

Questions to ask a home care agency

Here is a list of questions to ask a home care agency. Get all the answers you need and enlist the help of a family member or friend if you can.

About the carers

- Do you interview your recruits and take up at least two written references before offering them work?
- Do all your carers undergo a criminal records check?
- Will I have a regular carer?
- What will happen if the carer is off sick?
- What happens if a carer is unable to get to me because of adverse weather conditions or heavy traffic?
- How many different carers are likely to visit me in a week or in a month?
- What sort of training do the carers receive? Do they have an induction period? How often is their training updated?
- What qualifications and experience do they have?
- Will carers keep written records of the care that has been given and have accurate timesheets for me to sign? Can copies of the records be sent to me if I want them?

About your needs

- How will you match the most suitable carers to my needs?

- Will you be able to find carer(s) who can visit at the time I need care?
- What happens if I'm incompatible with the carer? Can a different carer be requested?
- What happens in the event of a medical emergency? Will the agency carer stay with me until help comes? Will they notify me of any problems?
- How will carers get into my home if I can't answer the door? How will that information be kept secure?

About the agency

- Do you have a standard contract for work with private clients? Can we see a copy?
- What are your hourly charges?
- Are there any minimum charges, such as a minimum number of hours per week?
- What happens on weekends and bank holidays? Is care provided?
- Is there an additional charge on weekends and bank holidays?
- How is payment required - by cheque, direct debit or some other way?
- How often is payment required? Monthly or weekly?

Are there any extra charges? The prices quoted usually include National Insurance contributions, travel and any VAT payable. Regulated home care services generally qualify as welfare services and are exempt from VAT. However, this does not apply to introductory agencies or domestic-only services.

What insurance do you have in place, for example, in the case of damage to property, the carer making a mistake or the carer having an accident in my home?

How do you ensure quality of care is maintained? What are your quality assurance policies and procedures?

Does the agency have procedures in place to:

protect me from accidents, neglect or self-harm?

cover the way staff handle my money if the carer shops or pays my bills?

instruct staff not to borrow or lend money, not to accept gifts and not take children or pets into my house without permission?

How will you make sure your staff respect my privacy and dignity?

Who should we contact (outside office hours, if necessary) if we have problems with a carer or the service provided?

Is it possible to try you for a short trial period initially, to see how it works out?

What the agency should assess

Regardless of whether you're engaging an agency via direct payment or engaging an agency directly (without an assessment from the council), the agency should carry out their own assessment before offering their care plan. They are likely to look at:

- the help you need, and details of any illness and medication
- your ability to see, hear and communicate, and your preferred method of communicating
- any problems with continence or mobility and any equipment you use
- any dietary requirements and preferences
- any religious and cultural needs
- who else is involved in supporting you
- your mental capacity and whether you are able to make decisions about your care, all or part of the time
- whether anyone else has a legal role to make decisions on your behalf, because they hold Power of Attorney
- the safety of carers visiting your home, as their employer carries health and safety responsibilities for them
- whether you pose a risk to yourself or others by living at home
- arrangements for getting access to your house.

If they don't carry out an assessment that covers all of these areas, you should ask them to do so.