



# Trending Healthy

## December 2025

### O3A's New Name and New Look Coming Soon!

As we approach our 50th anniversary in 2026, which will also be a four-year Area Plan year, we are focused on what the changing funding landscape and demographic shifts mean to our services. O3A has been busy pivoting to meet our communities' needs.



In recent years, we've been serving more individuals under 60 on long-term Medicaid as the average age of disability in our region has fallen to 56. These younger individuals will be on long-term services for more years, and their needs are somewhat different than older individuals. We are also launching Health Related Social Needs (HRSN) services soon to address social conditions that affect health—things like housing, nutrition, respite services, and home safety modifications. HRSN services will be available to Medicaid (Apple Health) recipients of all ages who meet the criteria for those services. And finally, we are looking to next year, when the first WA Cares beneficiaries will start accessing their long-term care benefits.

As our programs and the people we serve have changed, we want our name to be more inclusive. Although we will remain as the primary agency in our region for services to older adults, we will also be serving more younger and working-age adults.

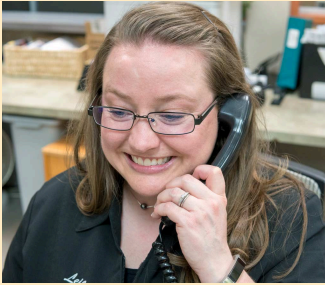
**Stay tuned—we'll be announcing our new name soon!**

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**Are you looking for services for older adults, adults with disabilities, or family caregivers?**

**Call us or stop by!**

**Clallam County:**

Forks Office (360) 374-9496

Sequim Office (360) 452-3221

**Grays Harbor County:**

Aberdeen Office (360) 532-0520

**Jefferson County:**

Port Townsend Office (360) 385-2552

**Pacific County:**

Long Beach Office (360) 642-3634

Raymond Office (360) 942-2177

Or visit our website: [www.O3A.org](http://www.O3A.org)

**Hearing from Caregivers**

*“I’ve been taking care (with the help of paid caregivers) for over 12 ½ years. It has taken a toll on me that I never imagined, physically and mentally.”*  
–unpaid family caregiver



Over one million people in Washington are unpaid family caregivers. Many don’t even realize they are “caregivers,” because much of the care they provide is done simply out of love and responsibility for the people closest to them—it’s “just what family does.” But someone who is shopping, cooking, driving a person to medical appointments, or helping with daily living activities like bathing and mobility is a caregiver.

The Olympic Area Agency on Aging (O3A) recently sent out a survey to get more insight about caregivers in our region. We wanted to learn more about the impacts caregiving had on those providing care. We also wanted to know who they were providing care for and why.

Just over half of the thirty-two people who responded to the survey provided care to a spouse or partner. About a third assisted a parent. The rest cared for a grandparent (12.5%) or adult child (3.1%). The vast majority—about 94%—were caring for a loved one because of a worsening chronic condition(s), rather than a sudden illness or injury. Over half were providing care to a person with Alzheimer's or other dementia. Other conditions included COPD, congestive heart failure, Parkinsons, stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, cancer, arthritis, and post-surgical complications.

The caregivers described how their lives have changed. Increased stress was the number one impact, with about 94% saying they experienced stress. "I've been taking care (with the help of paid caregivers) for over 12 ½ years. It has taken a toll on me that I never imagined, physically and mentally," said one. "It is extremely difficult with all of his mental and physical challenges. It's having an effect on my health as well with all the stress and added physical things I now have to do," said another.

Respondents mentioned how hard it is to have to take over unfamiliar and sometimes physically demanding chores: "Also have to help with switching out propane for heat and water heater. Make sure power system is working right (off grid system). Cut, split, and stack firewood." Another said, "I am now responsible for unfamiliar chores, maintenance, and repairs. Some go well, and others not so much."

About half reported feelings of isolation and financial strain. "I miss being able to share, vent, or laugh with my spouse. I am often mentally and emotionally alone but seldom physically alone," said a respondent. Several reported that it was difficult to manage the grief. "It can be very lonely, knowing that I won't have him for as long as I'd like." Another remarked that "Caregiver is the worst job in the world. Watching your loved one die while you cannot stop the disease."

Over a third lost time at work, and about one quarter had to stop working all together. "Never want to do it again. Almost lost my job," one commented.

For some, there were bright spots, things to celebrate in spite of the challenges. "The unexpected positive connection between us. We are doing more together in order to have positive experiences. He is more mellow so far and appreciates my efforts. Also, I've met extraordinary people who are also caregivers. While it's frustrating and sad at times, I feel enriched by the experience. He still has a sense of humor, and we laugh more than we cry." Another said, "My local support group for caregivers was extremely helpful and counseling plus massage. Volunteer Hospice was also extremely helpful."

O3A already has several programs in place to support family caregivers, including MAC/TSOA, the Family Caregiver Support Program, and Dementia Catalyst services. Since early 2024, we have focused on strengthening our dementia services in particular. All four counties in our region have an older population compared to the state as a whole, and because of that, we also

have a higher proportion of people with Alzheimer's and other dementias. We launched our free Dealing with Dementia workshops last year for family caregivers, along with trainings for social service and healthcare providers, in-home behavioral support consultation, and dementia-friendly community-based services.

As we look to 2026, our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the creation of a new four-year Area Plan, we are also looking at how to best tailor our services to the needs of our communities, including ways to support family caregivers.

One change that is coming in 2026 is the WA Cares Fund, which will allow spouses to be paid caregivers—something that isn't currently allowed with most other programs. The first beneficiaries will start receiving services on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Those who qualify (by meeting the contribution requirements and having a verified care need) will choose how to spend their benefit. One option is for in-home care, whether provided by a family member or a paid caregiver who can allow the family caregiver to continue working or have some respite.

“Long-term care is expensive, and families often have to step in to do hands-on caregiving and pay for things out of pocket, resulting in even more stress. Many caregivers lose work hours, benefits, or even sacrifice their jobs all together,” said Laura Cepoi, O3A's Executive Director. “It's crucial that we start addressing those gaps and bring some relief to caregivers.”



## What's New with WA Cares

### *Pilot program will launch in January*

A small group of people who live in Lewis, Mason, Spokane and Thurston counties can apply for early access to benefits.

Applications open January 2026.

Participants will have the opportunity to

give feedback on their experience along the way.

Most Washington workers contribute 0.58% of their paycheck during their working years into the fund. Benefits will become available statewide in July 2026 to anyone who meets **contribution and care needs**

**requirements**. The lifetime benefit amount starts at \$36,500 and will increase over time with inflation.

Covered services include:

- In-home caregivers
- Residential care (adult family homes, assisted living, or skilled nursing facilities)
- Home accessibility (safety evaluations, ramps, grab bars, etc.)
- Home-delivered meals
- Rides and transportation to medical appointments or grocery shopping
- Adaptive equipment and technology (such as bath chairs, communication devices, and more)
- Care supplies (incontinence products, personal hygiene aids, and more)
- Caregiver support services & training

For more information, visit [wacaresfund.wa.gov](http://wacaresfund.wa.gov)

### ***Investing Funds for Growth***

In November, voters approved a resolution allowing the state to invest WA Cares funds into a broader range of products, including stocks, to maximize fund growth. All earnings remain with the program and cannot be used for any other expenses. Analysis from an independent actuarial firm suggests this change is likely to yield greater investment returns over the long term.

### ***Request a Presentation***

If you'd like to have a presentation on WA Cares Basics for employees, the public, or other groups and you're in Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor, or Pacific Counties, please contact [o3a.wacares@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:o3a.wacares@dshs.wa.gov). Spanish language presentations are also available in Grays Harbor.

## **Keeping Yourself Safe From Common Drug Interactions**

Common interactions involve blood thinners, statins, antidepressants, and combining sedatives/opioids/alcohol. These interactions are often due to

affecting how drugs are metabolized or having other side effects. **Always tell your doctor/pharmacist about all medications, including OTCs, supplements, and alcohol, to prevent serious outcomes.**



### ***Examples of Common Interactions***

- Warfarin (Blood Thinners):
  - With Antibiotics (like Bactrim): Increased bleeding risk.
  - With NSAIDs (like Ibuprofen): Significantly higher risk of bleeding and ulcers.
  - With Amiodarone/Fluconazole: Can increase warfarin levels, raising bleeding risk.
- Statins (Cholesterol):
  - With Grapefruit Juice/Certain Antifungals: Increased risk of muscle pain (rhabdomyolysis).
- Antidepressants (SSRIs):
  - With NSAIDs: Increased risk of upper GI bleeding.
  - With Tryptophan/St. John's Wort: Can increase serotonin, risking Serotonin Syndrome.
- Opioids/Sedatives/Alcohol:
  - With Cough Medicines/Sleep Aids: Increased sedation, slowed breathing.
- Digoxin (Heart):
  - With Amiodarone/Quinidine: Can dangerously raise digoxin levels.
- Omeprazole (Stomach Acid):
  - With Levothyroxine: Reduces thyroid hormone absorption.
  - With Clopidogrel (Antiplatelet): Decreases clopidogrel's effectiveness.

### ***Why Interactions Happen***

- Altered Metabolism: One drug speeds up or slows down how the liver breaks down another, making it too strong or weak.
- Opposing Effects: Drugs work against each other (e.g., one raises blood pressure, another lowers it).
- Additive Side Effects: Two drugs cause the same side effect (e.g., drowsiness), intensifying it.
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### **How to Stay Safe**

- Tell Your Doctor Everything: Include all prescription, OTC drugs, vitamins, herbs, and alcohol.
- Use a Drug Interaction Checker: Reliable sources like GoodRx, Cleveland Clinic, Drugs.com, and WebMD can help.
- Read Labels: Be aware of ingredients and warnings.

*Note: This article was developed with AI. AI may contain errors. Please check with your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions or concerns.*

## **ElliQ Companion Robot Project Enters Year Three**

O3A is in the third year of a pilot project, providing free ElliQs to those who qualify. ElliQ is a unique companion designed specifically for older adults who live alone. She proactively engages the user throughout the day with questions and suggestions for activities. She



comes with several health and wellness features, including medication and appointment reminders, the ability to track vitals, exercise videos and short meditation/relaxation exercises, and cognitive games. She also has entertainment features like music and other games, including live Bingo, and the ability to send messages or have video calls with friends and family.

According to our most recent report, participants are using many different features:

- 94.74% of users participated in cognitive games
- 84.21% completed stress reduction activities
- 68.42% of users participated in physical activity with ElliQ
- 35% used ElliQ to message or video chat with contacts

Most users report reduced loneliness and a high degree of satisfaction, indicating that ElliQ is an effective tool for many people, particularly those with few friends and family members nearby.

There are currently some openings for new participants, with the devices being provided at least through June of 2026. Requirements for participation include age 60+, no significant hearing/speech/vision issues that would interfere with using the device, live alone or spend most of the day alone, are lonely, and have wifi.



## Advisory Council Update

*Image: Nancy Gorshe, Chair*

Congratulations to Advisory Council Chair Nancy Gorshe and Vice Chair Ginny Adams, both of whom were elected to second terms. Our 2026 Council will be busy with advocacy, outreach, input on our four-year Area Plan, and making recommendations on allocations for contracts. The council shares information

about needs and service gaps in their communities and helps ensure that community members know about O3A's services.

The Council currently has two openings for members from Clallam County, one for a member from Grays Harbor County, and a regional Minority Representative and Disability Representative from any of the four counties (Clallam, Jefferson, Grays Harbor, and Pacific). If you're interested in learning more or applying, please contact Michelle Fogus at [michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov).

## Dementia Program Brings Needed Resources to Rural Region

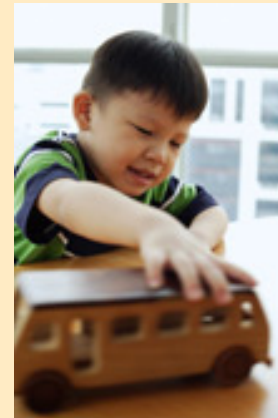
Thousands of individuals are living with dementia-related conditions in our remote region. In January 2024, O3A began implementing funds from the Building Dementia Capable Communities Grant and bringing important programs and resources to the region. Through our full-time dementia catalyst position, we developed new memory cafés, early memory-loss support groups, caregiver support groups, caregiver education classes, dementia-friendly art classes, and evidence-based programs like SHARE for dementia and STAR-C. We've partnered with a local church to start up a caregiver respite program through Respite for All.



Between 2024-2025 we've hosted 15 free Dealing with Dementia Workshops through the Carter Institute, reaching over 150 individual family caregivers. We've consistently held monthly memory cafés in two counties, and we've held four different Early Memory-Loss Support & Empowerment Groups between two counties. We also held four professional dementia training courses certified through the Alzheimer's Association for over 12 different agencies. Our SHARE for dementia program has successfully completed 20 6-week-long cases between 2024-2025. We have successfully completed 12 6-week-long STAR-C cases between 2024-2025. This Dementia Outreach Program has changed the lives of hundreds of people and has brought big city resources to the rural communities who need them most.

## Support for Those Raising Other People's Children, Including Grandchildren

The Olympic Area Agency on Aging (O3A) continues to offer services for people raising another person's child. The Kinship Navigator program assists families raising someone else's child, regardless of whether they are related by blood or not, connecting them with resources in the community to address their needs, which can include referrals for legal assistance, assistance registering for school, questions about guardianship, and registering for benefits the child is eligible for.



O3A also helps families who are raising another family member's child through the Kinship Caregiver Support Program with financial assistance for essential needs, which can include food, clothes, housing supplies, rent, utilities, and school supplies.

If you know someone who is raising another person's child, please feel free to let them know about the programs available. They can contact the Kinship Navigator at O3A, Aaron Hamm, by phone at 360-538-8870 or by email at [aaron.hamm1@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:aaron.hamm1@dshs.wa.gov).



## New Nutrition and Other Services Coming in Early 2026

### *Mobile Services to Expand in Clallam and Jefferson Counties*

O3A is contracting for a second year with the Sequim Food Bank to hold mobile events throughout the greater Sequim area. Events are held weekly at

several locations to distribute food, supplies when available, and resource connection. During its first year, the Sequim Food Bank expanded to serve most sites weekly.

In 2026, we will also be contracting with the Port Angeles Food Bank, which will hold mobile events throughout underserved areas of Clallam and West Jefferson Counties. Many sites will be served weekly, while others will be served monthly or quarterly for the more outlying areas.

We're grateful for these partnerships that allow us to reach the most vulnerable people in our north counties—many of whom live in food and service deserts and lack reliable transportation to get to the more populated areas. Having mobile events provides much-needed food and service connection to seniors, low-income households, people with mobility challenges, and those who have no transportation options.

### **Health Related Social Needs Services**

O3A will begin providing a range of additional nutrition services in early 2026 to qualifying individuals on Apple Health (Medicaid). Services include fruit and vegetable provisions, medically tailored meals, nutrition counseling and education, and pantry stocking. The services are intended to address Health Related Social Needs (HRSNs): non-medical issues that impact health. HRSNs include things like housing stability and environmental safety, as well as nutrition.

O3A will also provide some other HRSN services under the new funding, including home modifications, remediation, adaptation devices, and caregiver respite.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) has been published for agencies to contract for nutrition services. Interested providers can find it here:

<https://www.o3a.org/contracting/special-opportunities/>

## **VOLUNTEER WITH O3A!**

### **Have a Voice in Aging and Disability Services: Join O3A's Advisory Council**

O3A's Advisory Council represents the public we serve. The AC advises leadership and staff on programs and services and engages in advocacy with the state legislature to promote the interests of older adults and adults with disabilities. The AC meets monthly (with a couple months off) virtually with an in-person option that currently rotates between Aberdeen and Sequim. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more, please contact Michelle Fogus at [michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov) or 360.538.8876.



#### **Current openings:**

- Two at-large members for Clallam County
- One at-large member for Grays Harbor County

We are also seeking one regional representative (may be from any of the four counties) for each of the following:

- Disability rep
- Minority rep

For more information, visit <https://www.o3a.org/about/governing-bodies/>

### **Volunteer with SHIBA (Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors)**

Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) provide free, unbiased information about health care coverage and access to help improve the lives of all Washington state residents. We cultivate community commitment through partnership, service and volunteering. SHIBA volunteer advisors give seniors and people with disabilities the latest Medicare and health care coverage information. Information & Assistance sponsors the SHIBA program

that is part of the Washington Office of the Insurance Commissioner's consumer protection services.

As a volunteer you will:

- Provide significant help to people in your community
- Hone your communication and analytical skills
- Develop expertise
- Connect with community organizations
- Meet new friends

No experience is required. We will train you. And you will have expert support available whenever you need it.

For more information, visit <https://www.o3a.org/programs/statewide-health-insurance-advisors-shiba/>

## PASS THIS ON!

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Thanks, and happy reading!

**Editor's Invitation:** Thank you for reading *Trending Healthy*. Please let us know if there is an important topic about healthy aging that you would like to see us address. You can email [michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:michelle.fogus@dshs.wa.gov) with your suggestions.



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