



Elder Law Guys: Pennsylvania is expanding some options to help caregivers

JULIAN GRAY AND FRANK PETRICH

OCT 25, 2021

8:00 AM

According to a 2020 Pew Research Center study, 27% of adults in the U.S., ages 60 and older, live alone compared with 16% of adults in the 130 countries and territories studied. In many countries in the Asia-Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East-North Africa regions, fewer than 5% of seniors live alone.

Other studies have shown that older U. S. women are twice as likely as older men to live alone (37% and 19%, respectively). In 2016, approximately 72% of older men lived with a spouse while only 49% of older women did. Unfortunately, the likelihood of living alone increases with age. Among women 75 and over, 44% lived alone.

A 2021 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report concludes that

loneliness and social isolation in older adults are serious public health risks. Because of living alone, having faced the loss of family (especially a spouse) and/or friends, risks are created that can affect the health and mental condition of a significant number of people in the United States.

A National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report states, among other things, that nearly one-fourth of adults 65 and older are considered to be socially isolated.

Enough of the statistics. Let's now look at some potential options for those faced with situations of this nature.

There are two initiatives which, in our minds, are significant for Pennsylvanians to help address this type of situation.

The first is an expansion of eligibility to an existing law that will allow more flexibility to the Pennsylvania Department of Aging in managing the Pennsylvania Caregiver Support Act. The purpose of the law is to provide additional support to caregivers of older adults (along with adults living with a disability). The intent is to help relieve stress on the caregiver (and the care-receiver) and to maintain a healthy ongoing caregiving relationship while promoting both parties' well-being.

The law (Act 20 of 2021), signed by Gov. Tom Wolf in June, changed the maximum amount of reimbursement available to a qualified primary caregiver for out-of-pocket expenses incurred for services and to the lifetime amount for home modifications or assistive devices.

Who is a primary caregiver? That's the individual who assumes the primary responsibility for providing care to the older care recipient. For more details, go the PDA website: www.aging.pa.gov/aging-services/caregiver-support/ or contact your local Area Agency on Aging.

The second initiative, and one that we're quite hopeful will be successful, is the Shared Housing and Resource Exchange (Share) Program administered, again, by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging.

In a nutshell, the program is designed to bring together "home hosts" (think of someone living alone in his or her house, perhaps in unwanted social isolation) with "home seekers." The intent is to match home hosts, willing to share their homes with home seekers who would be willing to pay

rent, provide some help around the house or some combination of both.

This is not just for the “Golden Girls” type of arrangement. Share participants can be as young as 18, but one of the individuals must be over 60.

This program can make a lot of sense for people who don’t want to leave their home until they absolutely must. The program requires an application by either interested party to help ensure a good match and the rules to follow for both parties.

A Share housing counselor does the reference and criminal background checking, plays matchmaker as to the parties, and arranges a home sharing trial. If acceptable, a written agreement is entered into, and the counselor maintains contact and ongoing support for the relationship.

The program has been in effect for a little over three years and only in Adams, Crawford, Monroe, Pike, Snyder, Union, Venango and Wayne counties. Word on the street is that more counties may be coming online in the near future. If so, it should be a great benefit to home hosts and home seekers alike.

Julian Gray and Frank Petrich are certified elder law attorneys who practice in the Pittsburgh area at Gray Elder Law. Send questions to elderlawguys@grayelderlaw.com or visit grayelderlaw.com.

First Published October 25, 2021, 8:00am