**COVID-19 Updated Guidance for CY2022**

**Title III-E and the Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Family Caregiver Support Program**

Additional funding providing to the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) by Congress should be used to expand the capacity and range of services available to help family caregivers provide care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Funds are distributed for traditional NFCSP services with the understanding that they should also be used to implement strategies for service delivery and providing technology that allows caregivers to access counseling, respite, training, caregiver education and connect with caregiver support program staff.

The Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Family Caregiver Support Program, for which counties and tribes receive funding separate from the NFCSP, is also covered by this guidance, as applicable.

**CHANGES AND WAIVERS TO POLICY**

1. In the past, the State of Wisconsin limited payments to in-home provider agencies, extended family members and friends of primary caregivers. In response to the paid caregiver shortage, social distancing advisories, and the reality that many family members are reluctant to invite outsiders into the home of older adults at-risk of contracting COVID-19, DHS temporarily amended this policy in 2021 and will continue using the amended policy until Dec. 31, 2022.
All caregivers, **including primary caregivers**, who are eligible to enroll in AFCSP and NFCSP may receive a non-professional rate stipend to reimburse for caregiving provided. If an agency’s funding is running low, priority should be given to low-income caregivers who have been laid-off, furloughed or have lost a job.

Time spent performing the following tasks may be eligible for an hourly stipend using Title III-E or AFCSP when pre-approved by county and tribal caregiver program coordinators:

* Bathing and grooming
* Meal preparation and feeding
* Housekeeping chores, such as cleaning and doing laundry
* Grocery shopping and other errands
* Snow removal, lawn care and home maintenance
* Transportation to and from doctor appointments, scheduling appointments, or participating in appointments by phone or internet
* Managing banking, household bills, and other financial transactions
* Emergency preparation and planning for oneself or the care recipient
* Purchasing technology, caregiver training or internet services needed to maintain connections with medical and other care providers, friends and family members while adhering to social distancing guidelines
* Medication management and coordination with qualified health care professionals, including pharmacists
* Grandparent and relative caregiver supports
* Any other activity currently reimbursable under Title III-E and the AFCSP

Local agencies are responsible for setting the non-professional rate for stipends and for providing instructions to primary caregivers, extended family members and friends on how caregiving hours should be documented and submitted for payment. Agencies are also responsible for maintaining documentation to justify payments. Guidance for establishing a policy to provide stipends has been distributed to county and tribal AFCSP and NFCSP coordinators. It is also available on the GWAAR.org website or by contacting Lynn Gall, Family and Caregiver Support Program Manager for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, at Lynn.Gall@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

Note: Caregivers are personally responsible for determining the tax implications of receiving stipends, as well as for understanding how earning a stipend may impact their eligibility for unemployment benefits and other public benefits. Caregiver program coordinators may assist caregivers in gathering information they need to make a determination about the impact stipends may have on their tax liabilities and benefits, but program coordinators **may not advise or provide legal advice** about these issues. However, NFCSP and AFCSP may be used to pay for caregivers to consult with a financial advisor or attorney to help make these determinations. Free benefits counseling is also available to caregivers age 60+ through the [Elder Benefit Specialist Program](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aging/legal-assistance.htm) or to caregivers of all ages through the [GWAAR Guardianship Support Center](https://gwaar.org/guardianship-resources).

1. The 112 hr. annual limit on NFCSP caregiver respite is suspended until Dec. 31, 2022.
Agencies may approve respite as needed based on results of the required AFCSP and NFCSP needs assessment if funding allows.
2. Online education and training is now available to family caregivers through [Trualta](https://wisconsincaregiver.trualta.com/login).
Self-registration is easy, and caregiver coordinators are notified when a new user in their service area registers. Please follow-up with Trualta registrants to learn if they have additional unmet needs that our programs can address.
3. An online version of Powerful Tools for Caregivers (PTC) classes became available in June, 2020. To obtain the necessary training to host an online PTC class, contact Judy Rank at the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging at (608) 243-5690 or info@wihealthyaging.org.

**BEST PRACTICES**

Family caregivers face special challenges during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The person in their care needs them to be physically healthy and emotionally strong, which takes extra effort during a pandemic. Below are guidelines to help Family Caregiver Support Program coordinators and ADRC staff continue to serve caregivers in days ahead. Programs should provide information that is based on medical science with the goal of keeping caregivers connected to relatives, friends and qualified professionals.

1. **Emphasize Prevention**

Ensure that you and everyone in the household follows CDC Guidelines:

* 1. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing one’s nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
	2. Avoid close contact with others as much as possible (about 6 feet), and wear a face mask.
	3. Stay home when sick, except to get needed medical care.
	4. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
	5. Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects daily. (e.g., tables, countertops, light switches, doorknobs, and cabinet, refrigerator and appliance handles)
	6. For disinfection, a list of products with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval is available at [Novel Coronaviris (COVID-19) Fighting Products](https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-Coronavirus-Fighting-Products-List.pdf), Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions for all cleaning and disinfection products.

2. **Know who is at greatest risk**

According to the CDC, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions are at higher risk for more serious complications from COVID-19, even if they have received one of the available vaccines. If a caregiver or household member is at increased risk for COVID-19 complications, they should be advised to consult with their health care provider to monitor their health and symptoms.

**3. Watch for COVID-19 symptoms**

If a caregiver suspects they may have been exposed to COVID-19 and develops a fever, cough or other symptoms, or experiences difficulty breathing, advise them to immediately call their healthcare provider for medical advice.

1. **Designate a room at home that can be used to isolate sick household members**

Identify a separate room and bathroom for a sick or potentially exposed person to use, if possible. Plan to clean these rooms regularly. [Learn how to care for someone at home.](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Fguidance-prevent-spread.html)

1. **Create an emergency plan**

Advise caregivers to make a plan with the help of family members and friends to address what the care recipient are likely to need if the primary caregiver needs to self-isolate. Encourage caregivers to ask others to volunteer to ensure these needs are met, and make sure the caregiver creates an emergency contact list that includes instructions about medications and specific care needs in case the caregiver becomes ill. Remind them that their local Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) can assist in creating an emergency plan.

1. **Make a list of contacts and community resources**

Advise caregivers to create a current list of contacts for family, friends, neighbors, carpool drivers, health care providers, teachers, employers, the local public health department and the Aging and Disability Resource Center. Include help lines such as:

1. Alzheimer’s Association 24/7 Helpline – 1-800-272-3900 or [live chat.](https://www.alz.org/help-support/caregiving)
2. Wisconsin’s [Trualta](https://wisconsincaregiver.trualta.com/login) online caregiver education and training portal.
3. Caregiver Action Network Caregiver Help Desk – toll free number 855-227-3640 or [live chat](https://www.caregiveraction.org/)
4. Institute on Aging Friendship Line - crisis intervention hotline and a “warmline” for non- emergency emotional support calls – 1-800-971-0016
5. Disaster Distress Helpline – free, 24/7 crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related natural or human-caused disasters (options for deaf/hard of hearing and Spanish speakers) 1-800-985-5990 or Text TalkWithUs to 66746
6. **Caregiver program coordinators should keep abreast of changes**

Changes may occur in daily operations of ADRCs and other community support agencies in accordance with State orders and CDC recommendations. Call to learn details, as the following guidelines are being enforced at varying degrees across the state. Changes may include:

• Suspension of classes and support groups – some are being provided via phone or online.

• Suspension of in-home and in-office visits and offering visits by phone instead.

• Closure of congregate dining sites with options for picking-up meals or meal delivery.

8. **Take advantage of technology and virtual supports** such as telephone support groups,
 webinars, tele-events and message boards from the following organizations.

* [Alzheimer’s Association](https://alz.org/help-support/community) offers a variety of online and virtual supports. In addition to a telephone support group for Wisconsin caregivers on Tuesdays from 5:30-7:00 pm and Thursdays from 1-2:30 pm. Register by calling 800-272-3900 and ask for Wisconsin Support Group information
* [ALZConnected](https://www.alzconnected.org/) is a free, online community for anyone affected by Alzheimer’s or other dementia such as message boards and a Caregivers Forum.
* [Caregiver Teleconnection](https://www.wellmedcharitablefoundation.org/caregiver-support/caregiver-teleconnection/) holds weekly live call-in events as well as archived programs all relating to caring for someone who is older or disabled.
* [Alzheimer’s Foundation of America](https://alzfdn.org/webinar-archives/) hosts webinars that are accessible online.
* [Family Caregiver Alliance](https://www.caregiver.org/support-groups)offers online caregiver support groups

**9. Interactions with nursing homes, CBRFs and assisted living** Always call in advance to learn their most recent policies about visiting. The State Department of
 Stay in touch by phone, email and U.S. mail until restrictions are lifted.

**10. Resources for grandparents and relative caregivers of a child**

* [Children and Coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/children.html) – information from the CDC
* [Tips for Families - Coronavirus](https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3210-tips-for-families-coronavirus)
* [COVID-19 Fact Sheet for Grandfamilies and Multigenerational Families](https://www.gu.org/app/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-Fact-Sheet-3-17-20.pdf)
* If the child receives free or reduced school meals, contact the school to find out how meals can be accessed during school closures.

**11. Encourage caregivers to discuss their circumstances with their employer** Tele-work may be an option, as well as leave options. Remind caregivers to emphasize that
 someone else’s health is dependent on them remaining well.

**12.** **Prioritize emotional health and stress management** Encourage caregivers to make time to unwind, call a friend or spiritual advisor, listen to music or
 engage in other relaxing activities. It is important to take breaks from watching, reading or
 listening to news about COVID-19. Connect with family and friends by phone or consider
 conference call or video conferencing technology. Note: AFCSP and NFCSP can both be used to
 provide necessary technology.

**13.** **Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation** Get up-to-date information about local COVID-19 activity from the
 [Wisconsin Department of Health Services website.](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/index.htm)