

Home Care - How to choose the best agency

Millions of families pay for some form of home care services every year in the U.S. and those numbers are expected to increase in the coming years. With the seemingly endless supply of healthcare information available, researching your care options can often prove confusing and daunting.

Non-medical home care can be a vital component of any long term care solution or simply bridge a gap during a time of transition. This type of care provides personalized services that can address a variety of needs for a family or individual looking to retain their independence at home or place of residence – short or long term. Listed below are only a few examples of how home care can be utilized:

- Assistance with personal care activities such as bathing, dressing, feeding and mobility;
- Housekeeping functions such as preparing meals, organizing a room, cleaning the bathroom, changing linens and doing laundry;
- Addressing safety concerns when a loved one suffers from a memory-related disease or disorder;
- Socialization through activities such as taking walks, playing cards, going to lunch, or escorting a family member to church;
- Backup care for a spouse or other family caregiver in emergency situations or planned vacations;
- Transportation to errands, shopping or appointments;
- Picking up groceries or medications;
- Providing medication reminders

Home care agencies can effectively help an older adult “age in place” with dignity. Knowing caregivers are extensively screened, trained, insured, properly supervised, and in compliance with required regulations provides tremendous peace of mind. Home care agencies can also help prevent significant financial and legal risk arising from hiring an independent caregiver from a registry or classified ad.

When evaluating prospective home care agencies, it is important to screen more than one provider to understand their service offering, related fee structures, and general expectations.

Additionally, getting answers to the following types of questions can help:

- Is your agency licensed and/or do you hold any accreditations?
- Is there a formal assessment performed by a Registered Nurse (RN)? If so, what’s the cost?
- Are services supervised under the direction of an RN or other practitioner? How often can I expect to hear from that individual?
- Do you have a standard contract? If so, what are the terms?
- Is money required upfront to start service?
- Are there minimum visit guidelines?
- Do your services cost more during evenings and weekends?
- How much notice is required to cancel a visit without a fee?
- Are your caregivers bonded, insured and covered by workers compensation insurance?
- Are your caregivers employees of the agency or contractors?

- Are background checks and drug screens performed on all caregivers?
- How many caregivers would you assign to our case?
- What if we are not satisfied with our caregiver(s)?

Calling references, checking with the Better Business Bureau, and seeking answers to more specific questions are also important steps. Home care can serve as a valuable resource only by understanding your specific needs and doing your homework. Hiring the right agency for you can prove to be the difference between an average and exceptional experience at home.

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