
Choosing an In-Home Health Agency – “What to Look for”

In-home agencies offer a wide range of options for those that wish to remain in their home, such as companion services, personal care, household assistance, and skilled nursing care to meet the specific needs of those involved. Many agencies have minimum length of stay (usually 4 hours). Payment includes: **Medicaid, Medicare, other insurance, or private pay** depending on the agency.

It is important to ask questions when choosing an in-home health agency not only because the aide will be taking care of your loved one, but also because the aide will be coming into your home or your loved one's home.

What services are typically performed?

- ❑ **Mini-bath:** Bathing and personal care by an aide. Generally, they are set up for 1-2 hours of service for a set fee.
- ❑ **Companion:** Activities and companionship. May include: housekeeping, meal preparation and minimal personal care. Hourly rate with minimum number of hours required (normally a 4-hour minimum).
- ❑ **Home Health Aide:** Bathing, personal care, and companionship. May include: housekeeping, meal preparation, or errands. Hourly rate with minimum number of hours required.
- ❑ **L.P.N. and R.N.:** Personal care and skilled service by a licensed nurse. Hourly rate with minimum number of hours required.
- ❑ **Live-in:** Personal care, companionship, meal preparation, housekeeping, and errands. A set fee for a 24-hour period.

What are some questions to ask when contacting an in-home agency?

- ❑ How long has the agency been in business?
- ❑ What kind of experience does the agency have with in-home care?
- ❑ What services does the agency provide?
- ❑ How are the aides screened before being hired? What types of background checks are performed (should be statewide background check, not county)? How many references are checked?
- ❑ What kind of experience/certification do the aides have to have before they are hired?
- ❑ What type of training does the company provide to the employees? Does it include dementia training?

- ❑ Are the employees insured and bonded?
- ❑ Does the agency provide employee job descriptions in writing for clients?
- ❑ Do the aides have reliable transportation?
- ❑ How are the aides assigned to families? Will the same aide be coming every time?
- ❑ What kind of supervision is given to the aides?
- ❑ Who is available if problems arise? What is the procedure for addressing a complaint or problem? What happens if the aide calls in sick?
- ❑ Is a registered nurse available to staff on a 24-hour basis to handle emergencies?
- ❑ Is a list of agency references available for you to check the level of client satisfaction? (Be sure to check these out!)
- ❑ Does the agency provide Worker's Compensation in case their employees are hurt on the job?
- ❑ Is the agency Medicare/Medicaid approved? **The Missouri Home Health Consumer Hotline** will investigate complaints on home health and hospice (800) 877-6485.
- ❑ If you are unhappy with the service you receive, **The Better Business Bureau contact is (314) 645-3300**
- ❑ If you feel that the employee from an agency may have caused abuse in some nature, **The Abuse/Neglect Hotline is (800) 392-0210**
- ❑ Does the agency provide a free assessment by a qualified professional prior to the start of service?
- ❑ If your loved one needs specialized medical care, are employees licensed to perform it?
- ❑ Does the agency have a licensed social worker?
- ❑ Does the agency offer services to fit individual needs?
- ❑ What is the hourly rate for services? Is the rate different for nights and weekends? Is 24-hour care available?
- ❑ Does the agency provide a contract for services? Is there a cancellation policy?

Adapted from:

The Missouri Council of Senior Citizens. (June 1990). *Senior Action Alert*.

Oxford Healthcare. (2002). *Choosing a Home Care Agency*.

Alzheimer's Association. (1995). *Respite Care Guide: How to Find What's Right for You*.

Medicare offers a free tool called Home Health Compare which allows families to compare home health agencies that have provided Medicare with information. Visit www.medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE.