

[Raising personal needs allowance 'right thing to do'](#)

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Most of us might assume that a nursing home resident has all of their needs provided by the nursing home where they reside.

The truth is, costs such as cellphone, internet, most clothing and grooming needs, even snacks must be purchased by the resident or their loved ones, primarily out of a monthly allowance that's taken off the top of whatever income (mostly Social Security or pension) that they receive. The balance of any income goes to the nursing home for their basic care.

Massachusetts last set the rate of what's known as the personal needs allowance in the fiscal year 2008 budget at \$72.80 per month. That means for the past 18 years, despite inflation averaging 3% a year, the rate has been flat. That means nursing home residents have tough choices to make in what they can afford to maintain their dignity and quality of life.

If the personal needs allowance had kept pace with inflation when it was last increased, it would be about \$113.42 today. That may not seem like a lot of money, and it isn't, but it would be an improvement in the lives of some of our most vulnerable. A little more money to spend would not only help those living in a nursing home — the added purchasing power could benefit local businesses as well.

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts, a statewide, nonprofit, all-volunteer coalition advocating for older adults, people with disabilities and their caregivers, this year filed legislation on Beacon Hill to raise the personal needs allowance and include an inflation factor to keep pace with the Consumer Price Index.

Anyone interested in help nursing home residents in this way could ask their state legislators to co-sponsor the following bills: [SD.2385](#), [SD.401](#) and [HD.830](#). There will also be an effort to increase the amount when the next state budget comes up for debate in the coming months.

A much-needed increase in the personal needs allowance would have little to no impact on nursing home budgets. In fact, Signature Healthcare, a large nursing home chain with facilities in the central and southeast parts of the country, has been a leader in advocating increases in the personal needs allowance for several years, noting "it's the right thing to do."