

RCPA Supports Expanded DCW Scope

The Wolf Administration's recent policy clarification and the Department of Health Guidance regarding the increased availability of Specialized Care for individuals with disabilities and seniors is a welcomed step toward improvement in the effective and efficient provision of home care that supports independent living.

Specialized Care is defined as "non-skilled activities/services unique to the individual consumer's care needs that facilitate the consumer's health, safety, and welfare, and ability to live independently." The Direct Care Worker Non-Skilled Services in Home and Community-Based Services Settings Joint Policy Clarification, issued November 23, 2016, described the background, applicable regulations, laws, and policies, and the rationale for the administration's determination that the identified non-skilled activities are home care services that can be performed by direct care workers (DCW) who have the appropriate competency or training. The activities include: assistance with bowel and bladder routines, assistance with medication, ostomy care, clean intermittent catheterization, assistance with skin care, and wound care.

In order to implement the Joint Policy Clarification, the Department of Health issued guidance on February 23, 2017 to licensed Home Care Agencies and Registries regarding the definition of Specialized Care, the characteristics of consumers eligible to receive the service from a DCW, and the organization's responsibilities for training and competency documentation. The guidance includes the documentation of need for the assistance and a requirement for a service order or authorization that is reviewed at least annually.

Prior to the policy clarification and subsequent guidance, individuals with disabilities and seniors could access paid Specialized Care only through licensed personnel; e.g., a nurse, or through the individual enrolling in the consumer-directed model of services in which he or she is the employer of the worker. In many instances, the individual's unpaid family member or other informal supports provided the assistance. In some cases, the difficulty getting the appropriate non-skilled activities/services contributed to the individual accessing a higher level of care.

RCPA supports the administration's policy clarification that Specialized Care is home care that can be delivered by trained DCWs. This enables eligible individuals to have expanded choice of provider and service models, allows direct care workers to provide more comprehensive and coordinated care, and assists agencies to operate more effectively to support community living.

RCPA agrees with the administration's assertion that individuals with disabilities will have a greater chance of remaining in their homes and communities when they are able to receive non-skilled assistance along with other long-term services and supports from their direct care workers, and will be afforded the same opportunity for independence that individuals without disabilities experience when discharged from a hospital or when they require certain care at home.

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