
LONG-TERM CARE: STEPS TO TAKE NOW

If you are worried about your safety or quality of life, or a loved one who may need long-term care, we encourage you to take these important steps:

1. If you have assets, do not give away or start disposing, selling, or spending down your assets until you speak to a lawyer.
2. If you want to learn more about Medicaid long-term care, or have questions about your situation, you can call Idaho Legal Aid Services' Senior Legal Advice Line at: 208-746-7541 to speak with a lawyer for free. You can also view our Medicaid and Long-term Care Module on our website.
3. If you are ready to apply for Medicaid to help pay for long-term care, you can pick up an application at any Idaho Department of Health and Welfare office or you can apply online through their website.



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MEDICAID AND LONG-TERM CARE BENEFITS



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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we reach a point where medical issues have made it unsafe for us to continue to live alone without some type of assistance. Many people hesitate to seek help because they are not sure what services are available or they are afraid they cannot qualify for help with long-term care costs.

However, failing to get help when it is needed can result in self-neglect, vulnerability to abuse, deteriorating health, or a loss of quality of life. This brochure explains available options when it comes to accessing long term care such as in-home nursing, assisted living care, or nursing home care.



MEDICARE & LONG-TERM CARE

If you have Medicare already, you may be hopeful that Medicare can pay the costs of long-term care. But Medicare's long-term care benefits are very limited and do not typically cover in-home care or extended stays in a nursing home or assisted living facility.

So, if Medicare does not pay long-term care costs, what options do people have? The most commonly relied upon option is Medicaid. Medicaid can pay for long-term care at your home, in an assisted living facility, or in a nursing home.

MEDICAID & YOUR HOME

Seniors may worry about applying for Medicaid long-term care benefits because they have heard that they will have to sign their house over to the State or that the State will put a lien on the house and take it after the Medicaid applicant dies. Fortunately, that is not exactly how it works.

Although Medicaid will try to get repaid for benefits they paid out for long-term care costs, as long as the applicant or his or her spouse is alive, Medicaid will not try to take the home or other assets and will not stop you from selling or refinancing the home. **Owning a home should not discourage you from looking into Medicaid.**

MEDICAID & ASSETS

You may have heard that you have to be very, very low-income, with no assets at all, in order to qualify for Medicaid, but, when it comes to long-term care, that assumption is not accurate. **Merely having assets should not discourage you from looking into Medicaid as an option to cover your long-term care costs.**

The eligibility requirements for Medicaid long-term care benefits vary depending on whether you are single or married.

If you are a single person, Medicaid does not count your home and its contents or your car and you can have up to \$2,000 in savings or other assets.

If you are a married couple, then Medicaid will not count: your home and its contents; two cars; IRA and 401(k) accounts in the name of the non-applying spouse; \$2,000 in the name of the Medicaid applicant; and, typically, half of all the couple's other assets can be kept in the name of the non-applying spouse. Sometimes, when a married couple is low-income, they can qualify for Medicaid long-term care benefits without having to spend any of their assets.

MEDICAID & INCOME

Another concern people may have is that their income is too high to qualify for Medicaid. But, when it comes to qualifying for Medicaid to pay for long-term care, no one has too much income. Medicaid uses three ways to count a person's income.

The first way counts all income received in the name of the applicant. If the applicant's gross income (income before deductions or withholdings) is less than the income limit, then the applicant meets the income requirement.

Under the second way of counting income, if a married applicant's sole income is above the limit, then Medicaid looks at the couple's combined incomes and counts half. If half of their combined income is less than the Medicaid income limit, then the income requirement is met.

Under the third option, if an applicant's income is above the monthly income limit set by Medicaid for an individual or a married couple, then a special kind of trust, called a "Miller" trust, may be available to lower the monthly income amount to meet Medicaid's income requirement. A "Miller" trust sets aside a certain amount of your monthly income – the amount that your monthly income exceeds Medicaid's income limit – and places it into this trust to pay for long-term care costs. **The amount of your monthly income should not discourage you from looking into Medicaid as an option for paying for long-term care costs.**