

Meta Description: If you have a loved one with an incurable condition, is hospice care an option? What does it take to qualify for services in Philadelphia? Find the answers here.

Alt-Text: hospice care Philadelphia

What are the Requirements for Hospice Care in Philadelphia?

Hospice care isn't a popular topic of conversation, and it isn't a subject that most Philadelphia residents think about all that often. Consequently, people often have only a vague idea of what hospice care involves, and many are left with the wrong impression.

Contrary to common belief, hospice isn't a place – it's a holistic form of care that allows those nearing the end of life to spend their remaining time in the comfort of their own home. Hospice services are focused on improving the quality of life, and home health agencies provide a range of supportive services designed to meet the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of terminally ill individuals and their families.

If you have a loved one with an incurable condition, is hospice care an option? What does it take to qualify for services in Philadelphia? Let's take a look.

Eligibility Requirements for Hospice Care

As people who are terminally ill get closer to the end stage of the disease process, many choose to enter hospice care. Before receiving services from a Philadelphia home health agency, however, they must meet two qualifications.

Physician Certification

For someone with an incurable condition to be eligible for in-home hospice care, a doctor must certify that they an estimated life expectancy of six months or less, assuming the disease or illness runs its normal course.

However, estimating how long a patient has to live can be quite challenging, and when determining eligibility for hospice services, Philadelphia doctors look for indicators that the end is near. Signs that suggest that an individual may qualify for hospice care include:

- Frequent emergency room visits and hospitalizations within the past six months
- Decreasing appetite, diet-related issues and dramatic, unintentional weight loss
- Increasing weakness and fatigue, with more time spent sleeping during the day
- Marked confusion, a change in mental status or a decline in cognitive function
- Difficulty in completing everyday tasks due to strength and mobility concerns

Age isn't a factor when it comes to hospice eligibility. With physician certification, Philadelphia residents who are young and those of advanced years can receive hospice services – if, that is, they also meet the following requirement.

Readiness for Comfort Care

Anyone who has an incurable condition and a limited life expectancy may be eligible for hospice care. However, a home health agency can only step in and help if the individual is ready to focus on comfort instead of seeking further curative treatment.

In other words, an individual living with a terminal illness might have a six-month prognosis, but they can only receive hospice services if they decide to stop searching for a cure. If they'd like to continue pursuing life-prolonging treatment, palliative care may be an option. However, while the costs of hospice are typically fully covered by Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance, that's not always the case with palliative care.

When a patient decides to enter hospice, they can expect a personalized plan of care designed to meet their unique needs. The specific services provided may vary, but as a general rule, Philadelphia home health agencies offer:

- Medication and specialized therapies for pain and symptom management
- Medical supplies and medical equipment necessary for in-home care
- Skilled nursing services and home health aides to help with routine tasks
- Training for family caregivers and respite care for a much-needed break
- Bereavement counseling and spiritual support for everyone involved

What if someone qualifies for hospice services, but isn't able to communicate or make decisions about end-of-life care? In that event, their designated healthcare power of attorney can initiate a request for hospice care. If no one holds that designation, a family member or friend can contact a Philadelphia home health agency for help with a referral.

How Long Can Patients Receive Hospice Care?

In order for a patient to meet the requirements for hospice care, a physician must certify that they are likely to pass away within six months. But some people who enter hospice live longer than expected, since they have the support they need.

Home health agencies are prepared for this. Medicare, Medicaid and private insurers provide hospice care in benefit periods – eligible patients can receive services for two 90-day periods, followed by as many 60-day periods as they require. Near the end of each period, doctors reassess the situation. As long as they confirm that the patient has a limited life expectancy, hospice services can continue with no lapse in care.

On the other hand, when a patient's health improves to the point that their condition is no longer considered to be terminal, they'll be discharged. However, patients can always return at a later date, once a doctor recertifies their eligibility.

Schedule a Consultation with Suncrest Hospice

While terminally ill individuals and people with incurable conditions can benefit greatly from hospice care, services are underutilized – and many Philadelphia patients don't take advantage of in-home care as early as they could.

Now that you understand the eligibility requirements for hospice care, you can discuss the matter with your loved one and their doctor. Or, alternatively, contact Suncrest Hospice. Our professional team can help you initiate the conversation about the end-of-life journey, and we'd be happy to answer all of your questions about hospice care. For more information about our home health agency and the services we provide to patients in and around Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, contact us today.