

There are all sorts of reasons why people might have a lot of things filling up their living space. Some people have a hard time keeping things organized or put away. This can cause living spaces to look messy or cluttered.

Then there are people who have what is sometimes called “pack rat” behavior. For example, they may collect all kinds of things for projects they plan to work on someday. Or they plan to sell the items to make extra money. Sometimes these people keep things “just in case” the items may be useful or needed at some point. People with pack rat behavior can typically give a reason for needing all these items. And there is usually some type of order to how the items are stored.

But some people just feel a strong need to collect and save “stuff.” They may not be able to explain why they have or want all of the items. These people can end up having so much stuff that they run out of room. Large piles of items take over the living space. This can make it hard to safely walk up and down stairs or through hallways. Kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms may get too filled up to use.

**This could be a sign of hoarding behavior.**

**This information is available in Spanish. Contact PerformCare to request a copy.**

**Esta información está disponible en español. Póngase en contacto con nosotros para solicitar una copia.**

Call the toll-free Member Services number listed next to your county to talk with a representative about behavioral health services.

Members can call Member Services 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Usted puede llamar a Servicios al Miembro las 24 horas del día, los 7 días de la semana.

#### **Capital Area**

##### **Zona de la Capital**

Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and Perry: **1-888-722-8646**

#### **NorthCentral Region**

##### **Zona Norte central**

Franklin and Fulton: **1-866-773-7917**

TTY users: Call PA Relay at **1-800-654-5984** or **711**.

#### **Nondiscrimination statement**

PerformCare complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

English: ATTENTION: If you speak a language other than English, language assistance services, free of charge, are available to you. Call: **1-888-722-8646 (1-800-654-5984 (TTY)/PA Relay 711)**.

Spanish: ATENCIÓN: Si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al **1-888-722-8646 (1-800-654-5984 (TTY)/PA Relay 711)**.

Chinese: 注意: 如果您使用繁體中文, 您可以免費獲得語言援助服務。請致電 **1-888-722-8646 (1-800-654-5984 (TTY)/PA Relay 711)**。

All images are used under license for illustrative purposes only. Any individual depicted is a model.

PCPA\_19719322

**PerformCARE<sup>®</sup>**

[pa.performcare.org](http://pa.performcare.org)



# Surrounded by Stuff

## Help for hoarding behavior

**PerformCARE<sup>®</sup>**



## What is hoarding behavior?

Health care professionals say signs of hoarding behavior include when people:

- Feel a strong need to keep things even if the items don't work or are not safe to use.
- Feel upset at the thought of parting with their items.
- Have so many things piled up that rooms can't be used for their real purpose (like bedrooms for sleeping or kitchens for cooking).
- Feel upset about having so many things but still can't give them up.
- Experience social, job, or safety problems due to having so many things.

There doesn't seem to be a specific cause for hoarding behavior. It can sometimes be triggered by physical trauma like a brain injury or emotional trauma like the death of a loved one.

## Harm to physical and emotional health

There is a big difference between hoarding behavior and just having a lot of stuff. Hoarding behavior can harm physical health and emotional well-being.

It can:

- Increase the risk for trips and falls, especially for people who use walkers or canes.
- Cause serious injury if piled-up items fall over.
- Lead to problems with dust, mold, and pests that can trigger chronic health conditions.
- Delay emergency crews from getting into a home to help someone in need.
- Make it hard to get out of the home if there is a fire or other danger.
- Cause problems with friends and loved ones who are upset by the hoarding behavior.

Some people with hoarding behavior may not want other people to see how much stuff they have. They may try to hide the hoarded items or avoid having people come to the home. Or they find they can no longer use living spaces the way they want to or do things they used to enjoy — like cooking meals on the stove.

This can lead to feelings of loneliness, depression, and low self-esteem. Sometimes hoarding behavior can be a sign of a serious behavioral health condition.

## Help for hoarding behavior

Getting upset at someone with hoarding behavior or demanding that they clean up living spaces will not help.

Try being supportive and help the person think about staying safe. For example, talk to them about things like:

- Making sure there is space around doors, windows, and hot water heaters.
- Keeping papers and things that can catch fire away from the stove.

- Moving things away from electrical outlets.
- Having pathways to move safely through the living space.
- Making sure medicines are stored the right way and are easy to get to.

People can also get outside help for hoarding behavior. Support groups like Clutterers Anonymous<sup>SM</sup> can help people who are ready to clear out living spaces. Please visit [www.clutterersanonymous.org](http://www.clutterersanonymous.org) to learn more. Another helpful resource is from an organization that helps people with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). You can visit the International OCD Foundation website at <https://hoarding.iocdf.org>.

The Philadelphia Hoarding Task Force offers tools and resources to help address hoarding behavior. For more information, please visit [www.philadelphiahoarding.org](http://www.philadelphiahoarding.org). The website's Clutter Image Rating Scale is a good tool to help measure the amount of stuff in the home.

Just cleaning out the space is not a fix for hoarding behavior. Most people will need help to understand the reasons why they feel the need to have so much stuff. Someone who wants help with hoarding behavior can contact PerformCare using the phone numbers listed on the back cover. We can help the person find a behavioral health care provider who is trained in treating hoarding behavior.

Please keep in mind that the goals are to help the person with hoarding behavior stay safe and protect their health and well-being. This will also protect their neighbors and build healthier communities. The keys to doing so are patience, understanding, and open communication.