaid under the WorkAbility program would continue to receive Medicaid benefits even if they no longer work.

The Medicaid Moratorium is required to continue until the end of the Public Health Emergency. This is tied not to the New Jersey State of Emergency, but rather the Federal Public Health Emergency as ordered by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Currently, the Public Health Emergency has been renewed through January 2022 and will be reviewed at that time to determine if it will be extended for another 3-month period.

Medicaid can begin sending termination

notices at the end of the month in which the public health emergency ends. However, Medicaid is still required to follow proper procedure. They cannot terminate an individual without providing a written termination notice at least 10 days prior to the termination date. Additionally, the notice must provide the person with the right to appeal through a fair hearing and the right to request a continuation of benefits during the pendency of the appeal.

Lastly, even though Medicaid is not permitted to terminate a person from Medicaid during the Medicaid Moratorium, they continue to send annual redeterminations. The purpose behind this is to not be in a position where all Medicaid recipients need to have their redeterminations done simultaneously and to identify and “flag” those who would have otherwise been terminated from Medicaid if it were not for the moratorium. These “flags” may be for failure to complete the redetermination, being over limit, having excess income, no longer working, turning 65, or becoming Medicare eligible, among many others.

If you believe you may fall into the category of individuals who may be terminated from Medicaid when the Medicaid Moratorium expires, you should consider seeking legal counsel prior to the Public Health Emergency ending to determine if there are steps you can take to ensure you maintain your eligibility for Medicaid even after the end of the Medicaid Moratorium.



TIME TO START THINKING ABOUT SUMMER ACTIVITIES!

LISA MARIE DURAN

During the winter months we often think about what we want to do in the upcoming summer months. There are several summer camp programs out there and the Progressive Center can help fund them. This opportunity is through our Mercer County Summer Campership Award program.

The Campership Award program is a stipend for young people with disabilities to attend summer activities that can include typical camps, recreation activities, academic enhancement classes and even behind-the-wheel driving programs. The program is open to those in

Mercer County who are between the ages of 4-25.

The financial award amount can range from 85.00 and up to 400.00 and is based on household income. Anyone who applies within the deadline may receive a stipend. This award can either be reimbursed to the family directly to the provider (if approved ahead of time). Awards are given on a first come first serve basis. If you know of someone who could benefit from this program, encourage them to reach out to Progressive Center for Independent Living at 609-581-4500.

USING EQUINE THERAPY AS MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

• *By Laura Tapp*

Animals can offer an extraordinary amount of emotional support. Beyond the pet-owner relationship that many of us have lovingly experienced, animals are sometimes used in therapeutic settings to help clients navigate challenging emotional experiences.

What Is Equine Therapy?

Equine-assisted psychotherapy incorporates horses into the therapeutic process. People engage in activities such as grooming, feeding, and leading a horse while being supervised by a mental health professional. Goals of this form of therapy including helping people develop skills such emotional regulation, self-confidence, and responsibility. With mature horses weighing anywhere in the range of 900 to 2,000 pounds or more, it might feel a bit intimidating to have such a large, majestic creature participating in your therapy sessions. However, equine-assisted

therapy is growing in popularity due to its experimental approach and some burgeoning evidence of its effectiveness.

History of Equine Therapy

Horses have been used for therapeutic purposes since the time of the ancient Greeks. The Greek physician Hippocrates, known as the “Father of Medicine,” wrote about the therapeutic potential of horseback riding. Riding became more popular as a therapy tool during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1969, the North American Riding for Handicapped Association was formed, which later became the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship (PATH) International.

Who It is For

Equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) can be used with a variety of populations and in a variety of therapeutic settings. In fact, horses

can be used in counseling with individuals of all ages, even with families and groups. Equine-assisted psychotherapy is often not the sole form of treatment, but rather a complementary therapeutic service to be used in partnership with more traditional treatment. Offering a much different experience than traditional talk therapy, EAP brings people outdoors and offers an opportunity to use all senses while learning and processing through emotional challenges.

BENEFITS

Although a variety of animals can be used in the psychotherapeutic process, horses offer unique traits that have made them a top choice for animal-assisted therapies. Horses bring the following unique elements to the therapy process:

Non-Judgmental and Unbiased

As much as humans, especially therapists, do our best to offer a safe space for clients to explore deep emotional hurts and painful experiences, it can be uncomfortable for clients to openly share their thoughts. Building therapeutic rapport can take time as participants working toward building trust and practicing vulnerability in session. Having the horse present may offer a sense of peace, as they only will react to the client's behavior and emotions with no threat of bias or any judgment of their emotional experience.

Feedback and Mirroring

Horses are keen observers and are vigilant and sensitive to movement and emotion. They

often mirror a client's behavior or emotions, conveying understanding and connection that allows the client to feel safe. This also allows for clients to maintain a sense of self-awareness, using the horse's behavior and interactions for feedback and opportunities to check in and process what is happening in the moment.

Managing Vulnerability

As clients might find themselves vulnerable when trying to open up about emotional challenges, past experiences, or life transitions, the horse can offer a reference point to use for processing. If something feels too painful to speak of, it can feel a bit easier for clients to process using the horse as an example, or to align their experience with the horse's experiences in the moment. Externalizing the content in this way can make things easier to approach and process through.

For more information and to find a provider near you, go to: <https://www.eagala.org>.





December trip to the NJ State Museum and Planetarium..

RECREATION CORNER

• RENEE PFAFF

We took full advantage of the beautiful weather with our October outing at the Pennington Golf Center. All participants enjoyed a round on the 18-hole golf course. It was great to see some of our regular participants along with several new faces. If you have yet to visit Pennington Golf Center, please do, they are wheelchair accessible and their staff is amazing, just ask Daniel Haun, who frequents there often.

In November, we introduced a new presenter to our virtual Zoom. Marcia LeBeau, who teaches poetry, offered our participants opportunities to read and decipher some of her favorite poems along with some great guidance on how to create their own. Make sure you check out the poems in this edition that several of our PCIL members shared.

We planned our next event after taking some requests from our recreation members.



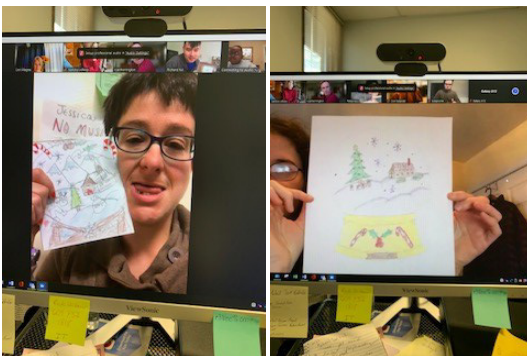
Participants enjoying the beautiful weather in October at the Pennington Golf Center.



Lining up the final shot at Pennington Golf Center!



Participants bowling in November at Hamilton Lanes.



Showing off snow globe creations during our December zoom.

In mid-November, we found ourselves at the Hamilton Lanes where everyone enjoyed two games of bowling. This activity brought some new participants and it was wonderful to see people come out who were very experienced at this game, while others hadn't put on bowling shoes since prior to the pandemic.

In December, artist, Lori Alagna from A Plus Tutoring, offered a tutorial on creating a beautiful snow globe using basic supplies such as pencils, erasers and colored pencils. Her session included directions on making 3D and shadowing effects. Participants were also encouraged to add their own personal touches as well.

We ended December with a trip to the NJ State Museum and Planetarium. This activity was in place of our annual holiday party since we were starting to experience increases in COVID cases. Our trip offered better social distancing and all who joined us not only were entertained by an educational laser light show on the Seasons of Lights, but also were able to explore the museum at their leisure.

Our winter events will be held virtually to ensure everyone's safety. Please visit us on Facebook at Progressive Center for Independent Living NJ to stay updated on all activities. You can also call us at 609-581-4500 and request to be added to our email and mailing list. Need the Zoom link? Contact us at reservations@pcil.org.

BECOME A PCIL MEMBER

Enjoy events like these
at a discounted rate!

JOIN IN 2022 by calling the office today!

POEMS CREATED BY OUR PCIL PARTICIPANTS

During our November virtual Zoom event we were pleased to have Marcia LeBeau as our special guest who as a poet, literary entrepreneur and educator, instructed our participants on how to create their own poem. Several participants of this activity have shared their creation from the session that we hope you enjoy!

Ode to My Pink Shoes

by Dee LeBeau

Pink shoes
Smooth and hard
Like frozen raspberry sherbet
Used for bowling
I love to bowl
My brother knew
For Christmas
He gave me shoes
Good on my feet
Proud of how they look
Makes me feel happy
When I wear them
Bowling

Break Free

by Kyle Bravo

When you have let the chains of perspective weigh you down, you will have lost everything.
So, I say, break free from the chains of society and doubt.
These chains cause nothing but corruption and fear, so do not let them weigh you down anymore.
Use the strength of purpose and faith to obliterate the chains of doubt, worry, and fear.
Take into account all variables and decide your fate and only yours.
Show the executor you will not be executed without a fight.

Ode to My Sunny Days

by Sammie Saat

Sunny days are light
Sunlight brings smiles to our faces
Dark thoughts disappear
Fluffy dogs are cute
Goofy ones bring joy to all
Love goofy fluff balls

Ode to My Mermaid Journal

by Carie Nicoson

My journal is like the seashore
Salty breeze
Waves calling
Warm and wet sand on my feet
Refreshing.
A gift from my Mom
At the bottom of my birthday bag.
My journal reminds me of joy
I write about friendship and family
Memories.
I am peaceful.
How beautiful my life is!



PANDEMIC UPDATE

■ TERESA PIRRETTI

Just when we thought it was safe to go back into the public, we must start taking precautions again. As frustrating as it is for the public to resume taking precautions, it is equally frustrating for our consumers. The nation has been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. In June 2021 there seemed to be a light at the end of the tunnel. Activities that were once completely virtual for our consumers i.e.-Special Olympic practices, drama and art activities, exercise classes, etc., started to bring people back to in-person learning and social engagement.

In November 2021, these activities were slowly declining. Consumers who were once so excited to see their friends, engage in classes, work and exercise, are now being

asked to put these things to a halt. There are many places that are closing for at least two weeks, maybe more.

One consumer who is very active with in-person Special Olympics Bowling, SKIT classes, PCIL recreations activities, etc., has had to resume virtual instruction or stop attending for a period of time. When speaking with this consumer's mom about the effect limiting his activities had on him, she stated that he understands why activities are closing again, but he is anxious since his routine has been disrupted. This is just one example of how the pandemic is still affecting so many of us. As challenging as this has been, one positive to come from this is how we have all been able to work together and find ways to adapt.

THE ROLE OF A SUPPORT COORDINATOR

BY CHRISTINE HANNEKEN

Many people have asked what Support Coordinators (SC) do. The answer is multi-faceted. We begin by helping the individual and their families navigate the Fee for Service/Medicaid system that governs the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) budgets awarded to adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities. We introduce services available through approved service providers to meet their needs and interests/abilities. Once they choose services, we work together with the family and providers to create a service plan explaining who the person is and what their individual support needs are. Often, we may suggest adjunct services in the community or through other agencies that may complement those through Fee-For-Service providers.

We also create a document that highlights the individuals' unique talents, hopes, dreams and interests. This can be very routine in many ways, and may only involve day services, but there are several other possibilities, including approved providers offering various other activities. The self-directed model allows individuals to create a meaningful life for themselves. The plan then becomes a blueprint for supporting the individual when family members are no longer able.

Sometimes we meet families who have unique situations, which may involve other agencies. SCs strive to include supports from every facet of the individual's life in the planning process to provide a comprehensive support team, providing congruent services that will assist the individual in discovering their true potentials while living the fullest life they want.

SCs also work with providers to ensure the individual is safe from exploitation, abuse, and neglect. When necessary, SCs may work closely with Adult Protective Services, the Bureau of Guardianship Services, legal advocates and other local, county, state, or federal agencies to ensure the individual is reaching the highest level of independence they can without anyone taking advantage of them or standing in their way.

At Progressive Center, we work as a team to identify needs/desires/ vulnerabilities and find appropriate ways to support those needs and desires. As a Center for Independent Living, we also employ Independent Living Specialists, who often can fill some of the gaps at no cost to the individual or their family.

MEET KIARA BOYD, NEW SUPPORT COORDINATOR

Hi, I am Kiara Boyd the newest member to the Progressive Center Family. In October I became a part of the Support Coordination team. I've always wanted to lend a helping hand to those that are in need. In 2014, I had an internship and externship through the Boys and Girls Club in Trenton, NJ and in 2016 I graduated from Georgian Court University. With these experiences I can network, research, and provide excellent services to my consumers, parents, and providers. As a Support Coordinator I can assist individuals in developing knowledge, experience, and connections with the community. I take honor in assisting individuals resolve crisis points while assisting them in developing a capable and resilient support network.

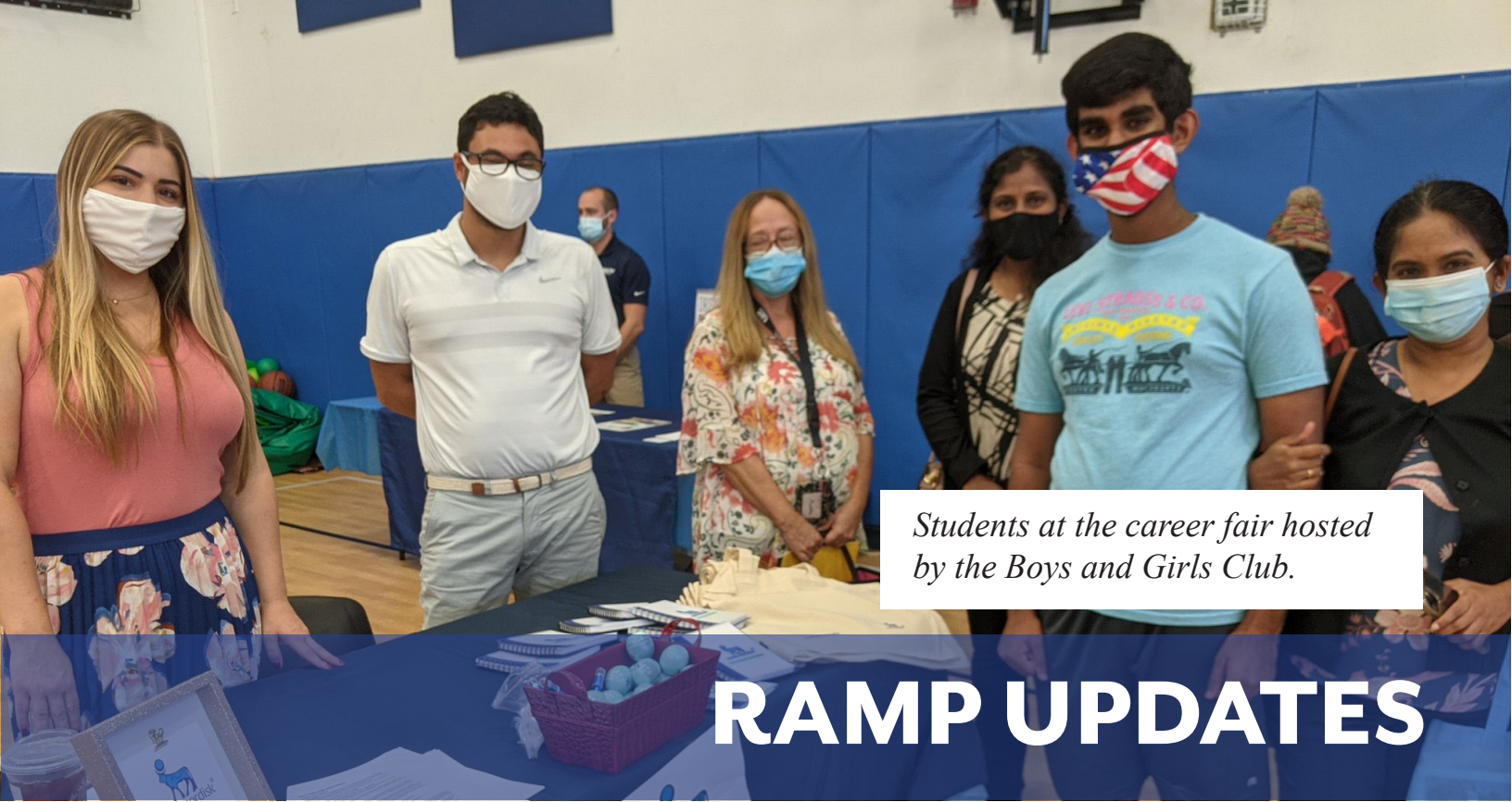


I am always on the search for identifying the appropriate supports, planning, and connecting individuals to different resources for services. With the COVID-19 pandemic has us fearful of social interaction, remote supports are a great necessity as well. Being a Support Coordinator comes with wearing multiple hats however self-care is my number one priority. When I am not in the office, I enjoy writing poetry, spending time with my family and exploring nature. I am thankful for the opportunity that PCIL has given me. I am excited for PCIL to see the growth I have gained from being a part of such a great team.

MEET BATOOL BOKHARI, NEW SUPPORT COORDINATOR



Hello everyone! My name is Batool Bokhari and I have recently joined the PCIL team as a Support Coordinator. I have recently graduated from The College of New Jersey with a bachelor's degree in Sociology. I have worked in customer service for the past 5 years and participated in a variety of volunteer organizations in the human services field throughout my life. I truly enjoy helping others and being able to build trusting relationships. I am so excited to be working with a great team at Progressive Center and I am also grateful for the opportunity to help individuals and families receive services!



Students at the career fair hosted by the Boys and Girls Club.

RAMP UPDATES

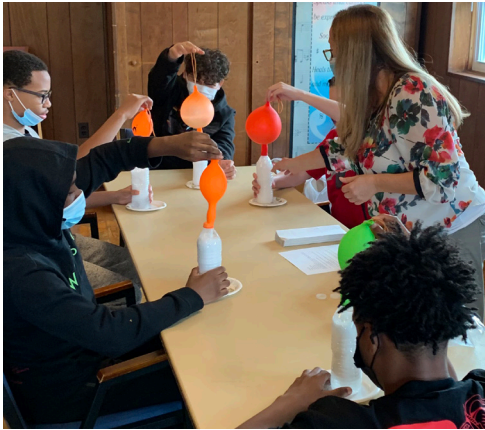
TRANSITION ACTIVITIES THROUGH RAMP

▪ Kelly Auletto

The RAMP family has surely been busy over the past few months. Students have been participating in weekly session learning about career clusters as well as conducting STEM activities and getting involved in community events.

Students loved learning about acids and bases by conducting a simple vinegar and baking soda balloon experiment. Who knew Science could be so much fun!

RAMP mentors and mentees also attended the College, Career and Job Fair at the Boys and Girls Club. Families learned about post-secondary options, internships, and



The reason that we can inflate a balloon in this experiment is thanks to the magical reaction of baking soda & vinegar. As the two interact, they release a gas and increase the air pressure in the bottle.

community resources at this very informative session. For more information about events please check out the Boys and Girls Club of Mercer County's web page.

The PCIL's own Ali Tankard came out to speak with students about a career in Health Sciences. In her spare time, Ali is a registered Personal Trainer. She shared her knowledge about what being a personal trainer is like. Students learned the importance of a healthy lifestyle, workout safety tips, and training needed for a career as a personal trainer. Thanks, Ali, for this very informative presentation!

As we approached the holiday season students were reminded the importance of giving back to the community and those less fortunate. The RAMP family took part in the Giving Tuesday initiative that took place across the global. As part of the

Giving Tuesday movement, students wrote inspirational messages and made over 100 lunch sacks for the Trenton Rescue Mission. This very heartfelt project would not have been possible without all the support of the PCIL and its amazing team! Kudos to everyone!!!



Students enjoyed participating in the 2021 Giving Tuesday event this past November.

What is Giving Tuesday?

GivingTuesday started as a day for anyone, anywhere to give, and it's grown into the biggest giving movement in the world.

Celebrated each year on the Tuesday following U.S. Thanksgiving, and fueled by the power of social media, GivingTuesday inspires millions of people across the globe to show up and give back to causes and issues that matter to them. The goal is to create a massive wave of generosity that lasts well beyond that day and touches every person on the planet. GivingTuesday took place on November 30, 2021, this year.



YOU + PCIL MEMBERSHIP



Let the
fun begin!

PCIL Members enjoy the benefits of EXTRA savings on all our events throughout the year!
Interested in becoming a member? We are accepting members now.

If you need a form please call our office and we will be happy to assist you!

Single	\$15.00
Couple (2 persons living at same address)	\$25.00
Family (Up to 5 persons living at same address)	\$50.00
Organization (Up to 8 persons per event)	\$100.00

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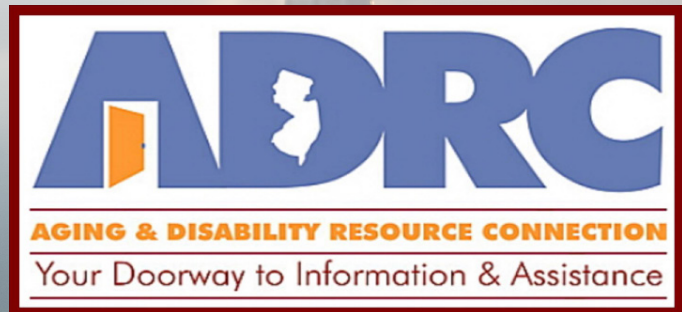
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your DOORWAY

QUARTERLY

A quarterly publication written by the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection to help support older adults, those living with disabilities, and their caregivers



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MEDICARE CHANGES FOR 2022

By Reed Thomas

Medicare is a crucial source of health care access for many older adults and people living with disabilities in America, covering more than 63 million Americans in 2021. The year 2022 brings changes to costs and options, so it's important to understand what that means to you. Medicare is broken down into section of coverages or "parts:" Part A, Part B, Part C, and Part D.

Part A covers inpatient hospital, skilled nursing facility, hospice, inpatient rehabilitation, and some home health care services. About 99 percent of Medicare beneficiaries do not have a Part A premium because they have enough of a work history to qualify for free coverage. Individuals who had at least 30 quarters of coverage or were married to someone with at least 30 quarters of coverage may buy into Part A at a reduced monthly premium rate, which is \$274 in 2022, a \$15 increase from 2021. Those with less than 30 quarters of coverage and certain individuals with

disabilities who have exhausted other entitlements will pay the full premium, which is \$499 a month in 2022, a \$28 increase from 2021.

Medicare Part B covers physician services, outpatient hospital services, certain home health services, durable medical equipment, and certain other medical and health services not covered by Medicare Part A. Each year the Medicare Part B premium, deductible, and coinsurance rates are determined according to the Social Security Act. The monthly premium for Medicare Part B enrollees is \$170.10 for 2022, an increase of \$21.60 from 2021. The annual deductible for all Medicare Part B beneficiaries is \$233 in 2022, an increase of \$30 from 2021. For those with incomes of more than \$91,000, there are additional costs for the Part B and Part D (prescription drug coverage) premiums known as "Income-Related Monthly Adjustments" that also are slightly higher in 2022.



Medicare Part C plans, also referred to as Medicare Advantage Plans, saw a premium decrease of roughly \$19 a month on average, and beneficiaries are likely to see more options available to them. Part C plans can be confusing, but here is a brief description from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services: “A Medicare Advantage Plan (like an HMO or PPO) is another Medicare health plan choice you may have as part of Medicare. Medicare Advantage Plans, sometimes called ‘Part C’ or ‘MA Plans,’ are offered by private companies approved by Medicare.”

Part D prescription drug premiums only increased slightly on average, seeing only a \$2 increase from the previous year, but the initial coverage limit was increased and so was the out-of-pocket threshold.

Why have this year’s premiums and deductible increased? According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), there have been increases in both costs and utilization across the healthcare system. Congressional action significantly lowered the projected increase for 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in only a \$3 increase in premiums for 2021, so we are seeing higher increases for 2022. In addition, concerns about the cost of Alzheimer’s disease treatments also have contributed to the increases.

This is a general view of the changes this year, but how do you make sure you’re

making the best decisions to make your Medicare both as affordable and effective as it can be? The Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC can help you determine if you are eligible for programs that assist those who are considered low income with the Part B premium or programs through Medicaid that can add significant supports for those with significant care needs. You can contact the Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC at 609-989-6661 or ADRC@mercercounty.org.

In addition, you can find information and tools for understanding and selecting coverage options at www.medicare.gov, and anyone in New Jersey who is eligible for Medicare has access to free State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) counseling. Trained volunteer counselors will provide information and assistance for dealing with claims and for evaluating health insurance options. To make an appointment with a SHIP counselor in Mercer County, please contact Cathy Forbes at 609-273-0588. If you are not a resident of Mercer County but a resident of New Jersey, you can contact the SHIP program by calling 800-792-8820 to learn how to connect with a counselor in your area.

Information for this article was obtained from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, MedicareFAQ, and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS, THIRD SHOTS, AND BOOSTERS AVAILABLE

COVID-19 vaccines teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. It typically takes two weeks after vaccination for the body to build protection (immunity) against the virus that causes COVID-19. People are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines or two weeks after the single-dose Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 vaccine.

After completing the primary series, some moderately or severely immunocompromised people should get an additional primary COVID-19 vaccination. This third dose is offered to those who received either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines and should be delivered at least four weeks after the second shot in the vaccine series. It also should be of the same product as the initial vaccine series, but if the vaccine administered previously is not available, Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna may be substituted with one another when administered as additional doses to moderately to severely immunocompromised

people. People who want a third dose should identify themselves as immunocompromised; however, proof of immunocompromised status is not required.

Although COVID-19 vaccines remain effective in preventing severe disease, data suggest their effectiveness at preventing severe infection or severe illness wanes over time, especially in people 65 years or older. Because of this, COVID-19 booster shots have been developed. In general, booster shots, such as the tetanus shot adults get every 10 years, are given to people with prior vaccination to help increase or boost the immunity that they have from their previous vaccine(s). Data from clinical trials show that a COVID-19 booster shot increased the immune response in trial participants who finished a Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna primary series six months earlier or who received a Johnson & Johnson/Janssen single dose vaccine two months earlier. If you're unsure about what is right for you, please consult your physician. For general guidelines, you can visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

COVID-19 VACCINATIONS, THIRD SHOTS, AND BOOSTERS AVAILABLE



website at www.cdc.gov or call the CDC information line at 800-232-4636.

The COVID-19 initial vaccinations, third shots, and boosters are available in many locations. The County of Mercer has been holding vaccination clinics at multiple sites for many months that offer all of the vaccine options. To locate these sites, please visit www.mercercounty.org and click on “Vaccination schedule for Mercer County clinics” at the top of the page. Often these clinics accept walk-ins, but please contact them to confirm before visiting. You can also visit the NJ Vaccination Appointment Finder from Mercer County’s website or by visiting it directly at <https://covid19.nj.gov/pages/finder>.

In addition to the State of New Jersey online scheduler, there is a statewide toll-free vaccination hotline, 855-568-0545, that helps callers in more than 240 languages. This hotline is staffed from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week to register individuals in the NJ Vaccine Scheduling System, answer questions about the vaccines, provide contact information for sites, and check registration status. There also is a hotline for those 65 or older to assist in scheduling a vaccine appointment; you can call the special senior hotline at 856-249-7007 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. for vaccination scheduling support. Dedicated appointment slots are reserved for those age 65 or older.

Not only are the COVID-19 vaccinations free, but transportation is available at no cost for those who need it. Individuals who are Medicaid members can schedule transportation to a vaccine appointment by calling Modvicare at 866-527-9933 at least 48 hours before the appointment. Please be sure to mention that the trip is for a COVID-19 vaccination. Mercer County Transportation Resources To Aid The Disadvantaged And Elderly (T.R.A.D.E.) provides free transportation to county residents age 60 or older as well as those who are living with disabilities. Call 609-530-1971 for more information or to schedule a ride. In addition, NJ Transit offers free transportation to vaccination sites with their VAXRIDE program. Visit <https://www.njtransit.com/vaxride> for details.

These Mercer County and State clinics, along with local pharmacies and other vaccination locations, can assist much of the community, but officials understand that not all community members will be able to travel to such a site for their COVID-19 vaccine or booster. If you are unable to leave the home to receive a COVID-19 vaccine/booster or are the healthcare provider or family caregiver of someone who is homebound, you may request an in-home vaccination or booster appointment by contacting your local health department. Mercer County’s 12 municipalities provide

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the in-home vaccinations, and we recommend contacting them directly at the following numbers:

- East Windsor: 609-443-4000 ext. 216
- Ewing: 609-883-2900 ext. 7691
- Hamilton: 609-890-3884
- Hightstown: 609-936-8400
- Hopewell Borough: 908-359-8211 ext. 2227
- Hopewell Township: 609-737-0120
- Lawrence: 609-844-7089
- Pennington: 908-359-8211 ext. 2227
- Princeton: 609-497-7608

- Robbinsville: 609-936-8400
- Trenton: 609-989-3242
- West Windsor: 609-936-8400

If you have questions about the COVID-19 vaccines or boosters, you may contact the Mercer County Division of Public Health at 609-278-7165. Older adults, those living with disabilities, or their caregivers who have questions or concerns also are welcome to contact the Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC at 609-989-6661. The County of Mercer's team is happy to help.

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP)

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DE SERVICIOS HUMANOS
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HENRY J. AUSTIN'S SENIOR HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION PROGRAM

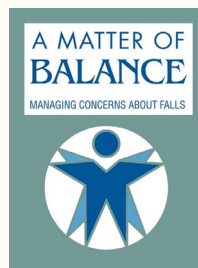
By Linda Buckley

The Senior Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Program is part of Henry J. Austin's commitment in outreach work to our community in Mercer County. Funding is provided by way of Mercer County Office on Aging, under the Title IID of the Older Americans Act. This grant program serves low-income senior housing, senior centers, nutrition sites, senior clubs, and faith-based organizations. Workshops are available to those in the vulnerable senior and disabled population 60 years of age or older, many of whom are medically and/or economically disadvantaged. Henry J. Austin offers two in-person programs that are limited to 12 participants each due to COVID-19: A Matter of Balance and Walk with Ease.

A Matter of Balance emphasizes practical strategies to manage falls. Participants will learn to view falls as controllable, set goals for increasing activity, make changes to reduce fall risks at home, and learn exercises to increase strength and balance. There are two classes per week for four weeks for a total of eight sessions.

Walk with Ease is a simple fitness program that is proven to reduce pain, build confidence in being physically active, and improve overall health. This multi-component program also includes health education, stretching and strengthening exercises, as well as motivational strategies. These sessions may be conducted outside or indoors depending on group needs. There are three sessions per week for six weeks for a total of 18 sessions.

For more information regarding these programs, please contact Linda Buckley, Nurse Educator, Senior Health and Disease Prevention Program, at 609-850-1491.





PRESCRIPTIONS DISCOUNTS SEE INCREASES IN FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA IN 2022

By Reed Thomas

For many years, the Pharmaceutical Assistance to the Aged (PAAD) and Senior Gold programs have helped many people in New Jersey save money on their pharmaceutical needs. Thanks to bills passed in 2021, both programs have opened that assistance to many more by raising the financial eligibility limits by \$10,000. Both programs have seen small cost of living adjustments (COLA) annually due to a bill adopted in 1996, and will continue to do so beginning again in 2023, but the recently passed increase from 2021 to 2022 far surpasses any COLA.

In 2022, the PAAD program raised its

income limit to \$38,769 from \$28,769 for a single person and to \$45,270 from \$35,270 combined income for married couples. Senior Gold has always had an income ceiling \$10,000 higher than PAAD. To be eligible for that assistance in 2022, you must have income between \$38,769 and \$48,769 for a single person or between \$45,270 and \$55,270 for married couples; anything below the limits would make you eligible for PAAD, which provides a higher level of assistance.

The PAAD program is a State-funded program that helps eligible seniors and individuals with disabilities save money



on their prescription drug costs. Other than the income requirements, you must be an N.J. resident age 65 years or older or be between the ages of 18 and 64 and receiving Security Title II Disability benefits. Medicare-eligible PAAD beneficiaries also are required to enroll in a Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan. PAAD will pay the monthly premium for certain standard basic Part D plans with a monthly premium at or below the regional benchmark. These plans will cover medically necessary prescription medications under Medicare Part D. If a beneficiary enrolls in an enhanced plan at or below the regional benchmark premium amount, PAAD will pay the premium as long as the plan agrees to follow all the billing requirements. The federal Medicare plan and/or PAAD will pay any costs above the PAAD copayment of \$5 for each covered generic drug or \$7 for each covered brand name drug, including premiums.

The Senior Gold Prescription Discount program helps eligible N.J. residents pay for prescription drugs, insulin, insulin needles, and syringes and needles for injectable medicines used for the treatment of multiple sclerosis. As with PAAD, you must be an N.J. resident age 65 or older or between the ages of 18 and 64 and receiving Security Title II Disability benefits. The Senior Gold card works together with Medicare Part D

Prescription Drug Plans. Senior Gold can reduce out-of-pocket expenses associated with participation in Medicare Part D. Members pay a copayment of \$15 plus 50% of the remaining cost of each Senior Gold-covered drug. Once members reach annual out-of-pocket expenses exceeding \$2,000 for a single person or \$3,000 for married couples, they pay only a flat \$15 copayment per prescription for the balance of that eligibility period.

If you or someone you know could benefit from either of these programs or any of the other NJ Division of Aging Services programs such as Specified Low Income Medicare Beneficiary (SLMB), Lifeline Utility Assistance, or Hearing Aid Assistance to the Aged and Disabled (HAAAD), please contact the Mercer County Office on Aging/ADRC at 609-989-6661 or ADRC@mercercounty.org.

More information on the PAAD Program can be found at <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/services/paad/>.

More information on the Senior Gold Program can be found at <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/home/seniorgolddetail.html>.

You can apply for both programs using the NJSave application at <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/doas/services/njsave/>.

VOLUNTEER ADVOCATES NEEDED

From the Office of the NJ Long-Term Care Ombudsman

In 1977, the New Jersey state legislature enacted a state ombudsman program to help ensure older adults who require an institutional level of care secure the civil and human rights to which we are entitled as citizens of the United States. State legislators recognized that physical and mental disabilities may make it more difficult to self-advocate for those rights and that an outside advocacy system was necessary. Shortly after, the Older Americans Act required all states to provide such a program, and there have been several pieces of federal legislation to bolster and define the role of ombudsmen in advocating on behalf of their state's residents.

In New Jersey, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (LTCO) uses volunteer advocates as a part of their strategy for monitoring and advocating for nursing facility residents. The Volunteer Advocate Program establishes a visible presence within long-term care facilities to represent the needs and concerns of residents. Volunteers take on a non-adversarial role to help resolve residents' concerns as close to bedside as possible. As an extension of the Office of the Ombudsman, they are an essential part of the LTCO team.

We are living through unprecedented

times, and never has the volunteer advocate role been more important than during the COVID-19 pandemic. For months, residents have been subject to restrictions on visitation by families and friends, which has negatively impacted many residents' health and well-being. The inability of residents, families, and friends to be together during the pandemic has emphasized the importance of human connection.

Each volunteer advocate undergoes 32 hours of extensive and in-depth training and is required to pass a certification exam to participate in the program. Then, after working with a more experienced volunteer for two weeks, the volunteer advocate is assigned to a nursing facility close to their home. Although volunteer advocates can set their hours, they are required to visit their assigned facility and speak to residents for at least four hours per week.

Advocates play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life of nursing home residents; providing information to residents and families about their rights as established by law; preventing abuse, neglect, and exploitation through consistent presence and advocacy; resolving problems within the facility; and empowering residents to speak for themselves. If a volunteer



advocate identifies serious issues, such as abuse, neglect, or exploitation, a full-time investigator/advocate from the LTCO may be assigned to investigate and resolve that concern.

Volunteer advocates are needed around New Jersey, but here in Mercer County the need is at an all-time high. If you are interested in having a direct impact on the lives of vulnerable Mercer County or other New Jersey citizens living in nursing homes, please consider becoming a volunteer advocate. For more information, contact the Volunteer Advocate Program at 609-826-

5053 or email at volunteer@ltco.nj.gov. To speak to the regional coordinator for advocates in Mercer, Middlesex, Somerset, Hunterdon, and Monmouth Counties, contact Beth Mané at 732-995-7482.

If you'd like to become a volunteer, you can apply at <https://www.state.nj.us/ooie/contact/contact-vap.shtml>.

For more information about the New Jersey Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, you can visit www.nj.gov/ooie or call 877-582-6995.

HEALTHY OUTLOOKS FOR OLDER ADULTS

By Barbara Sprechman

As we age, our body goes through many changes. Even if we do not have a chronic health condition as an older adult, we often feel more aches and pains than we did in our younger years. Pain can be your body's warning system that something is wrong. It is important to communicate to your doctor where you hurt and specifically how the pain feels.

There are two kinds of pain: acute and chronic pain. Acute pain begins suddenly, lasts for a short time, and goes away as your body heals. Examples of acute pain includes that from surgery, a broken bone, a toothache, or kidney stone. Pain that lasts for three months or longer is considered chronic pain. This pain often affects older adults, many times caused by a health condition such as arthritis. Chronic

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HEALTHY OUTLOOKS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Continued from page 25

pain can sometimes follow acute pain from an injury, surgery, or other health condition that has been treated, like post-herpetic neuralgia after shingles. Chronic pain also can be related to depression or anxiety.

Living with pain can be difficult and can cause many other problems; it can impact your daily activities; disturb your sleep and eating habits; hinder your work; and keep you from spending time with friends and family. Treating or managing pain is important. Some treatments involve medications and some do not. Your treatment plan should be specific to you. Good communication with your doctor or healthcare specialist is essential to proper treatment. Talk with your healthcare specialist about your pain level so they can give you a specific treatment plan. Your healthcare specialist may prescribe pain medications. Talk with them about their safety and right dose to take.

Opioids use is becoming more prevalent among aging adults, creating a potential health hazard that could have negative outcomes. A recent study conducted by AARP found that 40 percent of older adults have chronic pain that is treated often with opioids, which include codeine, morphine, and oxycodone and may be referred to as narcotics. Although opioids can be an effective form of pain management, the risk of a substance use

disorder, including addiction, overdose, or death, is increased if not properly managed. Also remember that our bodies metabolize medications differently as we age, which can be a problem for older adults using opioids. It is important to “start low, and go slow” with opioid use; you should start opioids at low doses and increase usage only as directed by a healthcare professional.

In addition to medication, there are complementary and alternative approaches that can give you pain relief. Some of these approaches include acupuncture, chiropractic therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, massage therapy, physical therapy, yoga, and meditation and relaxation. Whether one approach is safer and more effective than another will depend on your unique situation.

If you would like the free, one-hour presentation “Healthy Outlooks: Managing Pain Without Opioids” to be presented to your group, contact Barbara Sprechman at bsprechman@mercercouncil.org or 609-396-5874 ext. 205.

This information should not be used to diagnose or treat any medical condition. Instead, use this information to help you discuss your pain management options with your provider so you can identify the most effective approach to your care together.



Jersey Assistance for Community Caregiving

Jersey Assistance for Community Caregiving is a program that provides in-home services to seniors at risk of placement in a nursing home. JACC includes an array of services designed to supplement the assistance given by the individual’s caregiver network. Qualified individuals may have the opportunity to hire their own eligible family, friends, or neighbors to provide the care they need.

To learn more or start the application process, please contact the Mercer County Office on Aging / Aging and Disability Resource Connection at (609) 989-6661 or ADRC@mercercounty.org.

Caring for a family member – or someone you care for as if you were family – is a huge job. The Statewide Respite Care Program offers services to the person who needs care so that you, the caregiver, has a break (“respite”).



Statewide Respite Care Program

To learn more or start the application process, please contact the Mercer County Office on Aging / Aging and Disability Resource Connection at (609) 989-6661 or ADRC@mercercounty.org.

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Program Monitor
Brianna Richardson

PASP Coordinator/Analyst Trainee
Reed Thomas



COVID-19 RESOURCES

This is a reminder to everyone still affected by COVID-19 living in Mercer County that the Department of Human Services, in conjunction with Mercer County Board of Social Services, continues to offer the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). This fund helps landlords and tenants in Mercer County in need of financial assistance with unpaid rent and/or utility bills due to the impact of COVID-19, homelessness, or housing instability. The Mercer County Board of Social Services will continue to accept applications until funds are expended. To complete the application please visit <https://bit.ly/ERAPApplyII> or visit <http://www.mercercounty.org/ERAP> for more details. If you have questions or if you need assistance completing your application, please call 609-389-3575 or email erap@mcboss.org.

Progressive Center for Independent Living also has funds through the CARES Act to assist those affected by COVID-19. If you experienced a hardship directly linked to the pandemic, call our office to see if you are eligible for funding to go toward emergency food, supplies, personal protection equipment, technology, medical supplies not available during COVID, or limited rental assistance. We can be reached at 609-581-4500.

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One place, many services.

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FREE MATTER FOR
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