

Responsibilities of Personal Care Assistants and Home Health Aides in Supporting People with Disabilities

What is a Personal Care Aide?

A Personal Care Aide (PCA) is a healthcare professional who assists people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with temporary health conditions in completing their Activities of Daily Living (ADLs).

PCAs support individuals with ADLs such as:

- Feeding, medication management, and personal hygiene
- Resting, emotional regulation, and social engagement
- Learning, grocery shopping, and household tasks

There are various types of PCAs with different qualifications and titles, including Home Healthcare Aides, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs), Care Assistants, Direct Care Professionals and Support Workers.

PCAs must be adaptable, resourceful, and committed to providing personalized, high-quality care that meets the unique needs of the individuals they serve.



What is Disability

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines a disability as a significant limitation in performing one or more activities of daily living activities.

Obligations of PCA's

As a PCA, it's important to offer your clients the care and support they need. Being ready to assist with their needs is vital to quality care. Keep ready- find some helpful tips and resources to guide you along the way.

1- Use a Patient-Driven Approach

People with disabilities should be in control of their own healthcare choices. They should have the opportunity to share their needs, preferences, and ideas about the care that works best for them. It's important to listen and respect their input.

2- Understand the Legal Responsibilities of Healthcare Providers

Healthcare providers, including PCA Companies and PCAs, have requirements under federal disability rights laws to ensure equitable access to healthcare for people with disabilities.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

- What it is: A law that prevents discrimination against people with disabilities.
- What it does: Ensures equal rights and opportunities in jobs, public spaces, transportation, and communication.
- Healthcare impact: Requires providers and facilities to be accessible and offer services like sign language interpreters.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504):

- What it is: A law that stops disability discrimination in programs receiving federal funding.
- What it does: Ensures access to programs and services, including healthcare.
- Healthcare impact: Requires healthcare facilities receiving federal funds to offer accessible services.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

- What it is: A law ensuring children with disabilities get services in schools.
- What it does: Provides special education and related services, like speech and physical therapy.
- Healthcare impact: Ensures children get needed therapies and services at school.

Affordable Care Act (ACA):

- What it is: A major healthcare law passed in 2010.
- What it does: Expands health insurance, increases consumer protections, and promotes prevention and wellness.
- Healthcare impact: Prevents insurance companies from denying coverage or charging more for pre-existing conditions, including disabilities, and makes insurance more affordable.

Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP):

- What they are: Programs providing health coverage to low-income individuals, including children, pregnant women, elderly adults, and people with disabilities.
- What they do: Offer essential services like hospital stays, doctor visits, and long-term care.
- Healthcare impact: Ensures people with disabilities get the medical services they need.

3- Make Communication Accessible

People with disabilities may need different ways to access information. By making communication accessible, PCAs can ensure their clients with disabilities feel heard and are fully involved in the care received. This includes using plain language and offering information in formats like Braille, large print, captions, or sign language. Digital materials, such as emails or website content, should be easy to read with screen readers or magnification tools. Other helpful formats include American Sign Language, inclusive language, trauma-informed communication, and audio formats. Some definitions are below.

- Plain Language writing and communication that is clear, simple, and easy to understand without using complicated terms, while still keeping the intended meaning.
- Inclusive Language is a way of writing and speaking that does not exclude anyone (for example using gender neutral pronouns, i.e., they rather than he/she, and changing the focus of the language from disability to accessibility).
- Trauma-Informed Communication is a way of communicating that takes into account people who may have experienced trauma. This might include giving a warning before discussing sensitive topics like abuse, gun violence, or sexual assault.



Helping Clients with Assistive Devices and Communication

- Using Assistive Technology (AT) Properly
- Many clients use devices like lifts, wheelchairs, walkers, and communication tools. It's important to know how to use these devices safely and with respect. Get the training you need to properly use AT equipment to ensure client comfort and avoid injury.
- Listening to Clients' Needs
- Pay attention when clients communicate their needs, whether through words, body language, or emotions. Being aware of these signals helps you provide safe, respectful care.
- Keeping a Professional Relationship
- Always respect the client's personal space and keep communication professional. The PCA and client relationship should remain respectful and appropriate.

If you're not sure how to communicate with a client, simply ask them what works best for them!

4- Partner with Community Organizations

Developing relationships with aging and disability-led organizations that represent and serve people with disabilities can help in better anticipating community and access needs. Consider connecting with your local Center for Independent Living, Area Agency on Aging, and other local, state, and national organizations. These organizations can provide practical information that will help in providing care. Individuals with disabilities must speak for themselves when requesting assistance or care. Family members, friends, or personal care attendants should not make decisions for people with disabilities. The individual receiving care will know best how to meet their needs.



5- Presume Competence

Presuming Competence is acknowledging that all individuals have the ability to learn, participate, and communicate. It is important to presume competence of your client to be able to provide the best care. Learn to understand how they communicate and remember that they have the right to make choices and be active participants in their own lives.

6- Dignity of Risk

Dignity of Risk is the idea that self-determination and the right to take reasonable and informed risks are essential to the individual's dignity and autonomy. Caregivers should avoid being overly cautious in the name of duty of care. It is limiting and not respectful of the client and the client's autonomy by not allowing them to take risks.



Personal Care Attendants serve as essential supports for people with disabilities by providing critical care and helping maintain independence. By understanding different perspectives on disability, actively listening to individuals with disabilities, and following legal requirements, PCAs can deliver care that is respectful, inclusive, and of the highest quality.

About Able South Carolina

Able SC is a disability-led, nonprofit organization seeking transformational changes in systems, communities, and individuals. Want to learn more? Visit our website, [Able SC](#) or call us with questions at 800.681.6805.