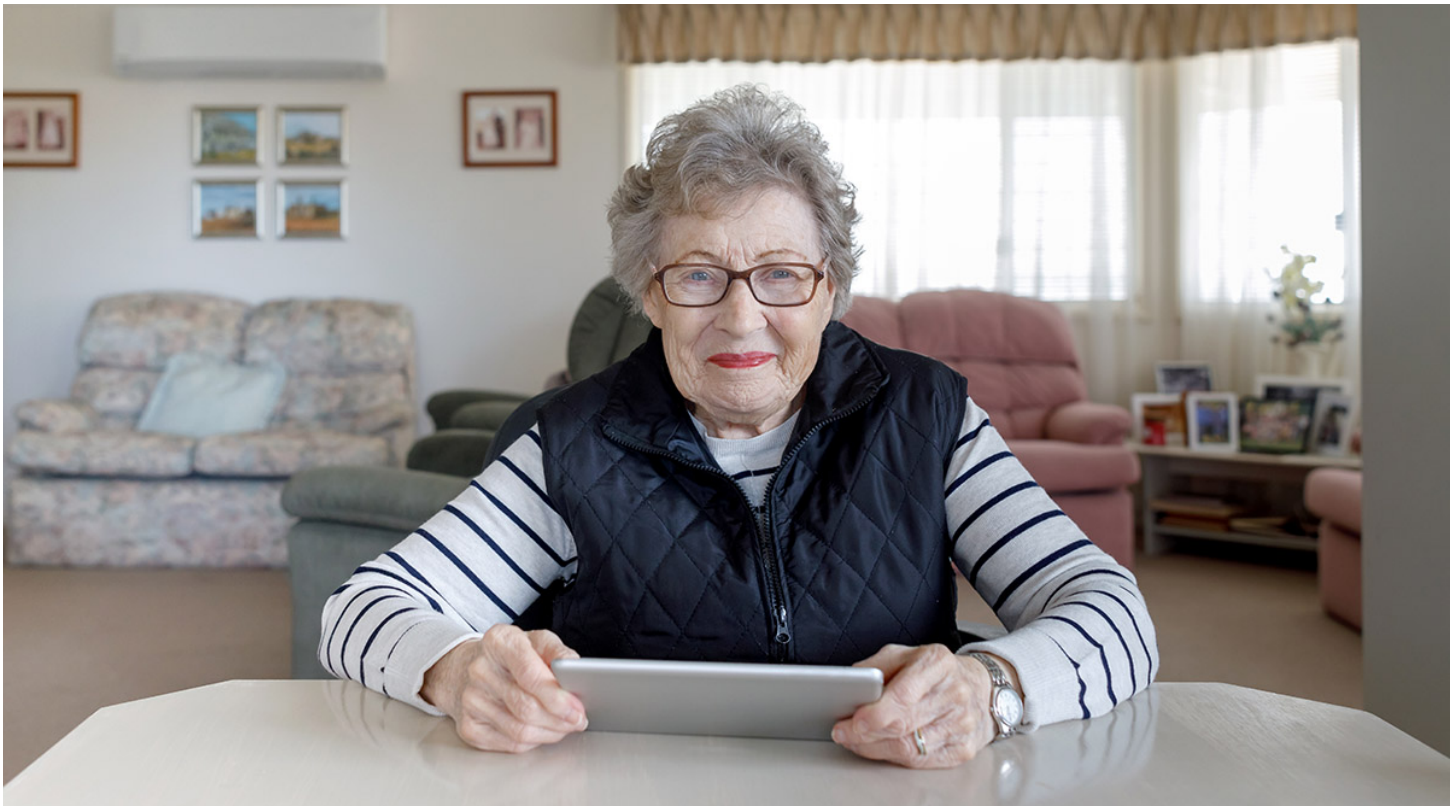
Ohio Departments of Aging and Medicaid implement programs to keep seniors connected to loved ones during COVID-19

June 30, 2020



COLUMBUS, Ohio – The Ohio Departments of Aging and Medicaid have introduced two measures to keep seniors connected to loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective July 1, the state can begin reimbursing nursing facilities across the state for the purchase of tablets and other online communications devices for residents to use to communicate with family and friends. Ohio Medicaid also eased rules that afford loved ones the opportunity to provide and be reimbursed for support services for seniors residing in home and community-based settings, thereby minimizing risk of external exposure to the virus.

Since March 13, access to nursing facilities has been restricted with no visitors of residents admitted except for in end-of-life situations. These measures have been implemented to help protect residents from the spread of COVID-19. To help nursing facility residents stay connected with their loved ones during this time, facilities may purchase one device per seven to 10 residents, with a maximum of $3,000 allowed per facility. Funding for the devices comes from nursing facility civil money penalty funds.

“Measures to protect seniors and others living in nursing homes are absolutely necessary, yet we know that prolonged isolation from friends and family members can take a toll.” said Ursel J. McElroy, director of the Ohio Department of Aging. “Ohio’s nursing homes have been creative in finding ways to help residents feel connected. We are excited to offer them these additional resources to continue to make those connections possible.”

“Technology is invaluable in closing the isolation gap that affects so much of the senior population at this time,” said Tom Cunningham, administrator of Continental Manor in Clinton County. “Residents miss their families. During these days of extended sequestration, it is good for them to see faces and hear voices of their loved ones.”

Governor DeWine announced on June 29, 2020, that nursing homes are permitted to begin outdoor visitation on July 20, 2020, provided all safety standards are met. Facilities are encouraged to maintain, add, or enhance virtual visitation options even as they allow outdoor visits. Technology purchased with these funds will support that recommendation.

Individuals and families can get free assistance from a long-term care ombudsman with questions or concerns about the care they receive from a nursing home. Call 1-800-282-1206 or visit www.ombudsman.ohio.gov to learn more.

In addition to funding for devices in nursing facilities, Ohio Medicaid sought and received authorization from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that ease the restrictions on family members being providers in the state’s PASSPORT program. PASSPORT is a Medicaid waiver program designed to help individuals who may otherwise need a nursing facility stay in their home with wraparound supports.

“In an effort to keep seniors at home and safe from contracting COVID-19, Ohio Medicaid sought federal approval to waive the prohibition on family members being reimbursed for serving as a direct care worker,” said Maureen Corcoran, director of the Ohio Department of Medicaid. “Prior to getting this permission, persons legally responsible for a senior were not allowed to serve as a direct care worker of provide waiver services.”

The Ohio departments of Aging and Medicaid continue to collaborate on other initiatives to protect seniors from the COVID-19 pandemic.

SHARE THIS

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Media Contacts:

Kevin Walter
Press secretary
Ohio Department of Medicaid
614-752-3688
kevin.walter@medicaid.ohio.gov

Beth Gianforcaro,
Deputy director
Ohio Department of Aging
614-644-6230
bgianforcaro@age.ohio.gov