

Choosing a home care provider

A comprehensive list of questions you may want to ask in order to help you find the right provider for you

Introduction

When faced with several care agencies, all appearing to offer similar services, making a choice can feel like an overwhelming prospect. But this checklist of questions is designed to help you find out what you really need to know about each of the providers you are considering, so that you can more easily compare them, knowing that you have been thorough in your search.

One key thing to understand is the distinction between a full ‘managed’ service (which means the agency employs their own carers), and ‘introduction-only’ agencies. A business that employs its own carers, and which offers personal care (“hands on” services such as help with washing, dressing, continence care) will be regulated, routinely inspected, and awarded a rating from ‘inadequate’ to ‘outstanding’ by the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Ask the provider for a copy of their latest CQC report. If they don’t have one, then they are probably an introduction-only agency. These agencies do not have to register with the CQC, nor do the care workers they supply, if they only offer assistance, such as shopping, cleaning and general household tasks. With introduction-only agencies, the person in need of care (or their family) directly employ the carer, and have to manage them including paying them, sorting out pension contributions, holiday pay, and finding someone to replace them if the carer is ill or on holiday.

The following checklist is designed to help you think about which things matter most to you and/ or the person who is looking for care. It uses the term ‘care provider’ to identify the organisation you are considering, and ‘care worker’ or ‘carer’ to identify the actual person from whom you will receive care in your home.

Some of the questions may not be relevant to your situation or may not be important to you, and can be ignored, but this list should help you to assess the agencies you’re talking to and may include some questions you might not otherwise have considered. By jotting down your answers and impressions for each provider, you can then compare notes, and your responses may help you assess the extent to which the provider will keep you (or your loved one) safe, provide an effective, well-led service, and deliver it in a caring way that is responsive to your needs.

The column on the right of the checklist is for you to use in whatever way you see fit – perhaps ticking to show that you have covered that question, putting a star against the questions that are of most importance to you, or simply recording a score out of 10 to indicate your general impression of that aspect of the provider.

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YOUR CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS

DETAILS OF HOME CARE PROVIDER (NAME OF COMPANY AND CONTACT DETAILS):

Meeting My Needs

If there is an assessment process, to assess my needs, what does it involve, what does it cover and who conducts it?

The agency should carry out their own assessment before drawing up a care plan. They are likely to look at:

- Your care needs, and details of any medical conditions and medication
- Your ability to see, hear and communicate
- Any problems with continence or mobility and any equipment you use
- Any dietary requirements or preferences
- Your religious and cultural needs
- Your mental capacity and whether you are able to make decisions about your care
- Who else is involved in supporting you and does anyone else have authority to make decisions on your behalf, for example if they hold Power of Attorney
- Whether you pose a risk to yourself or others by living at home, and the safety of carers visiting your home
- Arrangements for getting access to your home.

If an agency doesn't automatically carry out an assessment that covers these areas, you should ask them to do so.

Do you currently provide care for people with similar needs to mine?

How will the most suitable care worker be matched to my needs?

What happens if a care worker and I are incompatible?

What is the process for reporting any concerns and how will any concerns be followed up?

If care is not 'live-in' will the care worker have direct access to my house? How will this be arranged

How often will I/my representatives be contacted about the suitability of the carer and whether they are meeting my needs?

What domestic tasks will the care worker do/not do?

Cost of Service	
What are your hourly charges/ live-in charges?	
Do charges depend on the level of care that is needed?	
Are there any minimum charges for people who only need a small amount of support?	
Are there any set-up charges? Will I have to pay a deposit or make any payments in advance?	
Do prices vary depending on the time of day? i.e. Do I have to pay more if I need care in the evening, weekends or bank holidays?	
When can prices be increased and by how much?	
How much notice is required if I need to cancel or change a visit and will there be a fee?	
What happens if I have to go into hospital for a period of time? Will I still be charged for scheduled home visits while I'm in hospital?	
How is payment required – by cheque, direct debit or some other way?	
How often is payment required? Monthly? Weekly?	
How often and when are charges reviewed?	
Are there any other 'hidden' charges I must meet, e.g. travel, VAT, national insurance, pension contributions?	
Notes/comments	

