



Shining a Light on a Silent Epidemic

November is a month dedicated to raising awareness about Alzheimer’s disease, a devastating condition that affects millions of people worldwide. This silent epidemic, characterized by progressive memory loss, cognitive decline, and behavioral changes, has a profound impact on individuals, families, and communities.

Understanding Alzheimer’s Disease

Alzheimer’s disease is a neurodegenerative disorder that gradually destroys brain cells. As the disease progresses, individuals may experience difficulty with:

- **Memory:** Forgetting recent events, names, or familiar places
- **Thinking:** Struggling with problem-solving, planning, and decision-making
- **Language:** Finding the right words or following conversations
- **Behavior:** Experiencing personality changes, agitation, or wandering



**Alzheimer’s
Awareness Month**
NOVEMBER

Impact on Families

Caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease can be emotionally and physically demanding. Family members often face challenges such as:

- **Emotional stress:** Dealing with the loss of a loved one’s cognitive abilities
- **Financial strain:** Managing health-care costs and potential changes in living arrangements
- **Social isolation:** Limited opportunities for social activities and support

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**DEPARTMENT OF
PUBLIC HEALTH &
HUMAN SERVICES**

Importance of Awareness

Raising awareness about Alzheimer's disease is crucial for several reasons.

- **Early diagnosis:** Early detection can help individuals and their families plan for the future and access appropriate support services.
- **Reducing stigma:** Challenging negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the disease can help create a more compassionate and understanding environment.
- **Promoting research:** Increased awareness can drive funding for research aimed at finding a cure and improving treatments.
- **Encouraging support:** Fostering a supportive community can empower individuals living with Alzheimer's and their caregivers.

Action You Can Take Today

"Research shows that adopting healthy behaviors, like getting exercise and good quality sleep, may reduce the risk of cognitive decline," said Melanie Williams, Executive Director for the Alzheimer's Association of Montana.

"We know that the brain changes that lead to an Alzheimer's diagnosis are happening 15 to 20 years before the disease is ever diagnosed," Williams said. "Factors including high blood pressure, lack of

physical activity, our diet, and how social we are all play a role in our risk for developing Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia."

24/7 Helpline: 1-800-272-3900

The Alzheimer's Association 24/7 Helpline (1-800-272-3900) is a free service offering support for caregivers, families, the public, and people living with dementia.

You'll connect with a live person who can provide information, local resources, crisis assistance, and emotional support.

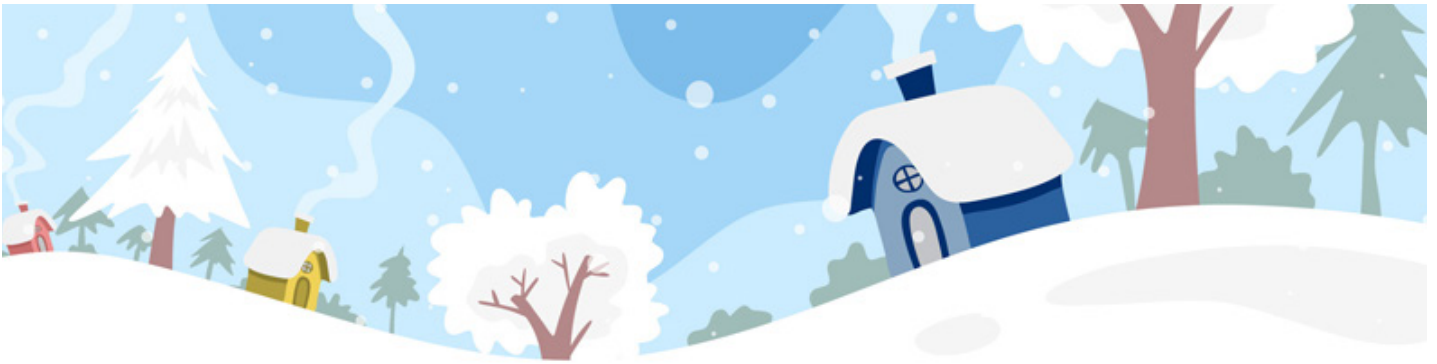
Information is also available on the Association's website: www.alz.org. A free online webinar explaining the 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's is available there as well.

November is Alzheimer's Awareness Month

Alzheimer's Awareness Month is an opportunity to come together as a community and support those affected by this devastating disease.

By raising awareness, challenging stigma, and promoting research, we can work toward a future where Alzheimer's is no longer a burden.





Worried About Winter Heating Bills?

Energy Share Can Help

Cold weather is coming, and heating bills can pile up fast. Do you know someone who is worried about how they're going to pay those bills?

Two programs in Montana can help. The first is the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps pay a portion of your winter heating bill. The second is Energy Share, which helps Montanans at risk of losing their heat or electricity and have no other resources to pay their bills.

In Montana, it's about neighbors helping neighbors. This might be as simple as going with a friend to help them apply for assistance.

Call Energy Share at **1-888-779-7589** to learn more. You can also find information at www.energysharemt.com.

Yes, Your Heat Can Be Turned Off In Winter

Many people think utility companies cannot shut off services during winter. However, under certain circumstances, this can happen.

From November 1 to April 1, a regulated utility cannot shut off gas, underground propane, or electric service without prior approval from the Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC regulates companies such as Cut Bank Gas, Energy West, Montana-Dakota Utilities, and NorthWestern Energy.

The PSC will not approve a winter shutoff if a customer is unable to pay (for example, if they are receiving public assistance) or if a household member is at least 62 years old or has a disability.

Customers must inform their utility company if these circumstances apply to their household.

For more information, visit the Public Service Commission's website at psc.mt.gov/consumers/energy/pdf/UtilityRules03012001.pdf or call **1-406-444-6199** or **1-800-646-6150**.

Please note, electric cooperatives and propane vendors are not regulated by the PSC. Each has its own policies, so be sure to check with your energy provider for their specific rules.



Lindsey Carter
Interim SLTCD Administrator

Collaboration Is Key for the Senior and Long Term Care Division

Hello! My name is Lindsey Carter, and I am excited to serve as the interim division administrator for the Senior Long Term Care Division. I've worked for DPHHS for 11 years and most recently served as the Bureau Chief for the Developmental Disabilities Program.

I began my career as a direct service professional in the developmental disabilities field, focusing on youth with autism spectrum disorder. My experience working directly with individuals in services and their families gave me a crucial perspective — one that emphasizes a person-centered approach to policymaking.

Although I've only been in this role for about a month, I've already learned so much about the exciting work happening in this division. The Senior Long Term Care Division's staff are driving many

important initiatives. We're implementing the newly developed Pediatric Complex Care Assistant service, established through HB 449 last legislative session, leading the State's efforts to create an Olmstead Plan and developing improved rate structures to ensure our providers have the resources to serve individuals with complex needs in the community. Needless to say, we have a lot going on!

Despite all this great work, we know there's more to be done to improve access to essential community-based services. I believe collaboration is the key to success, and I look forward to meeting and learning from this division's diverse stakeholders as we work to continue improving services.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Carter

Introducing “The Fraudsters”

Montana’s New Frontline Against Scams

By Alex Ward,
AARP Lead Volunteer for
American Indian Outreach

Fraud is on the rise, and Montana’s seniors are often targets. But a coalition of experts – dubbed “The Fraudsters” – is here to help you fight back.

The group, including the FBI, AARP, the Montana Commissioner of Securities and Insurance (CSI), and the Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP), is pooling resources to protect Montanans from scams.

The Fraudsters’ mission is simple: to make it easier for people to recognize the red flags that are common across various types of fraud. With so many different scams circulating, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed.

By focusing on these key warning signs, the group aims to simplify fraud prevention. Their first major outreach effort will take place during International Fraud Awareness Week, November 17-23, 2024.

Webinars and events will be scheduled to provide practical tips and strategies for staying safe. Keep an eye on the SMP offices at your local Area Agency on Aging, the CSI website, and AARP Montana’s website for details.



Photo by Nick Youngson, Alpha Stock images/Wikimedia Commons

Each presenter brings extensive experience in fraud prevention.

Rabecca Leary, an Outreach Specialist with the FBI, helped organize the initiative. Kari Weber, a forensic accountant with the FBI, specializes in financial exploitation. Rene LaBrie Shanks, director of Montana’s SMP, works to prevent Medicare fraud. Blair Stapleton, who works with the CSI, focuses on securities and insurance fraud, and Al Ward represents AARP Montana’s Fraud Watch Network.

Scammers are getting more sophisticated, and no one is immune. They excel at creating confusion and manipulating emotions, making it easy for even savvy individuals to fall victim.

Staying informed and knowing what to watch for will help you protect yourself and those you care about from becoming the next target.

A Haven for Montana's Caregivers

Respite Retreats Offer Relaxation, Recharging, and Reconnection

Caregiving can be both rewarding and exhausting, often leaving little time for self-care. To address this, MSU Extension offers respite retreats specifically designed to give caregivers a much-needed break.

These retreats provide a safe, supportive environment where caregivers can relax, recharge, and connect with others who share similar experiences and understand their challenges.

What to Expect at a Respite Retreat

At a respite retreat, caregivers can anticipate a blend of relaxation, education, and community-building. Activities such as meditation, yoga, and guided imagery are offered to help participants reduce stress and improve their overall well-being.

Educational workshops, focusing on self-care, stress management, and communication skills, are also available to equip caregivers with valuable tools for navigating the demands of their roles.

Building Community and Finding Support

Beyond relaxation and education, respite retreats provide a space for caregivers to connect with others who understand the challenges they face. These retreats



Photo by Yuri A., PeopleImages/Shutterstock

foster a sense of community and support through shared experiences.

Social activities and outings are incorporated to offer a refreshing break from the demands of caregiving, helping caregivers recharge both physically and mentally.

The Benefits of Respite

Taking time away from caregiving can have a significant impact on a caregiver's well-being. Regular breaks help reduce stress and anxiety, boost mood, and improve overall health.

By preventing burnout, caregivers can ensure they have the energy and emotional resilience to continue providing high-quality care to their loved ones. Many participants in these retreats report

UPCOMING 2024 CAREGIVER RETREATS

Monday, November 4

Glasgow, MT
Cottonwood Inn and Suites

Tuesday, November 5

Havre, MT
Best Western Plus Great Northern

Wednesday, November 6

Cut Bank, MT
TBD

Monday, December 2

Deer Lodge, MT
County Community Center

Tuesday, December 3

Phillipsburg, MT
Granite County Museum

Wednesday, December 4

Anaconda, MT
The Forge

feeling cared for and rejuvenated after attending, often sharing experiences like, “My cup was empty when I came, but now it is full.”

Investing in Yourself as a Caregiver

By participating in respite retreats, caregivers are investing in their own well-being and ensuring they can continue to provide the best possible care for their loved ones. These retreats offer an opportunity to recharge, connect with others, and return to caregiving with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

For more information about the Montana Respite Retreats, email Daniel Koltz at daniel.koltz@montana.edu, or call 1-406-994-4351.

Aging Horizons Has A New Host

Wilmot Collins is the new face of Aging Horizons. As Compliance and Communication Specialist for the Senior and Long Term Care Division at DPHHS, Wilmot brings years of public service experience, including work at VA Montana and Child and Family Services.

He holds a BA in Political Science and Sociology from the University of Liberia and a Master’s in Human Resources Management from Troy University.



*Wilmot Collins
New Aging Horizons Host*

“My whole career has been about public service and our vulnerable citizens,” he says. “I am looking forward to working closely with the producer and coworkers to manage the show’s content and production.”

Aging Horizons airs Saturdays at 9 a.m. and Sundays at 9:30 a.m. on SWX and NBC Billings, with additional broadcasts Sundays at 8 a.m. on ABC affiliates in Butte, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Missoula, and Kalispell.

Episodes are also available on the DPHHS YouTube channel. Just search for Aging Horizons on YouTube.com.

Guardianship and Beyond

How Adult Protective Services Supports Well-Being of Vulnerable Adults

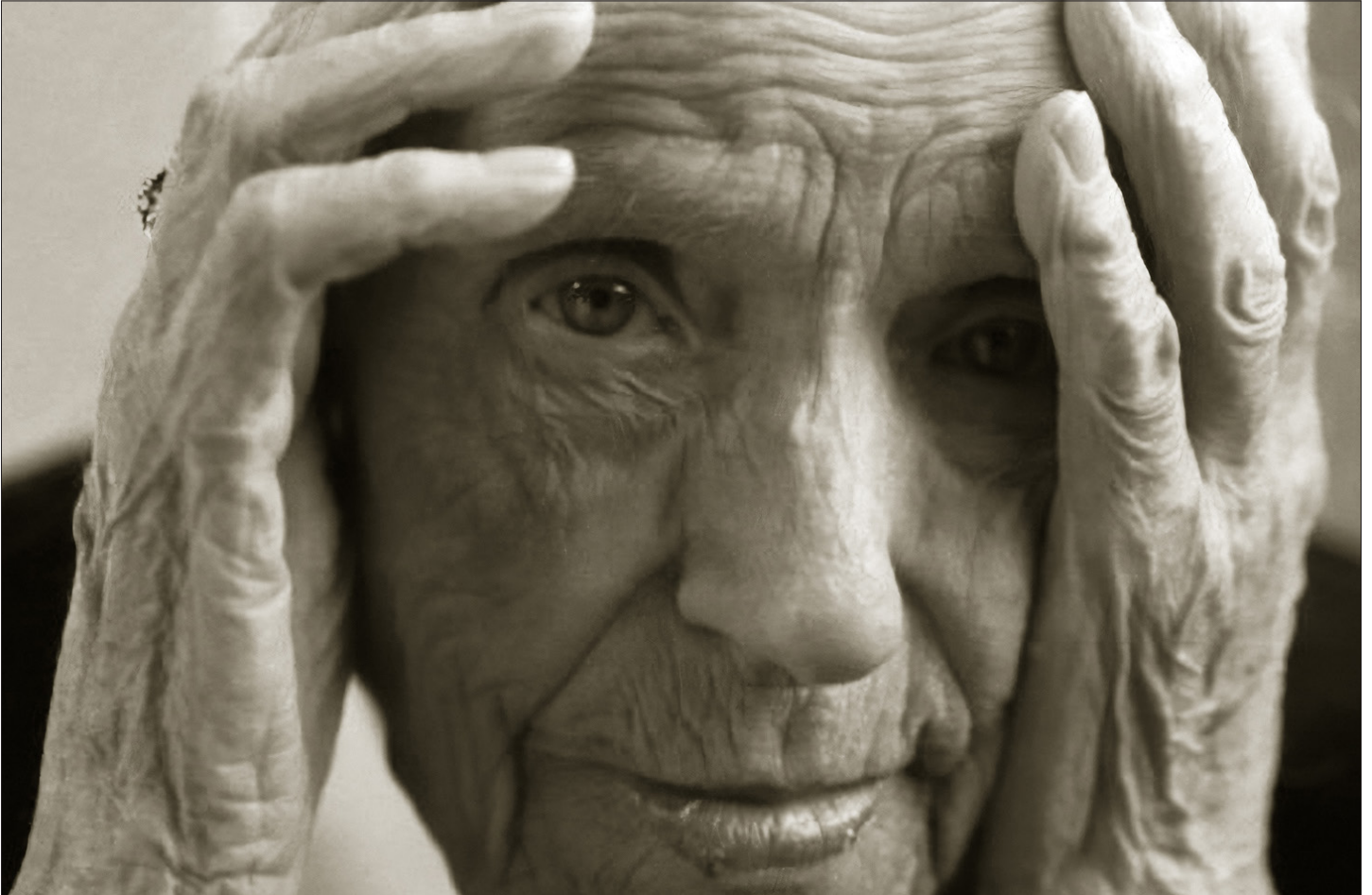


Photo by Andreas Bohnenstengel Altenpflege, Wikimedia Commons

Guardianship plays an important role in protecting vulnerable adults in Montana, and Adult Protective Services (APS) is at the forefront of managing these cases for the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

Since 2021, APS has dedicated a specialized social services unit to oversee guardianship

cases, ensuring individuals receive the support and protection they need.

Initially, this grant-funded unit was formed with four full-time staff members, to manage 120 guardianship cases. Before this, APS investigators handled guardianship cases alongside investigations into adult maltreatment.

The rising reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation created challenges, often leading to potential conflicts of interest for investigators serving both roles.

Today, APS has five grant-funded social services workers responsible for 77 active guardianship cases, as well as all new appointments.

While guardianship is the most restrictive form of decision-making, APS works diligently to prioritize less restrictive alternatives whenever possible. By helping individuals explore these options, APS ensures guardianship is pursued only when absolutely necessary.

The social services unit has successfully advocated for individuals no longer needing guardianship, transferring cases to family members when suitable relatives are available and willing to serve.

APS also collaborates with county attorneys to petition the court for guardianship when investigations reveal a vulnerable adult lacks decision-making capacity and requires protection to reduce the risk of harm.

In cases where no family member or qualified individual is available, a judge may appoint a state or federal agency to serve as guardian, ensuring the individual's safety and well-being.

Additionally, APS works closely with Child Protective Services (CPS) to create a clear pathway for children in state custody who will need alternative decision-makers once they transition into adulthood. This collaboration guarantees these individuals continue to receive the necessary support services as they mature.

APS remains committed to ensuring guardians act responsibly and ethically.

Through educational outreach and training, APS provides stakeholders with clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of a guardian, promoting proper care and compliance with state rules. The agency is also working to establish a standard of practice that safeguards the rights and well-being of those under guardianship, prioritizing their dignity and autonomy whenever possible.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT ABUSE OF A VULNERABLE ADULT?

Adult Protective Services specialists help protect vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. They help end abuse by matching the needs of the person with community partners in their area, such as mental health professionals, public health officials, law enforcement, the courts, the aging network, and other community groups.

- **If you suspect harm is occurring right now, call 911**
- **If the concern is not life-threatening, you can call 1-844-277-9300 or contact APS online: dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/aps/**
- **If you would like more info about APS, contact Senior and Long Term Care to get a brochure: 1-406-444-4077**

Aging Independently at Home is Possible

Medicaid's CFC and PAS Programs Explained

For many Montanans, staying in their own homes as they age or face health challenges is a top priority. Medicaid's Community First Choice (CFC) and Personal Assistance Services (PAS) programs help make that goal possible. These programs provide personal care to Medicaid-eligible individuals, allowing thousands of elderly residents and people with disabilities to live comfortably at home.

CFC and PAS services are tailored to each individual based on their specific needs, health conditions, and living situations. Assistance ranges from daily personal care — for example bathing, dressing, and meal preparation — to help with medication, mobility, light housekeeping, and grocery shopping.

Additionally, the CFC program offers services like community integration, yard hazard removal, help with correspondence, and a personal emergency response system. Services such as home repairs, financial management, and pet care, however, are not included.



Photo by Fotoluminate LLC, Shutterstock

Choosing Your Care

Individuals who qualify for Medicaid's CFC and PAS programs have two options for how they receive their care: Self-Directed or Agency-Based. Each option offers flexibility depending on your preferences and level of involvement.

Self-Directed Care

This option allows individuals, or their personal representatives, to take control of their care by hiring, training, and managing their personal care attendants. In some cases, individuals can also manage skilled services like catheter care or wound care, with approval from a healthcare provider. To choose this path, participants must demonstrate that they understand the program and are able to direct their own care. It's important to note that under this option, individuals assume responsibility for their medical care.

Agency-Based Care

For those preferring a more hands-off approach, the Agency-Based option lets Medicaid providers manage care services. Providers hire and train attendants, while a nurse supervisor ensures quality care. But skilled services aren't included under this option. If skilled care is needed, individuals may switch to the Self-Directed option, rely on informal support, or explore other Medicaid programs for skilled nursing.

Supporting Independence at Home

Medicaid's CFC and PAS programs offer more than just care — they also



HOW CAN I QUALIFY?

To qualify for Medicaid's CFC or PAS programs, you must:

- Have a health condition that limits your ability to perform daily activities;
- Participate in the authorization and screening process; and
- Be eligible for Medicaid.

To qualify for the CFC program, individuals must also undergo a level-of-care determination.

For more details on Medicaid eligibility, call: **1-888-706-7035**

or visit online:

**[dphhs.mt.gov/
MontanaHealthcarePrograms/
MemberServices](https://dphhs.mt.gov/MontanaHealthcarePrograms/MemberServices)**

empower Montanans to live with greater independence at home. Whether you prefer taking control of your own care or leaving it to professionals, these programs give you options to choose the path that works best for your situation.