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## Home Care Services

A wide range of health and personal services can be given in the home. Whether a person is being treated for cancer, is recovering from it, or has [advanced disease](#), home care might be an option, depending on the type of care needed. Home care agencies can help you get certain types of expert, compassionate care in your home instead of in a hospital or other facility.

- [What Are Home Care Services?](#)
  - [Who Provides Home Care Services?](#)
  - [Who Pays for Home Care?](#)
  - [Finding a Home Care Agency](#)
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## What Are Home Care Services?

Home care services are provided in your home to help you deal with an illness or injury. These services can help you recover from cancer treatment, better manage your side effects as you go through treatment, and become stronger and able to be more independent.

- [Types of home health care services](#)
- [Types of personal care services](#)

“Home care” can mean different things and can refer to different types of care that might be available in your area. When looking into home care, it is important to understand some key terms.

- **Home health care** focuses on skilled care or services that are provided by licensed health care professionals. It might include nursing visits and care or different types of therapy, such as physical or occupational therapy.
- **Personal care** services provided in your home focus on helping you with activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, or running errands, or housekeeping.
- **Hospice care** is provided to people whose treatment can no longer cure or control their disease. People getting hospice care might have both home health care and personal care services.

If you need home care, your health care team will work with you to figure out what type of care is best. Sometimes this depends on your insurance, Medicare or Medicaid coverage. You can choose a home care provider from a list and then work with your health care team and the home care provider to set up your care plan. The care plan should include the services you need, the type of staff best suited to provide those services, how often the services are needed and whether you need special eqol

An occupational therapist (OT) can help you with problems that keep you from being able to fully perform your daily activities. They will look at what you can do, then teach you new ways to do daily tasks to make them easier, like preparing food, eating, bathing, dressing, and doing other household routines. If you need special equipment, you'll be taught to use it.

### **Speech therapy**

If you can't talk the way you used to, a speech therapist can help you communicate by teaching special techniques and helping you practice. They may also help if you have problems swallowing.

### **Social workers**

Social workers look at social and emotional factors that affect people with cancer. For people with complex needs, they can help find sources of support in the community. This can include helping the family look for financial help as needed. Social workers also help people learn to cope with the demands of illness, family conflicts, and grief.

### **Respiratory therapy**

For people with breathing problems or lung diseases, respiratory therapists can help you manage your symptoms. They can also teach you how to set up and safely use oxygen and other equipment.

## **Types of personal care services**

### **Home health aides or home care aides**

A home health or home care aide can help with personal care, such as getting in and out of bed, walking, bathing, and dressing. Some agencies that offer personal care services can provide aides that also help remind you to take your medicines, do light housekeeping, and run errands. Some aides have had special training and are qualified to give more complex services if they are supervised by a registered nurse.

### **Homemaker/attendant care**

A homemaker can do light household tasks for you, like laundry, meals, housekeeping, and shopping. These services are done to help with housekeeping rather than give any personal or health care. Some agencies offer both personal care and homemaker

services.

## **Volunteers**

A volunteer who can sit with you, give emotional support, and help with personal care, paperwork, and getting to and from doctor visits might be available from a community organization, a church or faith-based organization, a home care agency, or hospice.

## **References**

American Society of Clinical Oncology. Hiring Home Care Services. Cancer.net. Accessed at cancer.net. Content is no longer available.

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# **Who Provides Home Care Services?**

- [What to look for and ask about](#)
- [Home health agencies](#)
- [Hospice care](#)
- [Infusion therapy companies](#)
- [Durable medical equipment and supply dealers](#)
- [Home care aide and homemaker agencies](#)
- [Private-duty agencies](#)
- [Independent providers](#)

## What to look for and ask about

When looking at home care services, it's best to find out what type of care they provide and what experience they have with situations like yours. It's also important to find out what your insurance will cover and what your out-of-pocket costs will be. If you choose to self-pay for some of the services, you should also check to see whether the caregiving staff is employed by the home care company (as opposed to being an independent contractor). If you hire an independent contractor, you would be considered the employer and may have to pay payroll taxes, Social Security, and unemployment insurance. You must also check to make sure the caregiver is "bonded and insured" which means they carry liability insurance and are covered for things like theft and property damage. It's also a good idea to get references from independent contractors, and even from an agency if you wish to do so.

## Home health agencies

Services by health care professionals are usually provided by home health agencies. Many hospitals have home health agencies within their network, but you have the right to choose one that best fits your needs.

Some agencies limit their services to nursing and 1 or 2 other specialties. If care is needed from more than one specialist, the home health agency will set up a team to provide care that covers your needs. Other agencies offer a wide range of home care services through nurses, therapists, social workers, homemakers and home care aides, medical equipment and supply dealers, and volunteers.

Because home health agencies hire and supervise their personnel, they assume liability for care given. Home care services are usually available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, though most home health services are given during the day if possible.

## **Hospice care**

This type of care uses a core team of skilled experts and volunteers who provide medical, psychological, and spiritual care to people with advanced, serious illnesses when treatment is no longer effective and a cure is no longer possible. You can find more information about these services in [Hospice Care](#)<sup>1</sup>.

## **Infusion therapy companies**

These companies provide medicines, equipment, and nursing services to people who need intravenous (IV) fluids, nutrition, or treatments at home. They also give special feedings through tubes that are put in the stomach or intestine (tube feedings). Nurses may teach patients and family members to give these medicines, fluids, or feedings at home. They also provide support to make sure everything is working well and help deal with problems.

## **Durable medical equipment and supply dealers**

These companies provide products ranging from oxygen tanks, wheelchairs, and walkers, to catheter and wound-care supplies. They deliver these products, set them up, and teach patients and caregivers how to use them. Most of these companies do not give physical care to patients. But some may provide nurses to give medicine and tube feedings to patients and teach the patient and family the proper way to give these on their own. Some offer respiratory therapy services to help patients use breathing equipment.

## **Home care aide and homemaker agencies**

These agencies provide workers to help patients bathe, dress, and get around. They may also help prepare meals and keep the house tidy. Others may be “sitters” who stay with patients who can’t be left alone for medical or safety reasons. This is sometimes called companion care. Some states require that these agencies be licensed and meet certain standards of care.

## **Private-duty agencies**

Private-duty agencies provide nursing, homemaker, home care aide, and companion services. In most cases, these agencies are not licensed or regulated by the government. Staffing registries often serve as employment agencies for home care

nurses and aides. They match the provider with the patient and collect a finder's fee. The patient or family is then considered the employer.

## Independent providers

These are nurses, therapists, aides, homemakers, and companions who are privately employed by the people who need their services. The patient or family must recruit, hire, and supervise these providers. The patient or family pays them directly, and may also be responsible for payroll, Social Security, and unemployment insurance.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care/hospice-care.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care/hospice-care.html)

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- **Self-pay:** If insurance coverage is not available or doesn't cover all the care that you need, you and your family can hire providers and pay for services yourself. It may help to shop around, as these services can be expensive.
- **Community organizations:** Some community groups, along with state and local governments, help pay for home health and personal care. Some agencies get donations from individuals and charity groups so they can provide care to anyone who needs it, whether or not they are able to pay. Depending on a person's eligibility and financial need, these groups may pay for all or part of services. Hospital discharge planners, social workers, local offices on aging, the United Way, and your American Cancer Society can help you find out what's offered in your area.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/more-about-home-health-care](http://www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers/more-about-home-health-care)
2. [www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/pages/Home\\_and\\_Community\\_Based\\_Services.asp?utm\\_source=geriatrics\\_home\\_page](http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS/pages/Home_and_Community_Based_Services.asp?utm_source=geriatrics_home_page)
3. [www.medicaid.gov/](http://www.medicaid.gov/)
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Last Revised: July 30, 2021

# Finding a Home Care Agency

Finding a home care agency that meets your needs may take some research, but it will be time well spent. You'll want to review the quality of their services, if the services you need are included, staff training and expertise, and your health insurance coverage. Most communities have several providers to choose from. Here are some places to start your search.

- [Where to look for a home care agency](#)
- [What to look for in a home care agency](#)

## Where to look for a home care agency

### Local referrals for home care agencies

Talk with your doctor, nurse, social worker, or hospital discharge planner about home care agencies near you. They usually have worked with home care agencies and know which ones can be counted on to respond best to your needs.

Information and referral services may be offered through your local area Agency on Aging, local United Way chapter, or the nearest chapter of your American Cancer Society.

Ask friends in your area about any home health care agencies they have used or heard about. You can also check the [yellow pages<sup>1</sup>online<sup>2</sup>](#) under “home care,” “home health care,” and “nurses.”

### State resources for home care agencies

Contact your state's department of health or social services to get a list of licensed agencies. If you're looking for a Medicare-certified agency, contact Medicare at 1-800-MEDICARE (633-4227) or their website, [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)<sup>3</sup>.

### National resources for home care agencies

National resources like the [National Association for Home Care & Hospice<sup>4</sup>](#) (NAHC) can help you find home care services near you. You can also check the [Medicare website<sup>5</sup>](#) for Medicare-certified home health services.

## What to look for in a home care agency

There are many things to look at in choosing the best agency to meet your needs. First, you'll want to talk with your cancer care team and figure out which services you'll need. Then you can look for agencies that offer those services.

Here are some of the things you might ask about a home care agency.

### Is the home care agency reputable?

There are a number of ways you can find information about the quality of care given by the home care agency.

**Accreditation by a nationally recognized group:** Check to see if an agency is accredited (certified and licensed) by a nationally recognized group, such as [The Joint Commission](#)<sup>6</sup>. The Joint Commission is an independent, non-profit organization that evaluates and accredits health care organizations and programs.

**Medicare certification:** [Medicare-certified programs](#)<sup>7</sup> have to meet certain

malpractice and liability insurance. Ask them to send you any brochures or other available information about their services. And ask to see a copy of the agency's patient's rights and responsibilities information. Have them explain anything you don't understand.

***What services are offered?***

When choosing a home care agency, make sure that they offer the services you need. You will want to know if they offer home health care, personal care, or both. Also check to make sure they employ the types of professionals you need, such as nurses, therapists, and home care aides. It may also be helpful to ask how much experience

important to ask if the initial evaluation includes input from your family doctor or other professionals already involved in your care.

### ***Care plan***

Home care agencies should offer a care plan for each new patient. Many states require that a registered nurse (RN) develop the plan. It's a good idea to ask how the plan is developed and if you and your family will have input. The plan should be written out and copies given to everyone involved. The care plan should list specific duties, work hours/days, and the name and telephone number of the person who will be in charge of your care. The care plan should also be updated as your needs change. You can ask to see an example of a care plan.

### ***Who will provide your care?***

You may want to ask about references for home care staff and whether the agency trains, supervises, and monitors its staff, caregivers, and volunteers. Ask how often the agency sends a supervisor to the patient's home to review the care being given. Find out whether the caregivers are licensed, insured and bonded. And ask who takes questions or complaints and how are issues resolved?

### ***How payment is handled***

It is important to find out how a home care agency handles payment and billing. Read any agreements carefully before signing and be sure to keep copies. Check with your health insurance provider to find out if there are any deductibles and co-pays. For example, certain medicines may require a co-pay. And ask what resources the agency provides to help you find financial assistance if it's needed.

### ***Communication***

The agency should have a 24-hour telephone number you can call any time you have questions or problems. Ask about the procedure for calling about problems, and for making and resolving concerns or complaints. How a home care agency responds to

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.yellowpages.com/](http://www.yellowpages.com/)
2. [www.yellowpages.com/](http://www.yellowpages.com/)
3. [www.medicare.gov/](http://www.medicare.gov/)
4. [www.nahc.org](http://www.nahc.org)
5. [www.medicare.gov/](http://www.medicare.gov/)
6. [www.qualitycheck.org](http://www.qualitycheck.org)
7. [www.medicare.gov/coverage/home-health-services](http://www.medicare.gov/coverage/home-health-services)
8. [www.usa.gov/state-health](http://www.usa.gov/state-health)
9. [www.bbb.org/](http://www.bbb.org/)
10. [www.usa.gov/state-attorney-general](http://www.usa.gov/state-attorney-general)

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Last Revised: July 30, 2021

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