

## Choosing the Right home care provider

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

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## 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.

# YOUR CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS

<b>DETAILS OF HOME CARE PROVIDER (NAME OF COMPANY AND CONTACT DETAILS):</b>

<b>Meeting My Needs</b>	
If there is an assessment process, to assess my needs, what does it involve, what does it cover and who conducts it?	
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?	
What nursing/medical care can the care worker do/not do?	
What assistance will the care worker provide regarding pet-care?	
If I like activities such as a daily walk, will that be part of the care plan? Are there any additional charges for this?	
What happens if my condition deteriorates – can I stay at home?	
What is the care worker's role in the event of a medical emergency?	

<b>Notes/comments</b>	

<b>Live-in Care</b>	
Does the service provider offer live-in 24/7 care?	
Will the care worker need their own bedroom?	
What else will they need? e.g., Internet access?	
Are they entitled to time off away from the home?	
What breaks will they need?	
How many hours a day on average will they be actually 'working'? How is that decided?	
Can the live-in carer(s) undertake clinical tasks such as managing PEG feeds, blood sugar monitoring, administering oxygen and managing catheters or stomas?	
<b>Notes/comments</b>	
<b>The service provider</b>	
Is the service provider a member of UKHCA (UK Home Care Association), and committed to complying with the UKHCA Code of Practice?	
Is the service provider registered with the CQC? What is its latest rating?	
Is the service provider led by its own healthcare professionals?	
What quality assurance policies and procedures does the service provider operate?	
Does the service provider have any insurance in case of damage to property by the care worker?	
Does the service provider offer specialist care, such as dementia care, Parkinson's care, multiple sclerosis care, stroke care, palliative care or cancer care?	
Does the service provider offer access to consultant nurses and/ or occupational therapists for support, advice and guidance?	

Does the service provider interview and employ all care workers, or does it use agency staff? Either way, how does it screen and recruit those who deliver the care? What characteristics does the service provider value most highly when hiring care staff? What characteristics would make someone unsuitable for working in their organisation?	
Can the service provider be contacted out of hours?	
Notes/comments	
<b>The Care Worker</b>	
What sort of training do the care workers receive before they start work and during their employment?	
Do the carers have any qualifications and does the service provider support their care workers in undertaking any qualifications?	
Do all the care workers undergo a criminal record disclosure from the Disclosure and Barring Service (in England and Wales) or Disclosure Scotland (in Scotland) or Access NI (in Northern Ireland)?	
What happens if my regular care worker is sick or on holiday?	
What referencing does the provider do?	
How many other people does the care worker look after?	
How long will the care worker spend with the person being cared for at any one visit?	
How does the provider avoid 'burn-out' for their workers?	
If there is a problem, is the provider contactable 24/7?	
How long do care workers tend to stay with the service provider?	

Notes/comments

**Service delivery**

Does the service provider have a standard contract for work with private clients? Can we see it in advance?	
Does the service provider manage all aspects of service delivery?	
What written/electronic records does the carer keep? How are these made available to relatives?	
Is there a focus on preventative care?	
How does the provider monitor that they are making a difference?	
How will the carer ensure that my privacy and dignity are respected?	
Is it possible to try the service/ care worker for a short initial period, to see how it works out?	
How flexible can the carer workers' visits be? For example, can the times of the carer's visits be amended to suit your schedule. This is important for example if a family member or friend will be providing some of the care and they have variable working hours.	
How early or late can the carer workers visits be?	
Is there a minimum or maximum visit length?	

Notes/comments

Cost of Service	
What are your hourly charges/ live-in charges?	
Are there any minimum charges?	
Are there any set-up charges?	
Do I have to pay more if I need care in the evening, weekends or bank holidays?	
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?	
<b>Notes/comments</b>	
Covid-19 related questions	
What extra measures is the care provider/care worker taking to ensure safety?	
How often are care workers tested?	
Does the care provider have a robust and comprehensive Coronavirus business continuity plan in place since the outbreak of the Coronavirus? Can you see a copy?	
What happens if a care worker becomes unwell and is symptomatic (for example, will the care provider send a replacement care worker without a gap in care provision)?	

Are care workers allocated to people in 'care groups' (for example, those who have no symptoms/those who have had a negative test within a given timescale/those who have symptoms etc) to reduce risk to others?	
What happens if you (the person receiving care) test positive for the virus or exhibit symptoms?	
Does the care provider require PPE to be worn by their care workers at all times, or are there exceptions (for example in the case of 24/7 care where the risk of infection is likely to be lower)?	
Do the care workers have Key Worker status (so, for example, they can access dedicated shopping hours allocated to social care)?	

**Notes/comments**



