



# Honoring Montana's Direct Care Workers

*April Is National Direct Care Worker Month*



*The work goes far beyond daily tasks—direct care workers build trust, provide comfort, and make it possible for Montanans to live with dignity at home.*

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Every April, Montana recognizes the dedicated individuals who support people who are older and individuals with disabilities. Direct care workers are the backbone of home and community based services, and their commitment ensures that thousands of Montanans can live safely, independently, and with dignity in their own homes and communities.

In Montana, these workers play a pivotal role in delivering services through the Community First Choice Services (CFCS),

Personal Care Services (PCS), and the Big Sky Waiver (BSW) programs. Their work touches nearly every corner of the state to include rural towns, tribal communities, and growing urban centers alike.

**Community First Choice Services and Personal Care Services: Support That Sustains Independence**  
CFCS and PCS providers assist individuals with the everyday tasks that many of us take for granted, such as bathing, dressing,

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preparing meals, managing household chores, and participating in community life. Through both agency based and self directed service models, they make it possible for Montanans to receive customized support that fits their needs and preferences.

For individuals who choose self direction, direct care workers are often selected and trained by the people for whom they provide care, which creates trusted relationships built on respect, autonomy, and shared understanding. For those receiving agency based services, care workers bring professionalism, compassion, and reliability to each home they enter.

### **Big Sky Waiver: Specialized Support for Montana's Most Vulnerable**

Caregivers working within the BSW program help individuals with more complex needs live in their chosen communities by providing specialized supports such as respite care, habilitation, adult residential services, and assistance with daily living. These workers serve individuals who would otherwise need to enter institutional care.

The personal commitment shown by BSW workers enhances quality of life and eases pressure on long-term care facilities.

### **A Workforce That Deserves Recognition**

Montana's direct care workers embody resilience, patience, and compassion. They are problem solvers, advocates, companions, and essential contributors to the health of our communities. Their

work is more than just the physical tasks on the service plan, they notice changes in health, provide emotional support, communicate with families, contribute to care coordination, and offer reassurance during moments of vulnerability.

This month, and every month, we acknowledge the:

- long hours and difficult weather they navigate to ensure members receive care,
- emotional labor that comes with supporting individuals and families,
- skill and professionalism they bring to sensitive, personal tasks, and
- stability they create for people who wish to remain in their homes.

Montana's direct care workforce is of utmost importance, not only to those they serve, but to the strength of our state's entire long term care system.

### **A Call to Appreciation**

During National Direct Care Worker Month, we encourage Montana communities, families, and program members to take a moment to acknowledge the work of our CFCS, PCS, BSW, and all direct care workers. A simple "thank you" can make a meaningful impact.

To every care worker across the state: Your dedication makes independent living possible. Your compassion strengthens families. Your presence enriches communities. Montana is grateful for you.

# Opening the Doors to Justice

## *How Self-Help Law Centers Support Montanans*

Navigating the civil legal system on your own can be confusing. The Self-Help Law Centers offer reliable information to help Montanans handle common legal issues and access the tools they need. While the centers cannot provide legal advice or representation, they help individuals understand the legal process and work through their legal problems independently.

Self-Help Law Centers are located throughout the state, with sites in Great Falls, Kalispell, Bozeman, Missoula, Helena, and Billings. The centers provide information on a wide range of legal topics, including divorce, parenting plans, consumer credit, guardianship, adoptions, landlord-tenant issues, name changes, and more. Staff can answer questions about Montana courts, help people locate state laws and regulations, and direct them to pro se forms. They can also review forms for completeness, but they cannot fill out or correct forms.

Litigants have two options for completing forms: fill-in-the-blank or automated online forms. At every center, staff can print forms for individuals to fill out by hand, allowing them to work at their own pace. Certain forms can also be completed online using auto-populating features available at the Self-Help Law Centers.

Self-Help Law Centers cannot give legal advice, interpret laws, or explain



*Clear, reliable guidance helps Montanans navigate the civil legal system with confidence—even when they represent themselves.* © Vitalii Vodolazskiy/Shutterstock

court decisions. When individuals need legal advice or further assistance, staff refer them to civil legal aid providers or statewide and local resources. Staff cannot refer people to specific lawyers.

Reasonable accommodations are available for individuals with disabilities. Requests should be made early by calling (406) 444-6178 or using the Montana Relay Service (7-1-1 or 800-833-8503).

The Montana Supreme Court's Court Help Program is dedicated to ensuring that every Montanan has meaningful access to civil legal information, echoing the Montana Constitution's promise that "Courts of Justice shall be open to every person."

*For more information, visit [courts.mt.gov/selfhelp](https://courts.mt.gov/selfhelp)*



*Lindsey Carter, SLTCD Administrator*

## The Dignity of Risk

*When the Future Becomes the Present*

We often think of aging-related decisions as something distant – important, yes, but still comfortably off on the horizon. My family recently learned how quickly that horizon can shift.

Not long ago, someone I love experienced a sudden medical event that left them confused and disoriented. In the emergency room, clinicians told us clearly: admission was necessary to provide life-saving care. To our surprise, my family member disagreed. Even in their temporarily foggy state, they understood the risks and expressed a firm desire to go home rather than stay overnight in the hospital.

It was an agonizing moment. As a loved one, my instinct was to keep them in the safest possible place. But because they still had legal decision-making capacity, the choice was theirs to make. They elected to leave the hospital against medical advice.

Fortunately, this story ends well. They stabilized at home, followed discharge instructions, and regained their clarity. When I asked later whether they regretted the decision, their answer was simple: “No. I would make the same choice again.”

This experience crystallized the “dignity of risk” principle. Currently under consideration in Montana’s HJ 26 Interim Study, guardianship laws must evolve. Robust legal frameworks are essential to ensure that protection never comes at the cost of an individual’s fundamental right to make their own choices and learn from their own lived experiences.

### **Understanding the Dignity of Risk**

The dignity of risk is the idea that adults have the right to make their own choices, even when those choices involve risk or differ from what others might prefer. Autonomy is a cornerstone of human

dignity. While it can feel safer to intervene or overprotect, doing so can unintentionally limit someone's independence and sense of control over their own life.

In my family's case, honoring autonomy meant accepting a decision we didn't want and recognizing it was fully theirs to make. It also highlighted something else: we were not prepared for this moment. We had not yet discussed advance directives, powers of attorney, or what our loved one would want in a crisis.

The future had become the present before we expected it.

### **Planning Ahead: An Ounce of Prevention**

Emergencies rarely happen on schedule. When families have not planned ahead, moments of crisis become far more stressful. Without clear documents in place, loved ones may struggle to understand a person's wishes — or may be unable to act on them at all.

The good news is that Montanans do not have to navigate this alone. Our state offers excellent resources to help adults and families prepare early, thoughtfully, and confidently.

### **Montana Resources for Advanced Planning**

MONTANA AGING AND DISABILITY RESOURCE CENTER (ADRC)

A statewide "one-stop shop" providing information, referrals, and connections to local Area Agencies on Aging. They can help families understand available services in their communities.

Contact:  
(800) 551-3191 | [montana.my-adrc.org](http://montana.my-adrc.org)

LEGAL SERVICES DEVELOPER PROGRAM  
Provides free legal clinics, sample forms, and guidance for Montanans age 60+. They can help with drafting Durable Powers of Attorney, Advance Directives, and other essential planning documents.

Contact:  
(800) 332-2272 | Visit the [DPHHS website](http://DPHHS)

MSU EXTENSION – ESTATE PLANNING  
Offers easy-to-understand "MontGuides" on wills, trusts, health-care decision-making, and other topics, all tailored to Montana law.

Visit: [montana.edu/estateplanning](http://montana.edu/estateplanning)

HJ 26 LEGISLATIVE STUDY ON GUARDIANSHIP

The Legislature continues to examine how Montana can better support individuals under guardianship while preserving rights, safety, and dignity. Following their work can help families stay informed about evolving options and protections.

### **A Final Thought**

You don't need to wait for a trip to the ER to start these conversations. Talk with your loved ones now about their wishes, their values, and what dignity means to them as they age. Putting plans in writing, before a crisis arrives, is one of the greatest gifts of clarity and peace you can give your family.

# Spring Cleaning for a Sharper Mind

*Why a safe, organized home matters for older adults and how APS can help if clutter becomes a concern*



*Spring cleaning supports more than a tidy home—it can reduce stress, improve focus, and lower fall risk for older adults. When clutter becomes overwhelming, reaching out for help can make a meaningful difference. © Krasula/Shutterstock*

As the frost melts and the first buds of spring appear, many people feel the urge to open the windows, sweep out the dust, and clear away winter's accumulation. For older adults, this seasonal reset is more than a household chore; it can be a meaningful way to support brain health and daily functioning.

## **How Clutter Affects the Aging Brain**

Our brains naturally prefer order. When a living space becomes cluttered, the extra “visual noise” forces the brain to process more information than necessary. This added cognitive load can make it harder to focus and can increase feelings of stress or fatigue.

Chronic stress — including the kind triggered by a chaotic environment — is

linked to elevated cortisol levels, which over time can contribute to memory problems and a higher risk of cognitive decline. A tidy, organized home helps create a calmer environment that supports attention, safety, and overall well-being.

## **Cognitive Benefits of a Spring Refresh**

Spring cleaning offers several advantages for older adults:

**Executive Function Boost:** Sorting through belongings and deciding what to keep, donate, or discard engages planning, sequencing, and decision-making — all key components of executive function.

**Cognitive Protection in a Safer Living Space:** Clearing floors and walkways

reduces tripping hazards and lowers the risk of falls. Preventing falls is essential, as injuries like traumatic brain injuries (TBI) can significantly increase dementia risk.

**Mood-Boosting Movement:** Cleaning often involves light movement – reaching, bending, walking, or wiping surfaces. These activities increase circulation and can release endorphins. Physical activity supports the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that helps maintain healthy brain cells.

### A Sanctuary for the Mind

Ultimately, spring cleaning is about reclaiming your space as a sanctuary. An organized home reduces the “where are my keys?” anxiety that can creep into daily routines, replacing it with a sense of control, safety, and calm. For older adults, that sense of order isn’t just comforting – it’s protective. A well-maintained environment supports cognitive health, reduces fall risks, and helps preserve independence.

But not everyone can tackle these tasks alone. When clutter becomes overwhelming

or interferes with daily functioning, it may be a sign that additional support is needed. Excessive accumulation, especially when it leads to unsafe living conditions, can be a form of self-neglect.

### Recognizing When It’s Time to Ask for Help

This spring, as you clear out the old and refresh your space, remember that maintaining a safe, healthy home is an essential part of aging well. And if you notice a friend, neighbor, or loved one struggling with hoarding, unsafe clutter, or self-neglect, your local Adult Protective Services office is here to help. Reaching out early can make all the difference in supporting someone’s dignity, safety, and well-being.

### Suspecting Abuse, Neglect, or Exploitation of a Vulnerable Adult

- 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](http://dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/aps)

STRATEGY	WHY IT WORKS
<b>The 20-Minute Rule</b>	Short cleaning sessions prevent fatigue and keep stress low.
<b>One Drawer at a Time</b>	Small, achievable goals create a sense of accomplishment and momentum.
<b>The "Body Double"</b>	Cleaning with a friend or family member adds social connection, which supports mood and memory.
<b>Visual Labels</b>	Labeling storage areas reduces the mental effort of having to remember where items belong and makes it easier for elders to maintain organization.

# Expanding Resources for Montana Caregivers



*Behind every care plan is a caregiver – expanded supports help Montana families sustain care at home and protect their own well-being. ©Daniel Megias/Shutterstock*

Momentum is building for caregiver support in Montana. The Aging Services Bureau (ASB) is excited to announce its selection as a recipient of the Administration for Community Living's Advancing State Implementation of the National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers cooperative agreement.

The ASB recognizes caregivers as anyone who provides care for another person, a role carried out by thousands of Montanans in diverse and often demanding circumstances.

Montana faces unique challenges in supporting its roughly 214,000 caregivers due to geographical isolation and

fragmented services. Informal caregivers – family members, friends, and others who provide unpaid support – deliver integral health-promoting physical, mental, social, and medical support and coordination, enabling those they care for to access streamlined care and remain in their homes.

When caregivers have the support they need, care recipients experience fewer hospitalizations, better health outcomes, and delayed placement in long-term care.

To address caregiver burden, the ASB will use the grant funding to strengthen and expand targeted caregiver supports, including respite retreats, legal document clinics, voucher programs, and the food box program.

These supports will be offered through the Tailored Caregiver Assessment and Referral (TCARE®) program and in partnership with MSU's Extension Program.

The ASB's legal clinics will assist caregivers in completing basic estate-planning documents, as well as financial and medical power-of-attorney documents. MSU Extension's voucher program, food boxes, and respite retreats will provide resources and education to support ongoing and emergency respite for caregivers. TCARE® will provide screening for caregiver needs, identify and streamline referral information, and connect caregivers with support.

Integration of these supports is designed to make services easier to access and better aligned with the needs of Montana caregivers.

To learn more about these programs and find out how to get involved, please contact Emma Whitehead, ADRC/ Respite Program Manager at [Emma.Whitehead@mt.gov](mailto:Emma.Whitehead@mt.gov) or (406) 444-3284.



## NEED HELP WITH SENIOR SERVICES?

Area Agencies on Aging offer guidance on health-care, Medicaid, Medicare, nutrition, and other essential services for elder adults. Contact your local agency for personalized support and resources.

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Area I - Eastern MT  
(406) 377-3564

Area II - Roundup Area  
(406) 323-1320

Area III - North-Central MT  
(406) 271-7553

Area IV - Helena Area  
(406) 447-1680

Area V - Butte Area  
(406) 782-5555

Area VI - Polson Area  
(406) 883-7284

Area VII - Missoula Area  
(406) 728-7682

Area VIII - Great Falls Area  
(406) 454-6990

Area IV - Kalispell Area  
(406) 758-5730

# Improving Accessibility with the Big Sky Waiver



*The Big Sky Waiver helps fund simple home modifications — like grab bars or ramps — that make daily routines safer and support independence. ©Myibean/Shutterstock*

Everyone deserves to feel safe and confident in their home and community. The Big Sky Waiver (BSW) helps make that possible by offering services that improve accessibility and support independent living.

### **Making Your Home or Vehicle More Accessible**

BSW supports independence by making homes and vehicles more accessible for members. For example, if a member needs an outside ramp to safely enter their home, BSW may help cover the cost. Vehicle modifications may also be supported, such as installing hand controls for driving or adding wheelchair

ramps. These services help members with limited mobility to travel more safely and independently.

### **BSW Services**

Home and vehicle modifications are often just one piece of the puzzle. To help a member live successfully in their community, BSW offers a wide range of other services to meet your needs:

#### **HEALTH AND THERAPY**

- Nursing, Physical, Occupational,
- Speech, and Respiratory Therapies
- Dietetic and Nutritional Services
- Pain and Symptom Management
- Specialized Medical Equipment and Supplies

## DAILY LIVING AND PERSONAL CARE

- Personal Assistance and Attendants
- Homemaker and Chore Services
- Adult Day Health
- Adult Foster Care
- Assisted Living
- Case Management

## COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Community Adult Group Homes
- Supported Employment
- Community Transition Services
- Service Animals

## SAFETY AND ACCESSIBILITY

- Emergency Response Systems
- Home Modifications
- Vehicle Modifications

## FAMILY AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT

- Respite Care
- Family Training and Support
- Financial Management and Self-Direction

### **For More Information**

To make a referral to BSW, contact Mountain Pacific at (800) 219-7035. To determine Medicaid eligibility, speak with a specialist at your local Office of Public Assistance, or contact the Montana Public Assistance Helpline at (888) 706-1535.

To find more information about BSW Services, please visit [dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/csb/BSW/BigSkyWaiverProgram](http://dphhs.mt.gov/sltc/csb/BSW/BigSkyWaiverProgram)



## HOW CAN I QUALIFY?

To qualify for Medicaid's the BSW program, you must:

- be financially eligible for Medicaid;
- meet the minimum level of care requirements for nursing facility placement; and
- have an unmet need that can only be resolved through the BSW program.

For more details on Medicaid eligibility, call:  
(888) 706-7035

or visit online:  
[dphhs.mt.gov/  
MontanaHealthcarePrograms/  
MemberServices](http://dphhs.mt.gov/MontanaHealthcarePrograms/MemberServices)

# How Cons Win Trust

## *Recognizing Manipulative Techniques*



*Scammers often build trust over the phone using familiar persuasion tactics—knowing these tricks can help you stay in control and protect your money. ©Halfpoint/Shutterstock*

*By Alex Ward, AARP Lead Volunteer for American Indian Outreach*

Con artists use several common techniques to encourage people to trust a total stranger. Many of these methods mirror tactics used in marketing, making them familiar to anyone who spends time watching television.

### **Using Familiar Techniques to Gain Trust**

Con artists rely on recognizable persuasion tactics to make their offers appear credible. These techniques create a sense of familiarity and trust, even when the person presenting them is unknown.

### **Phantom Riches: The Promise of Reward**

One frequently used tactic is known as phantom riches – the promise of a reward for choosing the “right” prize or making a particular decision. While most people are generally cautious when someone tries to sell them something, con artists use this method to create the illusion that there is something to gain for free. It is important to remember that the person making such promises is a stranger, and there is no inherent reason to trust what they say.

### **Source Credibility:**

#### **Questioning the Messenger**

It's important to consider the credibility of the source. Ask yourself whether the stranger is telling the truth. In many cons, the deception is so smooth that the victim may not even think to verify the person making the offer. Always remember: if you do not know the individual personally, you have no reason to trust what they say.

### **Social Consensus:**

#### **The Influence of the Crowd**

The idea that “everyone is doing it” can be persuasive, but widespread promotion does not guarantee that something is a good deal. It is essential to do your own research before spending your hard-earned money on something unfamiliar, especially when the offer comes from someone you do not know.

### **Reciprocity:**

#### **Feeling Obligated After Receiving a Gift**

Some cons involve offering a lunch, dinner, or other gesture of generosity as part of a sales pitch. When the gesture feels significant, people may feel

obligated to reciprocate—often by making a purchase or agreeing to something they otherwise would not.

### **Scarcity:**

#### **The Allure of Limited Availability**

Scarcity is another frequently used tactic, such as claims that “only two are left” or that an item is rare. Old coins, for example, may be presented as scarce and therefore valuable. However, scarcity alone does not guarantee worth; it can simply mean that few people are willing to invest in an item to begin with.

These tricks are commonly used by marketers. The next time you watch television commercials, try to spot these persuasion techniques and practice naming them. While such methods can make a product or offer seem appealing, they should never be the sole basis for determining the validity of the pitch.



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

APS 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](http://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