

What is PACE North?

By Rick Charmoli Cadillac News

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The PACE (Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly) model of care provides a welcomed alternative to a nursing home. Since 2019, PACE North has been operating out of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg PACE Center in Traverse City.

Photo courtesy of PACE North

Recently, the Wexford County Board of Commissioners listened to a brief presentation by Colleen Gerace, the PACE North community liaison.

That is not noteworthy as many organizations give presentations, from time to time, to the Wexford board and countless other municipal entities. The difference is, that PACE North, which stands for Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, wasn't familiar to all the commissioners.

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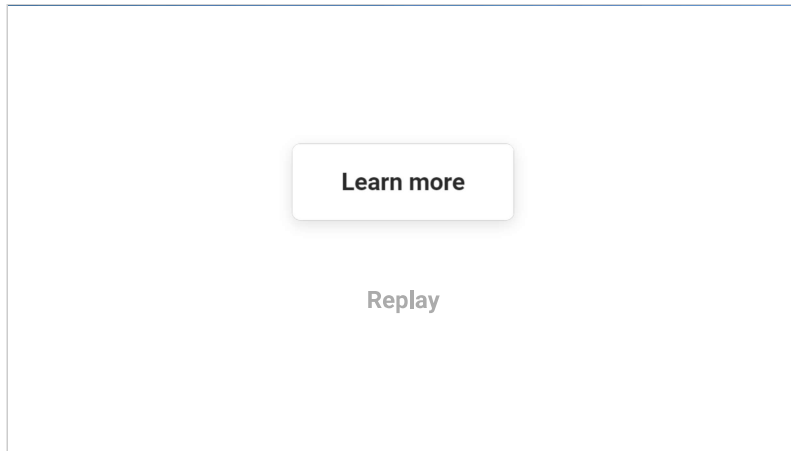
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As you are reading this, it also may not be an entity that is familiar to you. If you are 55 or older, however, you may want to learn more about the organization. According to the 2020 Census, 6,741 residents of Wexford County, or approximately 20% of the total population, are aged 65 or older. This figure increases to 11,708 residents, nearly 35% of the county's total population when it includes individuals aged 55 to 64. Considering these statistics, PACE North is interested in getting to know you.



The PACE model used by PACE North is a Medicare and Medicaid program that helps people meet their healthcare needs in the community instead of going to a nursing home or other care facility.

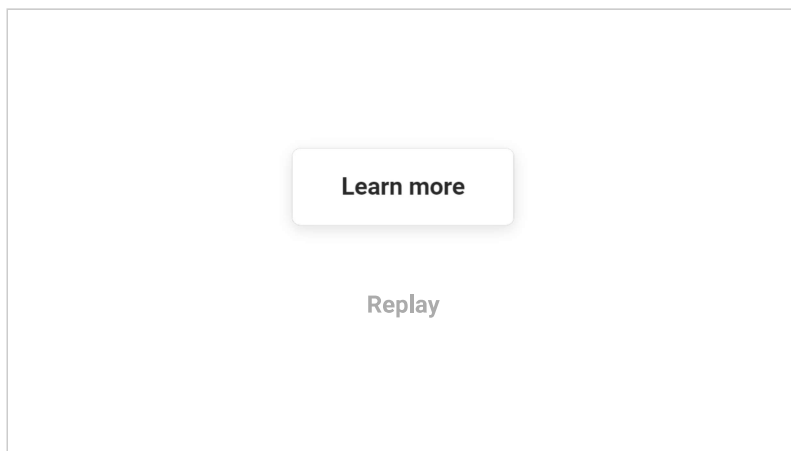
PACE covers all Medicare- and Medicaid-covered care and services and anything else the health care professionals in the PACE team decide is needed to improve and maintain a participant's health. This includes prescription drugs and any medically necessary care. Eligible participants are aged 55 or older.



Likewise, the participants who qualify for PACE North must be certified by the State of Michigan to need a nursing home level of care. They must live in the defined PACE service area and be able to live safely in the community, supported by PACE program services, at the time of enrollment.

PACE North serves all of Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau and Wexford counties and part of Antrim and Manistee counties. Community PACE at Home, in Newaygo County, covers Lake and Osceola counties but currently Missaukee County is not covered by PACE.

The care participants in PACE receive combines social, medical, dietary and support services. It also provides door-to-door transportation to the Day Center in Traverse City and medical appointments. The point of the organization is to help people live safely at home.



If you have Medicaid and Medicare, you won't pay a monthly premium for the long-term care portion of the PACE benefit. If, however, you don't qualify for Medicaid but you have Medicare, you'll pay a monthly premium to cover the long-term care portion of the PACE benefit and a premium for Medicare

Part D drugs.

There's no deductible or copayment for any drug, service, or care your healthcare team approves. If a participant doesn't utilize Medicare or Medicaid, they can pay for PACE themselves out of pocket.

The PACE model of care can be traced to California in the early 1970s. The Chinatown-North Beach community of San Francisco saw the pressing need for long-term care services by families whose elders had immigrated from Italy, China and the Philippines.

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Today, 171 PACE organizations are operating in 33 states and the District of Columbia. More than 300 PACE centers serve more than 77,000 participants across the country.

Nicole Farkas, PACE North executive director, said PACE North started in the region in October 2019.

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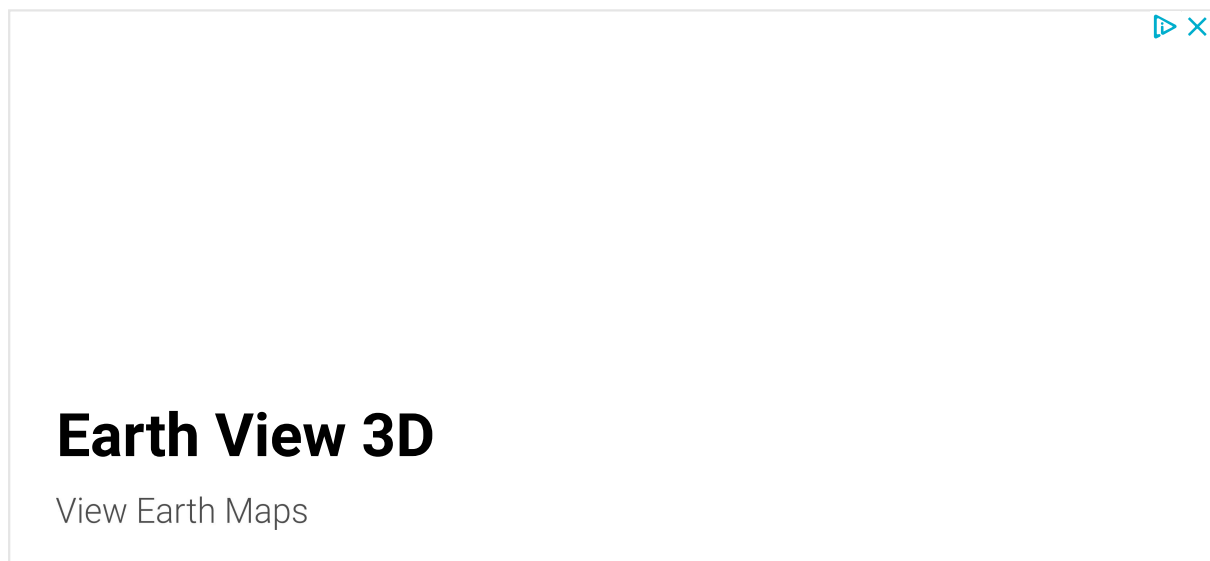
Like many organizations experienced, Farkas said COVID-19 made the first few months of PACE North's operations interesting, to say the least. While challenging, for the population PACE serves, it made what they do even more vital.

"People living in nursing homes were getting COVID and there were restrictions at nursing homes to keep them safe," she said. "It was a time when people were not wanting to go to nursing homes, so we were able to be an alternative. We had internal challenges with learning how to cope with COVID but it didn't slow down enrollment."

Since October 2019, Farkas said they went from having zero participants in the program to 217 as of August 2024. Of that total, 22 participants reside in Wexford County.

Dr. James Whelan, Munson Clinically Integrated Network and Northern Michigan Care Partners medical director said he was an early supporter of PACE when he was the medical director of the Munson Cadillac Physician Hospital Organization. In the role, he also served on the PACE North board for several years.

Whelan said PACE North and PACE programs are comprehensive care programs for the right set of elderly adults in that difficult transition between independence and assisted living. He said it also gives PACE participants and their families a sense of security as they navigate aging, especially when their support systems may be distant.



For Whelan, the niche that PACE North fills is for that sub-population of people who are in the transition between independence and assisted living.

“They (PACE North) fill an important niche as adults need additional, often intensive support in order to remain in their homes,” he said.

Although the goal is to have the entire state covered by PACE programming, Farkas said it would be premature to talk about plans or expansion, including new counties to be covered or new sites. What she was willing to share was that all PACE programs in the state are looking at how they can achieve getting every county in the state covered.

If a person living in Wexford County would like to see if PACE would work for them or their loved ones, call (231) 252-2767.

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