

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

AREA AGENCY ON AGING

INSIDE LINE

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2006

FREE TRANSPORTATION TO MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

Many people aren't aware that they're eligible for free transportation to medical appointments through the Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP). And in fact, if you are eligible for MATP transportation, then you should not be using the Area Agency on Aging "red card" for taxi trips to medical appointments. Please read on . . .

MATP provides free transportation to medical services for citizens of all ages receiving Medical Assistance benefits. Transportation is available to almost any service that is paid for by Medical Assistance. Transportation can be provided to physicians, dentists, health clinics, podiatrists, physical therapists, outpatient services, pharmacies, psychologists, mental health clinics, optometrists and dialysis clinics.

The Westmoreland County Transit Authority (WCTA) coordinates the MATP program in Westmoreland County. This program, which is funded through the Department of Public Welfare, provides free transportation to medical appointments for residents of Westmoreland County who possess a valid Welfare Medical Card.

Transportation can be provided by three options: Mileage reimbursement for use of a private vehicle, public bus transportation, or taxi service. All taxi services have wheelchair accessible vehicles when needed. The Transit Authority will provide the type of transportation that is the least expensive while still meeting the rider's needs.

Eligible individuals must register for the program by calling the WCTA Medical Assistance Transportation Department at 1-800-242-2706. This same toll-free number is used to schedule a medical trip. Scheduling hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Monday through Friday. Calls for next day service must be received by 2:00 p.m. on the preceding day.

For people not eligible for MATP, there is transportation to medical appointments using the Area Agency on Aging's Priority Transportation Program (also known as the "red card"). You may not use your "red card" for medical trips that are eligible for MATP coverage. PA Department of Aging guidelines do not permit local Area Agency on Aging's to pay for trips to destinations that are eligible for coverage through the MATP program.

MEDICARE PART D ENROLLMENT

The open enrollment period for making changes to your Medicare Part D prescription plan, or purchasing a new plan, is November 15, 2006 through December 31, 2006. For more information, or to compare plans, consumers can call 1-800-MEDICARE or access information on the internet at

www.medicare.gov. This will be the only opportunity to make changes or purchase a Medicare Part D plan until the next open enrollment period. However, there are some exceptions and questions regarding these exceptions can also be directed toward the Medicare resources as well. Additionally, information is available through the APPRISE program locally at 1-800-262-2103 ext. 4213 or statewide at 1-800-783-7087.

INTERNET INFORMATION

The Westmoreland County Information Systems Department has developed an Internet site, www.co.westmoreland.pa.us. At this site, you will find all the information you need to know about your local government offices, public meetings, calendar of events and services available throughout our county.

The Area Agency on Aging also has a link on this site. One would go to the homepage, and click on the word Departments on the left side of the screen and then click on Area Agency on Aging. Here, you can learn more about Aging services and programs. You will also find a link to the Aging newsletter, INSIDE LINE, where you will be able to read all the latest information and news for seniors. The newsletter comes out every two months, five times a year

with the exception being for July/August. Occasionally, the INSIDE LINE receives information about events that cannot be printed due to time frames. In these situations, the information will be available under Calendar in the Aging link. This is an excellent source for Westmoreland County seniors to utilize and stay abreast of the latest happenings. Happy surfing!

PREVENTING TYPE 2 DIABETES

From the National Institutes of Health

Prediabetes is a condition, which your blood glucose level is higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes. Many people with prediabetes develop type 2 diabetes within the next 10 years. People with prediabetes also have a 50% higher risk of having a heart attack and stroke than those who have normal blood glucose levels.

Overweight people with prediabetes can often prevent or delay diabetes by losing 5 to 7% of their body weight. They can do this through cutting fat and calories and increasing physical activity, such as walking 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week. The key is small steps lead to a big reward. Here are some tips that might help. Fast steps to increase activity:

- Put away the TV remote control and get up to change the channel.
- Try walking around the house while you talk on the phone.
- Park the car farther away from stores, movie theaters or your office.
- Get off the bus one stop early if you are in a safe place to walk.
- Visit museums, the zoo or an aquarium. These are great ways to be active with your family.

Eat right:

- Try to keep meat, poultry and fish servings down to three ounces – that's about the size of a deck of cards.
- Try to eat three sensible meals at regular times throughout the day.
- Eat more fresh fruit, veggies, nuts and whole grains.
- Limit fried foods. Baking and broiling are healthier ways to eat meat, chicken and fish.
- When eating out, share large portions.
- You don't have to cut out foods you love to eat. Just cut down on the amount you eat, and eat them less often.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO QUIT

Studies have shown that quitting smoking at any age has significant health benefits and that most successful quitters had tried a number of times before they succeeded. So keep trying! Your body begins making healthy changes that continue as long as you remain smoke-free. According to the Department of Health and Human Services:

- **20 minutes** after quitting, your heart rate drops.
- **12 hours** after quitting, the carbon monoxide level in your blood drops to normal.
- **Two weeks to three months** after quitting, your risk for heart attack begins to drop. Your lung function begins to improve.
- **One to nine months** after quitting, your coughing and shortness of breath decrease.
- **One year** after quitting, your added risk of coronary heart disease is half that of a smoker's.
- **10 years** after quitting, your lung cancer death rate is about half that of a smoker's.
- **15 years** after quitting, your risk to coronary heart

disease is back to that of a nonsmoker's.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health and the American Cancer Society offers a Free Quitline, 1-800-QUITNOW (1-800-784-8669) for smokers interested in smoking cessation support. The Free Quitline can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Free Quitline is staffed by a group of clinically trained counselors. Callers are assessed for their readiness to quit and given counseling options. The counselors also provide cessation information in regards to the caller's local resources and cessation assistance programs. All calls are confidential, and strict privacy of all information received will be maintained.

ONE BASIC SUGAR DOUGH MAKES FIVE TASTY COOKIES

With this simple recipe, you'll bake up this holiday's memories.

Basic Sugar Cookie

In a bowl, with mixer on medium, beat 1 ½ cups (3 sticks) softened unsalted butter and 1 cup sugar until fluffy; beat in 1 large egg and 2 tsp. vanilla extract. On low, beat in 4 ½ cups all-purpose flour and ½ tsp. salt. Divide dough in half; shape each half into a ½ inch-thick disk. Wrap in plastic wrap; chill until firm. Heat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. On floured surface, roll dough 1/8 inch-

thick, cut into shapes. Transfer to ungreased baking sheets. Bake until lightly golden around the edges, 10 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes on sheets; transfer to racks to cool. Decorate and store in an airtight container up to 2 weeks, or freeze, undecorated, up to 3 months. Makes 60 (3 inch) cookies: 54 (4 inch) cookies: 42 (5 inch) cookies.

Here's how to get four variations on the basic dough recipe:

Chocolate Cookie

Omit vanilla and substitute chocolate extract. Add 6 Tbsp. unsweetened cocoa powder to flour.

Spice Cookie

Omit granulated sugar and substitute ¾ cup packed dark brown sugar and ¼ cup molasses. Omit vanilla extract. Add 1 Tbsp. pumpkin pie spice to flour.

Lemon Cookie

Omit vanilla extract and substitute 3 Tbsp. lemon juice and 1Tbsp. grated lemon zest.

Nut Cookie

Omit 1 cup flour; substitute 1 cup ground unsalted pistachios, almonds or hazelnuts.

2006-2007 LIHEAP PROGRAM BEGINS

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) began this year's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) on November 6, 2006. There are three parts to the program: the Cash

Grant, Crisis Grant and Weatherization Program. To be eligible for any of the three programs, annual household income must meet the following guidelines:

Household Size

	<u>Cash & Crisis</u>	<u>Weatherization</u>
1	\$13,230	\$14,700
2	\$17,820	\$19,800
3	\$22,410	\$24,900
4	\$27,000	\$30,000

For each additional person, add \$4,590 for Cash & Crisis and \$5,100 for Weatherization.

Homeowners and renters are eligible for the program if the total household income is not more than the program limits. LIHEAP payments will be sent to the applicant's heating or utility company, which will apply this credit to their account. Subsidized housing tenants are eligible only if they pay their own heating charges.

To apply, call or visit your local county assistance office:

Greensburg 724-832-5524 or 724-832-5218
 New Kensington..... 724-339-6800
 Donora..... 724-379-1500

You may also apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us.

The Area Agency on Aging has a limited supply of applications, which are available by calling:

Greensburg .. 724-830-4444 or 1-800-442-8000
 Monessen..... 724-684-3141 or 1-800-339-9454

SEARCHING FOR A JOB

If you are 55 years of age or older, a resident of Westmoreland County, and your income falls within our guidelines, you may be eligible for our training program.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) at Westmoreland County Community College enrolls low-income older adults to update old skills or get training in new skills, allowing you to earn while you learn in preparation for re-entering the job market. All positions earn \$5.15 per hour, 20 hours per week.

For more information, please call Mimi Owens 724-925-4098 or Rebecca Dunn 724-925-4231 or toll-free at 1-800-262-2103 and ask for the Lifelong Learning Center.

Available Training Positions

Clerical Trainee – Office work, familiarity with office machines helpful but not required. Primary duties may include receptionist activities, copying and collating materials for mass mailings, assisting with fundraising activities, and maintaining information areas. Positions available throughout Westmoreland County.

Dietary Aide – Must be knowledgeable in minimal food preparation techniques and have the ability to work with senior citizens.

Docent – Training provided in archiving, researching and preserving local history.

Library Aides – Positions available throughout Westmoreland County. Individuals should possess an inquisitive, helpful attitude.

Maintenance/Groundskeeper – Positions available throughout Westmoreland County.

LONG DISTANCE CAREGIVING

Millions of Americans have become long-distance caregivers, those who manage care for an elderly, ill or disabled relative and who live at least one hour away. The number of long-distance caregivers will continue to increase as baby boomers and their parent's age.

Although caring for an aging relative is a challenge when one resides in close proximity, it's doubly so when it's done across the miles. Some strategies that may help:

- Make a purposeful visit. Check to see if bills are being paid on time. Replace all regular light bulbs with the long-life type. Get rid of excess clutter. Check the refrigerator to see if there are expired foods. Take care of minor maintenance tasks. Make sure your relative can still drive safely by

accompanying them on a short drive. Make sure the car is inspected and being properly maintained. Take care of any repairs, like changing the oil and checking the brakes and tires. Check smoke detectors and replace the batteries. Introduce yourself to neighbors and friends and leave a key and your phone number with a trustworthy person. Pick up a copy of the local phone book and take it home with you.

- Make copies of any essential medical, financial and legal information. These include Social Security numbers, health insurance policies, medical histories, wills, power-of-attorney paperwork, and health care proxies, all of which might be needed in an emergency. The Family Caregiver Alliance (FCA), a national non-profit organization that provides information and support for caregivers, has developed a form to help you record this information. Find it on the group's web site www.caregiver.org or get it by calling 1-800-445-8106.

- Go with your relative to their doctor's appointment. Get a diagnosis of your relative's physical and mental problems, including a thorough assessment of what he or she can or cannot do independently. To get an assessment, ask your relative's primary doctor for a geriatrician, someone who specializes in geriatrics and understands the physiology of an aging person.
- Respect your relatives. Remember they are adults and you need to honor their independence. Allow them to be themselves and make their own decisions, even if wrong, as they age. However, if dementia is involved then that becomes a different matter altogether.
- Involve all the family. In most cases, one person in a family assumes primary responsibility for caregiving. Call family and friends to take turns in visiting the elderly relative, making monthly phone contact or just sending small packages containing necessity items such as food, toiletries, stamps, etc.
- Find community resources. Most communities have volunteer resources, which are sponsored by churches or synagogues. Yet many caregivers do not know about these resources. A place to link people with resources is the website www.findwestmoreland.org sponsored by the Health and Welfare Council of Westmoreland County. Also, contact the Westmoreland County Area Agency on Aging at one of our two locations. The telephone number for the main office located in Greensburg is 724-830-4444 or toll-free 1-800-442-8000. The number for the Monessen satellite office can be reached at 724-684-3141 or 1-800-339-9454. We can help identify programs that may be of benefit to your elderly relative.

PREPARE FOR WINTER WEATHER

*By the Pennsylvania Department of Aging
Older Pennsylvanians*

are encouraged to plan ahead for the challenges posed by extreme winter weather. Winter may be beautiful, but the downed power lines, ice storms,

frozen water pipes and blizzards can turn peaceful settings into dangerous situations at home and on the road. It is essential for citizens of all ages to prepare for winter weather before it strikes.

At home have plenty of drinking water, a first-aid kit, canned food, a non-electric can opener, battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries available in an easily accessible place. If prescription or over-the-counter medicines are needed, have an extra supply on hand.

Also, know how public warnings are issued on radio and television and learn what each kind of broadcast weather alert means. For example:

- “Winter weather advisory” means weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous, especially to motorists.
- “Winter storm watch” means be alert, a storm is likely.
- “Winter storm warning” means take action, a storm is in, or entering the area.
- “Blizzard warning” means snow and strong winds will produce near-zero visibility, deep drifts, and life-threatening wind chill – seek refuge immediately.

Keep warm at home:

- Dress in several layers of loosely fitting, lightweight, warm clothing. Outer garments, like hats, mittens, scarves, and boots, should be tightly woven and water-repellent.
- Properly insulate walls and attics. Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows. Install storm windows or cover windows with plastic from the inside. Protect pipes by wrapping them in insulation and let faucets drip to prevent freezing.
- Fireplace and wood stove chimneys should be inspected annually to make sure the residue left by burning wood has not accumulated.
- Consider buying emergency heating equipment, such as a wood or coal burning stove or kerosene heater, as a backup.
- Keep kerosene and propane heaters at least three feet away from combustible substances, like furniture, blankets and rugs. Never substitute one type of fuel for another.
- Run generators outside only. Open windows and fans do not provide enough ventilation to prevent the build-up of carbon monoxide.

Be safe on the road:

- Avoid driving during a winter storm or blizzard warning. If travel is necessary, do it in daylight and don't travel alone.
- Keep cars and other vehicles fueled and in good repair.
- Make sure batteries, ignition systems, thermostats, lights, flashers, exhausts, heaters, brakes, defrosters and tires of vehicles are working. Check antifreeze, windshield washer fluid and oil levels.
- Pack a shovel, ice scraper, flashlight, battery-powered radio, extra batteries, water, snacks, hats and mittens, blankets, tow chains or ropes, road salt and sand, booster cables, emergency flares and a fluorescent distress flag in vehicles.
- Drive only at speeds dictated by conditions and increase distances between vehicles.
- Share travel schedules and routes and stay on main roads. Carry a cell phone.

Motorists within Pennsylvania may call PennDOT's 24-hour, toll-free Road Condition Hotline at 1-888-783-6783 for interstate conditions. Out-of-state motorists can call 717-783-5186. In the event of an emergency, call 911.

During winter weather emergencies, the Pennsylvania Department of Aging encourages individuals to contact older relatives, friends and neighbors by telephone to make sure they are safe and in good health.

For additional emergency preparedness and winter safety information, please visit the PA Emergency Management Agency website at www.pema.state.pa.us.

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