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PROGRAM MEMO

TO: Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs

NO: 21-18

DATE ISSUED: 10/01/2021

EXPIRES: Until Superseded or Rescinded

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

SUPERSEDES: N/A

SUBJECT: Robotic Companion Pets for Individuals Living in CA Long-Term Care Settings

Purpose:

This Program Memo provides information and requirements for local Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (LTCOP) to participate in the Robotic Companion Pets Project-Ombudsman to combat loneliness and social isolation in residents of Long-Term Care (LTC) facilities. The Robotic Companion Pets Project-Ombudsman is paid for using the pooled local assistance funding from the COVID-19 response Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding.

Background:

Pandemic isolation has had a negative effect on older adults and adults with disabilities living in LTC facilities. As outlined in a recent [AARP report](#), feelings of loneliness, abandonment, despair and fear among residents – and their toll on physical and neurological health – are pushing the pandemic's death toll higher.

While visitation restrictions, social distancing, and isolation policies were put in place to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, it has had the unintended effect of heightening the risk of social isolation and loneliness. Individuals living in licensed care facilities have experienced the loss of fellow residents and staff to the virus. They have endured extended periods of facility quarantine, restricted opportunities to engage with fellow residents, lack of meaningful engagement through organized activities, and most especially the stress of the unprecedented separation from family and friends who were restricted from inside visits with their loved one.

The California Department of Aging (CDA) has been working collaboratively to bridge the digital divide and address inclusion, equity, and social isolation for older Californians, people with disabilities, and caregivers. The CDA Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OSLTCO) initiated the Electronic Companion Pets Project- Ombudsman in response to the negative impact COVID-19 has had on residents living in LTC facilities. The Electronic

Companion Pets Project- Ombudsman is a person-centered approach to increasing engagement and enhancing meaningful interactions during and post COVID-19 pandemic. Electronic companion pets are designed to enhance meaningful interactions among residents living in LTC facilities, which are congregate living models, but may be experienced as lonely and socially isolated settings.

On July 7, 2021, a survey requesting commitment to participate was distributed to all 35 LTCOPs throughout the state. On August 2, 2021, the survey was closed with 100% response rate identifying 27 LTCOPs agreeing to participate.

Program Intent, Eligibility, Requirements:

Funding recipients must be designated a Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. Funding for this effort can only be spent on the following allowable items:

- Purchasing a Robotic Companion Pet

It is the intent of this project that LTCOPs will purchase electronic companion pets that will be distributed as personal property to individual residents living in licensed LTC residential and skilled nursing facilities. Only one electronic companion pet should be given per resident. The pet will belong to the individual resident and should be recorded on the individual's inventory log. The resident will have access to their pet as they wish and participate in determining if and where the pet is stored. The pet is not to be withheld to influence resident decisions or compliance, nor shall it be impounded by the facility as a penalty, for any reason. This initiative is person-centered and is at no cost to residents.

Purchase of electronic companion pets for individual LTCOP representatives is not allowed. A sample unit may be reported on the LTCOP property inventory and retained in the local LTCOP office if used for training and/or other activities to promote the project.

LTCOPs participating in this project must maintain records pertaining to pet allocation method, number of pets purchased, number of residents who received a pet, and the number of facilities, including facility type, impacted. LTCOP representatives should also gather information from residents and staff about the impact the pet has had on the individual and others at the LTC facility through observation and interviews. Photographs taken by Ombudsman representatives require documented resident or representative consent. This information shall be reported to the OSLTCO monthly using the [CDA 8000](#) form until all funds are expended.

Budget and Allocation Methodology:

Allocations have been determined based upon a survey completed by the LTCOP. The survey included the number of pets each LTCOP would like to provide to residents in LTC facilities within their Planning and Service Area. CDA has divided the number of requested pets by the total funding allocation of \$210K. Each LTCOP will receive \$171.15 per pet. These allocations are exhibited in the Budget Display within the Area Plan contract

Expenditure Reporting and Closeout:

AAAs are required to report expenditures monthly. To report expenditures, AAAs must use the “Ombudsman Robotic Pet Form” (CDA 8000). This document is located under the [CDA Forms](#) page on CDA’s website.

These funds will end September 30, 2022, and the closeout will be required October 31, 2022. Closeout information will be forthcoming.

Inquiries:

Questions or comments regarding the Robotic Companion Pets Project-Ombudsman may be directed to the OSLTCO by email at: StateOmb@aging.ca.gov

Eden Rosales
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