

# **PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES (PAS) FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS: *WHY THIS IS A GREAT IDEA!***

## **WHAT ARE PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES (PAS)?**

- Assistance from another person called a Personal Assistant (PA) or a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) who helps a person with disabilities live in the community
- Support is individualized & flexible to meet a person's preferences
- The person receiving services has the control of hiring, training, supervising & firing (if necessary) the PCA/PA
- The person receiving services decides when & what services are provided
- Under One Care, the individual's One Care plan pays for the personal assistance services

## **WHAT PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES MIGHT BE HELPFUL FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS?**

- Emotional support
- Support, encouragement & reminders to complete tasks
- Assistance with shopping, budgeting & other daily/weekly routines
- Transportation
- Help negotiating with social service systems & agencies

## **HAVE PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS IN MASSACHUSETTS USED PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES?**

Yes! The next page of this fact sheet tells about three people with mental health conditions who have used Personal Assistance Services.

## **WILL MY ONE CARE PLAN PAY FOR PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS?**

Yes! People who have One Care can get Personal Assistance Services as one of the Long Term Support Services available to members.

**For more information, please contact the Transformation Center at [info@transformation-center.org](mailto:info@transformation-center.org)**

## **THREE PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS WHO HAVE USED PERSONAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES**

1. Nancy Lee was in her late 50s when she began receiving Personal Assistance Services. Her PCA helped with light house cleaning as this was sometimes an overwhelming task for her. Her PCA also provided transportation and accompaniment to stores as the bus system was confusing to Nancy Lee and sometimes caused her to have panic attacks. Nancy Lee's anxiety and depression were often quite severe. The most important thing her PCA provided was emotional support. As Nancy Lee was the person hiring her PCAs, she always made sure they were caring empathetic people with whom she could easily talk. Before Nancy Lee was approved for PAS, she had several acute psychiatric hospitalizations. After she began receiving services, she credited having a PCA at her house to provide emotional support as what kept her out of the hospital on a number of occasions. Instead of going to the emergency room, she would reach out to her PCA whose support would lessen her anxiety and depression and help her through the crisis. As she received PAS in the early days of paid peer support in Massachusetts, some of Nancy Lee's PCAs had lived experience of mental health diagnosis themselves and some did not.

2. Lea had been receiving services in the mental health system for 27 years when she got approved for PAS. When interviewed about having a PCA, she said, "In all of the traditional mental health services [that I have used] the workers get paid to do a job that somebody else defines....With a personal care attendant, I actually hire the person and train him or her to assist me. I also take care of the paperwork so that Medicaid gives me the money to pay my PCA each week. That really puts control in my hands." Describing how her PCA assists her with her mental health condition, she said, "Vacuuming frightens me because of the loud suction noise. I hear frightening voices sometimes when the vacuum is on. So when my PCA vacuums, I leave my apartment and go downstairs until she is done. Also, having a psychiatric disability and being on SSI means I am in the lower socioeconomic sphere. I can't afford a car and public transportation is limited. But on an emotional and psychological level I can't afford to be isolated. My PCA will give me rides to the clubhouse, food shopping, doctors appointments, etc. I'm a very sociable person. I need contact. My PCA is my friend and we do things together. Sometimes we just listen to the radio together or go out for an inexpensive meal or she cooks a meal for me if I'm not feeling up to it. I also take a lot of different medications and my PCA helps me keep them organized and we always check to make sure I have enough."

3. Patty was in her early 30s when she was approved for Personal Assistance Services. Her PCAs provide emotional support and helped her organize tasks around the house. Traditional agencies providing mental health services had criticized her for having poor hygiene. When hospitalized she often would not "earn" privileges because she did not regularly shower. When she hired her first PCA she talked about how showering was difficult for her. As an adolescent she had been repeatedly abused in the shower. With her PCA's help, Patty figured out that if her PCA stood in the bathroom the entire time that she showered, encouraging her and assuring her that no one else was in the bathroom, Patty could begin to shower regularly without feeling the terror that someone would come in and hurt her that she had previously felt. This was the single most important service provided by her PCAs.