

# HOW TO SELECT AN IN-HOME CARE PROVIDER WORKSHOP FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS



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Two of the most important issues for seniors are to remain independent and in their own home. However health and cognitive issues can sometimes make normal day-to-day living a bit more challenging.

In many cases it may not be necessary to move your parents into a nursing home or assisted living facility. Instead, many seniors are able to remain in their primary living quarters with some assistance from professional in-home care providers.

This workshop will help you determine when home care is needed by giving you the warning signs to look for. We'll also share some pointers on how to have a conversation with your parents about the need for extra care and exactly what roles these professional caregivers play.

We'll provide you with tips and guides for how to select an in-home care provider including agency and caregiver credentials. In addition, we'll help you make sure your decision is going to be the safest choice and discuss what protections you should inquire about. Finally, we'll provide you with some suggestions about where you can seek more information and guidance.



### Snapshot of Boomers and Parents

Nearly 70 percent of Boomers in the U.S. (55 percent in Canada) said their parents live independently at home or in an apartment. One in ten Boomers in the U.S. and Canada has their parent or parents living with them. Approximately one in five Boomers in the U.S. and Canada live more than two hours away from their parents. \*

## HOW TO KNOW IF YOU NEED AN IN-HOME CARE PROVIDER

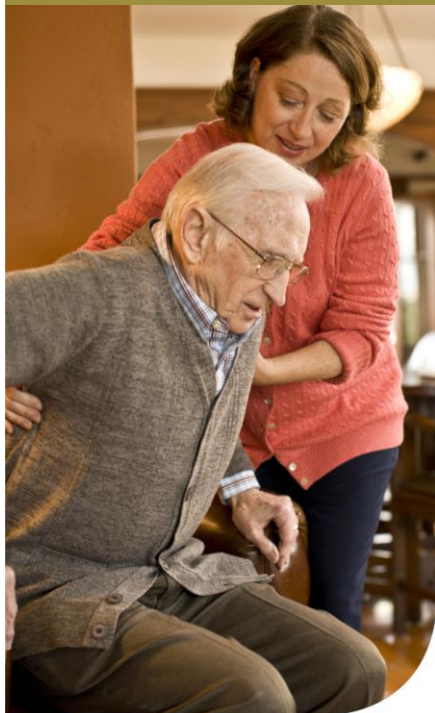
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Determining that your parents need help often happens in one of two ways:

1. A medical condition or emergency that requires your parent to give up some of his or her normal day-to-day activities,  
– or –
2. Seeing signs that demonstrate an inability to take care of regular activities.

## TIP

Not all of these warning signs need to be present to indicate the need for in-home care. In fact, you may choose to get help even if there is just one pressing



## Signs that your parents might need help:

1. Difficulty walking; unsteady when standing or a recent fall
2. Poor grooming or personal hygiene; wearing soiled clothing
3. Spoiled or outdated food in the fridge; little nutritious food in the house
4. Diminished driving skills; recent accidents or near misses
5. Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed
6. Reluctance to socialize
7. Difficulty concentrating or exhibiting poor judgment
8. Signs of memory loss, forgetfulness, or confusion
9. Medications not being taken on time; prescriptions not refilled
10. Sleeping more, lacking energy or talking about being constantly tired
11. More irritable or having sudden mood changes
12. Evidence of unopened mail, past due bills or bank statements not being handled
13. Inability to keep up with housekeeping and home maintenance

## Roles that a professional caregiver can fill:

- Adult Day Care & Respite Care
- Bill Payment & Household Financial Management
- Companion Services
- Financial Planning
- Geriatric Assessment, Evaluation & Care Management
- Home & Safety Monitoring
- Medical Home Healthcare
- Home Renovation & Maintenance
- Non-Medical Home Care
- Homemaker & House Cleaning
- Hospice Service
- Insurance
- Live-In Home Care
- Meal Preparation
- Personal Care
- Rehabilitation Services
- Transition Services
- Transportation
- Private Duty Nursing

## When having the conversation with your parent about in-home caregiving services, try to:

- Move toward solutions that provide the maximum amount of independence for the older person
- Look for answers that optimize strengths and compensate for problems
- Remain respectful and not be patronizing
- Make sure you both have the time and energy for such conversations

### Notes:

## AGENCY CREDENTIALS

### Step #1:

Pull together a list of local care providers. You can create the list through local phone books, referrals from the local elder or senior centers, or check on the Internet. Here are a couple of helpful websites:

**Eldercare Locator** – search by city, county, or zip code  
[www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)



**National Association of Area Agencies on Aging** – click “Answers on Aging” to search by state  
[www.naa.org](http://www.naa.org)



**DID YOU KNOW...?**  
There are more than 5,000 Senior Home Care Agencies nationwide.

**TIP:**  
Create a notebook to hold all of your information. It is helpful to have one with pockets to hold pamphlets and printed pages from online sites.

### Step #2:

Once you have the names of several providers, you'll want to learn more about their services and reputations. You may want to ask the following questions:

- How long have you been serving the local community?
- How long has your parent company (if applicable) or local office been in business?
- Tell me about your licensure, accreditations and certifications.
- Can you provide any literature explaining your services, eligibility requirements, fees, and funding sources?

*Note: many providers provide a “Patient Bill of Rights” that outlines the rights and responsibilities of the providers, patients, and caregivers alike.*

### Step #3:

For those agencies for which you received satisfactory answers so far, next inquire about their personnel policies and ask what types of insurance they carry.

In most cases, caregivers are “Employees” which means the Agency is responsible for paying the employee payroll taxes, as required by law. However you should ask if they also carry the worker’s compensation insurance, general liability insurance and if they have bond insurance for their caregivers.

### Step #4:

The last items you should check are the provider’s service agreements, financial policies and billing procedures.

Ask for sample copies of written agreements and invoices. Inquire if the provider furnishes written statements explaining all of the costs and if there are payment plan options associated with home care.

### Notes:

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Some states require business certificates and licensure but there are no national licensure requirements for non-medical senior home care. Instead, there are a number of accrediting agencies from which companies can seek to get certified, licensed or accredited. Some of the most popular and reputable are the Accreditation Commission for Health Care, Inc., the Community Health Accreditation Program, the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, the National Private Duty Association and Home Care University.

### TIP

Ask the home care provider and your insurance company what services will and will not be covered by your parents’ medical and long-term care insurance.

## CAREGIVER CREDENTIALS

Now that you’ve narrowed down your list of potential in-home care providers based on the agency’s credentials, it is time to find out about the actual caregivers themselves.

- **Inquire how the agency selects caregivers.** Are decisions based on experience, education and qualifications? Does each potential caregiver complete a thorough personal and professional reference and criminal background check?
- **Find out who is watching over the caregivers.** Does the provider assign supervisors to oversee the quality of care that patients are receiving in their homes? How often do these individuals make visits? Are there any regular reports made from the supervisor to the family such as changes to the caregiving plan?
- **Make sure that there is a consistency of staff that visits your loved one.** Some agencies use a caregiver team approach. That way if one caregiver is sick, another is normally available to meet your home care needs. Having a team also means that the most compatible and reliable caregivers will be there for your family member or friend.

## Notes:

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## PATIENT SAFETY, RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS

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We're all concerned about safety and privacy these days. Unfortunately there are many people in the world who would take advantage of others – especially vulnerable populations such as seniors.

Here are a number of things to keep in mind:

- **Make sure the agency you select pre-screens their employees** and conducts criminal background checks and drug testing.
- **Confirm that your loved one is receiving the appropriate level of care.** For example, ask if there are any pre-service clinical evaluations done and, if so, who among the family and medical care professional are consulted.
- **Ask about the credentials of the person doing the pre-service evaluation.** Is it a nurse or therapist? Find out what the evaluation entails so that you can inform your loved one about what to expect.
- **Make sure the in-home care provider is taking a holistic approach.** Also, ensure that their services will be compatible yet not compete with other care your parent is receiving.
- **Make sure the plan of care will be provided in writing.** The plan should detail the specific tasks to be carried out by each professional caregiver and a copy should be given to both your parents and a member of the family. Find out if the provider will update the plan if changes occur, and take time to educate family members about the care being administered.
- **Be sure to ask what procedures the provider has in place to handle emergencies.** Are its caregivers available 24 hours a day, seven days a week? If not, ask for advice on other options, e.g. a personal emergency response system.
- **Find out who you can contact with questions or concerns.** Check the agency's policy in place for responding to and resolving issues.
- **Finally, ask the in-home provider how they ensure patient confidentiality.** Be sure to ask for this policy in writing to guarantee the safety of your senior loved one's personal information.

**Reference checks:**

At this point you should have your choices for providers narrowed down to two or three options. Ask each home care provider to supply you with a list of references, such as doctors, discharge planners, patients or their family members.

Contact each reference and ask:

- Do you frequently refer clients to this provider?
- Do you have a contractual relationship with this provider?
- If so, do you require the provider to meet special standards for quality care?
- What sort of feedback do you have from patients receiving care from this provider, either on an informal basis or through a formal satisfaction survey?
- Do you know of any clients this provider has treated whose cases are similar to mine or my loved one's?
- If so, can you put me in touch with these individuals?

**TIP**

In addition to asking for formal references you should also "ask around." Talk to friends and relatives to see what they have heard – good or bad. Often the most straightforward answers come from these sources and if the care is great, they will be sure to let you know.



Also, you can check with local and national consumer protection agencies such as:

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| Better Business Bureau                 | <a href="http://www.bbb.org">www.bbb.org</a>                               |
| AARP                                   | <a href="http://www.aarp.org">www.aarp.org</a>                             |
| American Society on Aging              | <a href="http://www.asaging.org">www.asaging.org</a>                       |
| National Council on Aging              | <a href="http://www.ncoa.org">www.ncoa.org</a>                             |
| National Family Caregivers Association | <a href="http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org">www.thefamilycaregiver.org</a> |

**Other resources:**

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## TAKING ACTION

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The task of selecting an in-home care provider may seem daunting, but going about it in a comprehensive and methodical way means that you get the best care for your loved one. That way you ensure their continued independence and a great quality of life for you both.

Think about your next steps, and how you can create your own action plan:

1. The primary sign that my loved one needs in-home care is:
2. The first thing I will do in my search for an in-home care provider is:
3. Resources I need to search, talk to, or meet with before making a decision about a care provider are:
4. The most important questions for me to ask a potential provider are:

### Action plan:

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\* Statistics are from the survey "Parents and Boomers: The Conversation Gap", conducted for the Home Instead Senior Care network, 2006.