

Benefits at higher income levels

MONEY FIX

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A Medicaid pooled income trust can be life-changing, if you're over 65 or disabled.

It allows those with too much income to qualify for Medicaid to stay in their own homes and have their living expenses paid with their excess income, and still be eligible for community Medicaid services, says Brian Andrew Tully, founding partner of Tully & Winkelman in Melville.

■ **How it works:** Medicaid allows a single person to earn \$825 a month (\$1,209 per couple), and any income above that amount must be spent on medical bills and/or paid directly to Medicaid, unless this type of trust is set up. The excess income is deposited into the trust each month. The funds are then accessed

by having the trust pay bills, such as rent or a mortgage, in the client's name, says Paul Mertz, chief operating executive of P&P Medicaid Consulting in Massapequa Park.

■ **Support for caregiver:** Debra Wojcik of Selden spent the last few years as the sole caregiver for her husband, Francis, who has ALS. Through a support group she learned about the Medicaid pooled income trust. She applied for the trust with the help of elder-law attorney Nancy Burner of East Setauket, and since July has had in-home help, 12 hours a day, seven days a week, for \$85 a month.

■ **Caveat:** However, there are considerations. "Any money remaining in your trust when you die remains with the trust and can't be withdrawn by your beneficiaries or heirs," says Tanya Hobson-Williams, an attorney with Hobson-Williams in Jamaica Estates.

For Wojcik, the trust has been a godsend. "I know Francis is being cared for, and I can take some time for myself. It's given me freedom."