

CAREGIVER CHRONICLES

BULLETIN

December 2025

Dane County Caregiver Program
Area Agency on Aging of Dane County

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The Most Wonderful Time of the Year?

Have the Holiday Season You Want and Need

It's the most wonderful time of the year—or so the classic holiday song goes. There are certainly many things to anticipate and celebrate, from social gatherings with loved ones to participating in our most memorable traditions. There are also many of us who find that there can be a lot of stress involved. Caregivers are among those who may find the holidays challenging. Making additional time for holiday-related tasks like shopping, decorating, and food preparation on top of caregiving tasks and everyday obligations can be daunting. The disruption to routine can make caring for your care partner more difficult as well, particularly for those with cognitive impairments. The financial and personal energy costs of holiday décor, food, gifts and more can be difficult to balance with caregiving duties. This year is particularly taxing for those on tight budgets or those who depend on programs that have been eliminated or have smaller budgets and fewer resources. Facing significant changes in cost for critical items from food to utilities to healthcare can cause stress levels to run high – particularly at holiday time.

Begin with You and What You Can Control

- **Take a breath and focus on your expectations of the season for a moment.** Let go of what you think your family expects or society dictates. What is important to you about the holiday? Make a list of a few things that you love about the season and that bring you joy. Be realistic about what you have the energy and resources to accomplish and make sure those things are at the top of your list.

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- **Plan ahead and prepare as much as you can in advance.** Streamline and simplify. For example, outdoor decorations may be too much so concentrate on the festive touches you can enjoy inside. Look forward to attending holiday events? Know your care partner's limits and check for those that accommodate your needs so you can enjoy the time together. If there is a concert, play, or gathering you love but would find it hard to attend with your care partner, find alternate care early so you are free to do this for yourself. Even better if you can attend with a friend or family member you'd like to see more often.
- **Seek support and communicate your needs.** If you have traditionally been the host for holiday events let others know how much you are able to commit. If it is convenient for you to have a gathering at home where your care partner can be comfortable ask others to bring food to share, or have them help with decorations or take charge of an activity. If you traditionally exchange gifts but it isn't in the budget this year, talk with others about alternatives. Maybe there is a way to find time to share simple experiences instead.

Strategies Can Be Helpful But Self Care Isn't Always a Thing You Can Do

We commonly think of self-care as an activity like meditation, yoga, a massage, or getting out to see a movie or take a walk. These are important, yet the kind of self-care that makes lasting change for the better is internal.

Heather Aberle, MA, LPC writes*:

It's about guiding you toward longer-term emotional wellness and reimagines how you interact with others. It's about self-knowledge, self-compassion, and the willingness and courage to make difficult decisions. This creates a kind of well-being that is focused more on deriving meaning and having actions in your life that are consistent with your values, and it tends to give a greater sense that your life has purpose. Instead of focusing on breaks, pleasure or happiness, "*real self-care* emphasizes personal growth, accepting your authentic self, and feeling connected to what matters to you. Real self-care is an internal solution; it's about changing your internal reality—or your consciousness."

Wellness activities can provide temporary relief but can't change you internally unless you also do the work of real self-care. Principles of real self-care:

- Set boundaries with others
- Change how you talk to yourself (self-compassion)
- Bring in what matters most to you—recognizing that it will be different for others so what works for someone else may not work for you.



*You can read the full article by Heather Aberle in the University of Colorado, Denver, Lynx Central here: [Real Self-Care](#).

Steps to Increase Your Access to Food

When living on a budget, people may have to make hard choices between housing, medications, food, and other essentials, especially when FoodShare benefits are cut. Here are some steps to help you maintain your access to food and stretch your budget:

Practice meal planning. Thinking about what you're going to make or eat ahead of time cuts down on stress and makes it easier to shop on a budget.

Research food banks and community meals in your area. Donated meals and food items can go a long way toward stretching your food budget. Feeling nervous about asking for help? These resources are there for you to use. Consider volunteering to see how the process works. You may feel better about having a meal with others if you help prepare and/or serve it.

Plan to grow your own produce. You can start small, with herbs in jars or a few plants on a windowsill or patio. If you feel up to it, start a vegetable garden. Raised garden beds don't require a lot of space, and there may be an organization in your area with volunteers to assist. You could also see if there's a community garden in your area with plots that can be reserved.

Watch for sales to stock up on non-perishable items like canned goods. Make sure you are storing things properly if you don't plan to use them right away.

Buy in bulk if practical. If you have storage space, it may make sense to buy large quantities of certain items. Consider dehydrating and/or canning food to preserve it. There may be classes offered on how to do this. Learn a new hobby!

Start a regular potluck group. Ask a group of friends or neighbors to join a weekly or monthly potluck where everyone brings something to share. This is a great way to socialize, try new foods, and perhaps bring home leftovers!

If you live with others, think about food options available to household members that could help maximize your budget. If school-age children live with you, are they offered breakfast and/or lunch for free? Do they participate in after-school programs that offer snacks or meals? Are there restaurants offering free or discounted meals on certain nights for seniors?

Learn more about food waste and how to cut down on it at Reducing Food Waste at Home | | Wisconsin DNR <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/waste/residentialfoodwaste.html>.

—The GWAAR Legal Services Team (for reprint)



Monthly MIPPA Moment:

Medicare Open Enrollment Period Closing

MIPPA (Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act) has a goal of educating older adults on Medicare's cost-saving benefits & preventive services.

The annual Medicare Open Enrollment Period for 2025, where people with Original Medicare can **review, make changes and enroll into Part D and/or an Advantage plan, will end on December 7th**. All changes selected during this time will become effective January 1, 2026 for the year. If you are happy with your current coverages, no changes or actions are needed.

Notable updates for 2026 include that the maximum out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs should be capped at \$2,100 (a \$100 increase from 2025, when this beneficial limit was enacted). The Medicare Prescription Payment Plan is still available through each drug plan, and can help spread out the deductible and other costs through the year as opposed to up front. Part D base premiums are expected to rise slightly, with the maximum deductible increasing to \$615 (from \$590 in 2025).

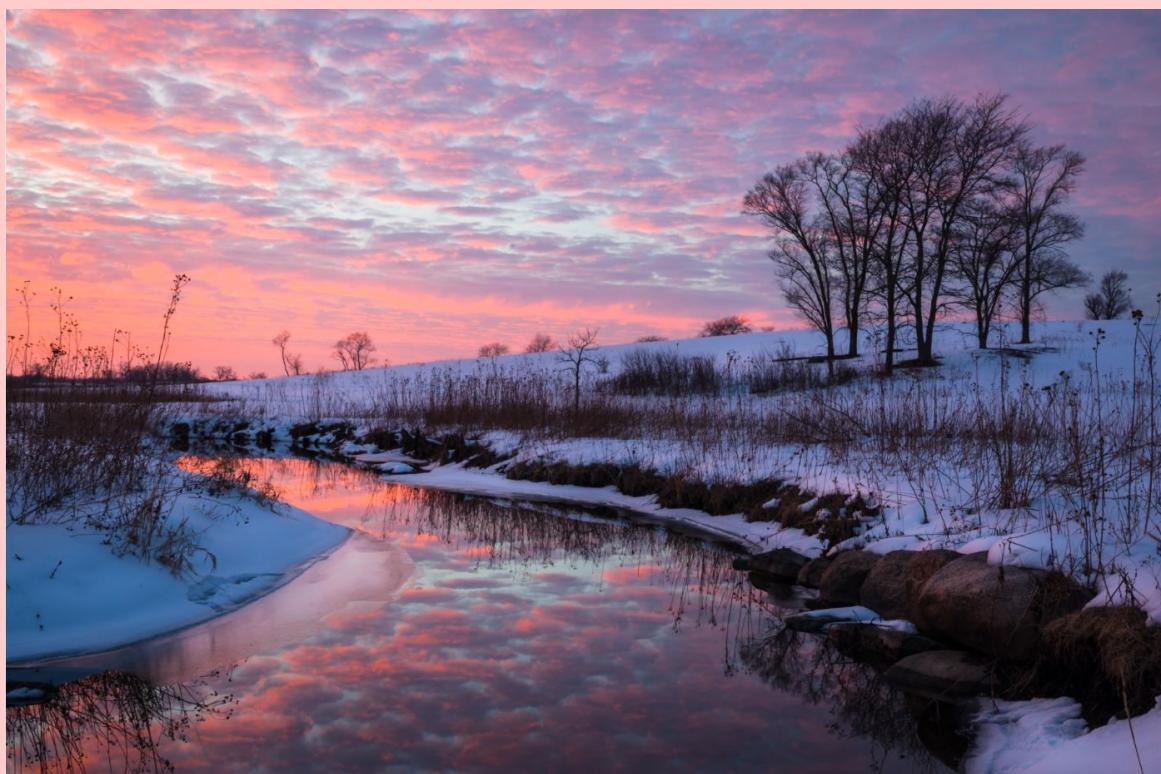
If you already have a Part D or Advantage plan but did not make changes during the annual Open Enrollment Period that ends December 7th, you may still qualify for Special Enrollment Periods (for Part D changes) or the Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period that runs from January 1-March 31 of 2026.

In continued efforts to improve access to health care and lower prescription costs, you can still see if you qualify for **Wisconsin's SeniorCare** pharmaceutical assistance program. **See more information here: [SeniorCare: Prescription Drug Assistance Program | Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)**

Adapted from [diabetes.org](#).

For more MIPPA Program information, call MIPPA Program Specialist, Leilani Amundson, at 608-240-7458.

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Date

Time

Topic

A LEADING VOICE FOR CAREGIVERS

All sessions are available on your choice of Zoom or telephone only!

Wednesday December 3	11:00 am Eastern 10:00 am Central 9:00 am Mountain 8:00 am Pacific	Caring can be Rewarding, but Stressful: How to Build on the Positives with Elliot Montgomery Sklar, PhD and Lucy Barylak, MSW Caregivers often feel like so much is out of their control, but that's not always the case. This program will focus on the positive aspects of caregiving and ways to take control of what is possible.
Tuesday December 9	11:00 am Eastern 10:00 am Central 9:00 am Mountain 8:00 am Pacific	"Making the Case for Music in Dementia Care" with Justin Russo Join this practical, evidence-informed session on using favorite, personally meaningful music to improve daily life for older adults living with dementia. Attendees will learn the therapeutic value of favorite music and how to use it purposefully to achieve outcomes like calmer transitions, better mealtimes, lifted mood, and smoother sleep. It includes tools and techniques that make integration into care routines simple and safe, and how to evaluate impact with brief, low-burden measures, including cost-effectiveness and return on investment.
Wednesday December 10	11:00 am Eastern 10:00 am Central 9:00 am Mountain 8:00 am Pacific	"Cómo disfrutar la Navidad en momentos difíciles" con Leticia Guzman Sanchez, BS, Q.D.C.P. La Navidad puede seguir siendo especial, incluso si estás enfermo, eres adulto mayor o cuidas a alguien. Aprenderemos como vivir las emociones sin culpa, adaptar las celebraciones para que sean cómodas y sencillas, y como valorar los pequeños momentos.
Tuesday December 16	1:00 pm Eastern 12:00 pm Central 11:00 am Mountain 10:00 am Pacific	The Holidays and Dementia: Tips for Making the Holidays More Enjoyable with Hollie Lowe, MA, LPC, NCC Join this educational program designed to help families and caregivers navigate the unique challenges that the holiday season can bring for people living with dementia. The program provides practical strategies for creating meaningful, low-stress celebrations, adapting traditions, managing expectations, and ensuring a safe and comforting environment. It focuses on maintaining connection, promoting well-being, and preserving the joy of the season for both the person with dementia and their loved ones.



A program of the WellMed Charitable Foundation

Register online at www.caregiverteleconnection.org or call 866.390.6491
Toll Free

≡ **FREE Welcome to Medicare Seminars**

**Sponsored by: Area Agency on Aging of Dane County's
Elder Benefit Specialist Program**

What you need to know about enrolling in Medicare

If you are turning age 64 this year, the Dane County Area Agency on Aging wants to help you make informed choices about your Medicare options! Do you understand what Medicare is and isn't...how to avoid penalties for late enrollment in Medicare...and how to get the most out of your health and prescription benefit plans? Some decisions and actions about Medicare can take place 3-6 months before you turn 65, so don't wait until you are turning 65 to understand all you need to know about this important benefit.

Want easy to understand answers to all of these complex questions? Sign up to attend one of the following Free Welcome to Medicare Seminars. By attending a seminar, you'll walk away with the accurate and detailed information you need from unbiased experts in benefit programs. In-Person seminars have limited space so sign up early.

All dates are on Saturdays, 9—11:30 am

EXCEPT November 14, 2026 will be 1 pm-3:30 pm

January 17, 2026-Virtual
Email AAA@danecounty.gov
to register by 1/9/26

March 14, 2026-In-Person
McFarland Senior Outreach
5915 Milwaukee St, McFarland
Email AAA@danecounty.gov
to register by 3/6/26

May 16, 2026-Virtual
Email AAA@danecounty.gov
to register by 5/8/26

July 25, 2026-In-Person
Cornerstone Community Center
505 N Main St, DeForest
Email AAA@danecounty.gov
to register by 7/17/26

September 12, 2026-Virtual
Email AAA@danecounty.gov
to register by 9/4/26

November 14, 2026-In-Person
Waunakee Senior Center
333 S Madison St, Waunakee
Email AAA@danecounty.gov
to register by 11/6/26

