SOUTH DAKOTA
Foundation for Medical Care

SOUTH DAKOTA
RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION

CAREGIVER COMPANION RESOURCE BRIEF

Managing Chronic Conditions and Health at Home

Practical tools to organize health information, prepare for appointments, track changes, and know where to seek help.

Why this topic matters

When several conditions, medicines, appointments, and care instructions are involved, important details can be difficult to track. A simple, updated system can help you share accurate information, notice changes, and ask clearer questions. You do not need to manage medical decisions alone—use these tools with the care recipient's healthcare team and follow individualized instructions.

What You Should Know

- Keep one current list of prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, supplements, allergies, diagnoses, healthcare contacts, and emergency contacts.
- Update the list whenever a medicine or care plan changes. Bring it to clinic visits, pharmacy consultations, hospital visits, and care transitions.
- Track what changed, when it began, what makes it better or worse, and how it affects daily function. A clear observation is more useful than a general statement such as "something is wrong."
- Ask the healthcare team for condition-specific instructions about what to monitor, when to call, and what requires emergency care.
- Do not start, stop, split, combine, or change the dose or schedule of a medicine unless the prescriber or pharmacist provides instructions.

Four Practical Steps

Step	What to do	Helpful reminder
1	Create one health-information file.	Keep paper or electronic copies where the caregiver and care recipient can find them.
2	Review medicines and care instructions.	Ask the pharmacist or prescriber to resolve differences or unclear instructions.
3	Prepare before every appointment or transition.	Bring the current medication list, recent changes, questions, and discharge documents.
4	Write down the next plan.	Record who to call, what to watch for, and when follow-up is due.

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Questions You Can Ask

- What is the most important change or symptom for us to watch?
- Who should we call during office hours and after hours?
- Which medicines are essential every day, and which are used only when needed?
- Could any medicine, supplement, or combination be causing this change?
- What should we do if a dose is missed or the medicine cannot be taken?
- When should we schedule follow-up, and what information should we bring?
- How does this plan support what matters most to the person?
- How will this plan affect daily life, cost, transportation, and what the caregiver can realistically manage? Is there a simpler option that meets the same goal?

Important

This brief provides general education and does not replace individualized medical advice, diagnosis, treatment, emergency services, or instructions from the healthcare team.

RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Enhance®Wellness South Dakota

EnhanceWellness South Dakota (EWSD) is a participant-centered program that helps adults identify personal health goals and develop realistic steps to improve their well-being. For 6 months, participants work with a trained wellness coach to build on their strengths, address barriers, and make sustainable changes that support healthier living. SDFMC is preparing to offer the program and welcomes inquiries from potential participants, referral partners, and individuals interested in becoming wellness coaches.

FOR MORE INFORMATION	
Who may benefit	Adults managing a chronic condition who want support identifying and working toward personal health and wellness goals.
Format	Individualized support from a trained wellness coach by phone, video, or in-person (depending on location). ; program details and availability will be shared as implementation progresses.
How to connect	To get connected complete the EWSD **Contact Us Form** by scanning the QR code.

Additional Resource Connections

Dakota at Home: Search South Dakota resources for home care, medical equipment, healthcare, caregiver support, respite, and other services.

https://dakotaathome.sd.gov/

AHRQ My Medicines List: Create and maintain a detailed list of prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, herbs, and supplements.

https://www.ahrq.gov/health-literacy/improve/pharmacy/medicine-list.html

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

AHRQ Questions Are the Answer: Prepare questions before, during, and after healthcare appointments.

https://www.ahrq.gov/questions/index.html

Medicare Home Health Services: Review general Medicare home-health coverage information. Eligibility and coverage must be confirmed.

https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/home-health-services

Medicare Care Compare: Locate and compare Medicare-enrolled home-health agencies and other providers.

https://www.medicare.gov/care-compare/

Poison Control: For a possible medicine error, overdose, or poison exposure, call 1-800-222-1222 or use the online tool. If the person collapses, has a seizure, has trouble breathing, or cannot be awakened, call 911.

https://www.poison.org/

When to Seek Help

Situation	General next step
Routine question or planned review	Use the next appointment, patient portal, pharmacy consultation, or scheduled care-plan review.
New or worsening change; possible side effect; unclear or conflicting instruction	Follow the individualized care plan. Contact the clinic, pharmacist, home-health clinician, or nurse advice line promptly.
Possible medicine error or poison exposure	Contact Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222. Do not guess or wait for symptoms.
Severe chest pain or pressure, severe trouble breathing, sudden inability to speak/walk/move, one-sided weakness, unresponsiveness, severe bleeding, or another life-threatening concern	Call 911 immediately.

Condition-specific warning signs may differ. Ask the healthcare team to write down exactly what requires a routine call, a prompt call, or emergency help.

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

CAREGIVER TOOL 1

Current Medication and Health Information List

Update this page whenever information changes. Bring it to appointments, pharmacy consultations, hospital visits, and care transitions.

Care recipient	Date updated	Primary caregiver/contact

Health Information

Diagnoses or health conditions	Allergies or serious reactions	Primary clinic/provider and phone

Medicines, Vitamins, Herbs, and Supplements

Name and strength	What it is for	When/how much	Prescriber	Notes/refills

Include prescription medicines, over-the-counter medicines, inhalers, creams, eye drops, vitamins, herbs, and supplements. Use another page if needed.

Medication Review Questions

- ☐ Does this list match what the person is actually taking?
- ☐ Were any medicines started, stopped, or changed recently?
- ☐ Are instructions from different providers or discharge papers inconsistent?
- ☐ Are there side effects, swallowing problems, cost concerns, missed doses, or refill problems to discuss?

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

CAREGIVER TOOL 2

Chronic-Condition Tracking Page

Use the care team's instructions

Ask what should be monitored, how often, the person's usual range or baseline, and what requires a call. Do not create or change clinical targets on your own.

Condition or concern	What the care plan says to monitor	Usual baseline or goal provided by care team	When/who to call

Daily or Weekly Notes

Date/time	What I observed or measured	Different from usual?	Action taken / result

Patterns to Share

- What changed first?
- Is the change getting better, worse, or staying the same?
- What happened before the change?
- Were medicines, meals, sleep, activity, pain, mood, or routines different?
- How did the change affect walking, eating, speaking, thinking, breathing, sleeping, or other daily activities?

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

CAREGIVER TOOL 3

Prepare for the Next Appointment

Appointment date/time	Provider or clinic	Purpose of visit

Before the Appointment

- ☐ Update the medication and health-information list.
- ☐ Bring recent discharge instructions, test results, tracking notes, and home-health information.
- ☐ Confirm transportation, interpreter, accessibility, and telehealth needs.
- ☐ Ask the care recipient what they want discussed and how they want you involved.
- ☐ Put the most important questions first.

My Three Most Important Questions

1		
2		
3		

Recent Changes to Report

What changed?	When did it start?	What makes it better/worse?	Effect on daily life

Before You Leave

☐ Use teach-back: “Let me explain the plan in my own words to make sure I understand.”
☐ What should we monitor?
☐ Who should we call with questions, including after hours?
☐ What would require prompt or emergency help?
☐ Were any medicines started, stopped, or changed?
☐ When is follow-up due?
☐ Can we have written instructions or an after-visit summary?

Notes and Next Steps

Instruction or next step	Owner	Due date

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

CAREGIVER TOOL 4

Change-in-Health Notes

Use this page to organize observations before calling the healthcare team. It is not a substitute for urgent or emergency care.

Care recipient	Date/time noticed	Person completing notes

Describe the Change

What is different from the person's usual baseline?	When did it begin? Sudden or gradual?

What makes it better or worse?	How does it affect daily activities or function?

Related Information

Recent medicine change or missed dose?	Recent illness, fall, appointment, hospitalization, or transition?	Recent change in food, fluids, sleep, pain, mood, or routine?

Contact and Follow-Up

Who was contacted?	Date/time	Instructions received	What happened next?

Do not delay emergency care

Call 911 for severe chest pain or pressure, severe trouble breathing, sudden inability to speak, see, walk, or move, sudden one-sided weakness, unresponsiveness, severe bleeding, or another life-threatening concern. Follow condition-specific emergency instructions from the healthcare team.

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

CAREGIVER TOOL 5

Emergency Information Checklist

Complete this with the care recipient and healthcare team. Keep a copy where it can be found quickly and take it during an emergency.

Care recipient name	Date of birth	Home address
Emergency contact and phone	**Primary provider and phone**	**Preferred hospital, if applicable**

Information Ready to Share

- ☐ Current medication and allergy list
- ☐ Diagnoses and important medical history
- ☐ Advance directive, healthcare power of attorney, or medical orders—if applicable and available
- ☐ Insurance information
- ☐ Communication, mobility, sensory, behavioral, or accessibility needs
- ☐ Emergency contacts and backup caregiver
- ☐ Home address, directions, entry instructions, and important safety information

Numbers to Confirm and Save

Service	Phone
Primary clinic	
After-hours or nurse advice line	
Pharmacy	
Home-health agency, if used	
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Emergency	911

What You Can Do This Week

One achievable action

Update the medication list and write down the three most important questions for the next appointment.

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Evidence and Resource Sources

AHRQ: How to Create a My Medicines List

AHRQ: Questions Are the Answer

MedlinePlus: Talking With Your Doctor

MedlinePlus: Caregiving—Medication Management

National Institute on Aging: Taking Someone to a Doctor's Appointment

MedlinePlus: When to Use the Emergency Room—Adult

Dakota at Home

Medicare: Home Health Services

Poison Control

This document is supported by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of the Rural Health Transformation Program, a financial assistance award totaling $170,816.00 with 100% funded by CMS/HHS. The contents are those of South Dakota Foundation for Medical Care and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by CMS/HHS, or the U.S. Government.