

CHCA Project ECHO Personal Care Providers

All Teach, All Learn

Building Skills, Knowledge, and Confidence



Consent, Understanding, and Care: Recognizing Mental Capacity for Personal Care Providers

Personal Care Providers are often in a position to notice changes in a person's understanding, communication, decision-making or response to care. Based on Laura Tamblyn Watts' presentation, this Learning Snapshot highlights key points to help providers recognize capacity-related concerns, support informed consent, communicate observations clearly, and reinforce respectful, person-centred care within their role. TeleECHO session held on April 15, 2026.

Capacity is not about whether a person makes the choice that others prefer. It is about whether the person can understand information and appreciate the consequences for the specific decision at hand.

WHAT DOES "CAPACITY" MEAN?

- Mental capacity is the ability to understand information and appreciate consequences.
- Always ask: capacity for what decision, and why does it matter?
- Capacity is different from physical ability or daily function.

WHAT WILL YOU NOTICE?

- Changes in understanding, communication, alertness, behaviour, or ability to explain a choice.
- Concerns that the person is not appreciating risks or consequences related to care.
- Situations where family or others are trying to decide without clear authority.

CONSENT REMINDERS

- Informed consent requires information the person can understand.
- The person must have the chance to ask questions and receive answers.
- Risks and benefits should be explained, without coercion or undue influence.

CAPACITY CAN FLUCTUATE

- A person may be capable for some decisions, but not others.
- Capacity may change by time of day, health status, sleep, medications, blood sugar, grief, substances, infection or illness.
- A person can understand something generally, but not appreciate how it applies to them.

SUPPORTING THE PERSON

- Presume the person can decide unless there is a proper determination otherwise.
- Help the person understand in plain language and allow time for questions.
- Respect that capable people may still make choices others dislike or disagree with.

WHEN TO ESCALATE

- Do not decide legal capacity yourself unless that is part of your formal role.
- Report observations and concerns to the supervisor, regulated provider or care team using clear examples.
- When unsure who can decide, ask the team to confirm the proper substitute decision-making process in your jurisdiction.

Remember: Your role is to observe, support communication, respect the person, and share concerns with the care team — not to take away choice because a decision seems risky, unusual, or frustrating.



Personal care providers are essential healthcare team members who deliver personal care and support to individuals receiving home care. This Project ECHO stream reinforces national standards and best practices and offers opportunities to learn new skills, gain knowledge from experts, and connect with peers in home care. This stream is designed to make learning easy, practical, and effective