What is Home Health Care?
Home care is available for all ages and varieties of needs. The primary focus is on the care and needs of the client. Services range from non-medical caregivers to skilled and licensed medical caregivers. Medical caregivers provide assistance to clients with medical needs requiring the skills of trained professionals such as registered nurses. Non-medical caregivers help clients with personal care and companionship.

Home health care services are provided to individuals in their home, wherever that may be: (private home, apartment, independent or assisted living facility). Care is provided to people of all ages, from newborns to seniors.

Services can range from homemaking and companionship to specialized medical care. If the agency has a website, take some time to review the site and the services they offer. Home health care services range from periodic as needed visits to 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

A reputable agency will work with you to determine the type and level of care you need and may refer you to another agency if your needs are not best suited to the services they can provide. Your doctor will also need to be involved in your care plan. They will also help to determine what the best level of care is. For example, some agencies only specialize in pediatric care, medical care or companion care. Some agencies only serve specific locations, so they may also refer you to someone closer to your home. Expect to talk in-depth about what kinds of care will be provided, and what the client’s expectations are for someone coming into their home.

The Agency
Most agencies have liaisons that come to you to explain their services. Find out if the caregiver and agency have the right credentials. Meet with a few agencies to find the right fit for you. Below are some questions you may want to ask when choosing a home health care provider:

What kinds of care does the agency provide?
How long has the agency been in business? Is the agency insured and bonded?
Does the agency have a “Patient’s Bill of Rights” for you to review?
Does the agency have a specialty service or population? For example, an agency may only serve clients needing a specific type of care.
If help is needed for mobility assistance, be sure to ask if the agency can provide that care.
All agencies must be registered or licensed. Ask for license information and verify the license. A red flag would be if they are not registered or licensed.
What is the screening process or background checks the business uses for the caregivers? One of the license requirements is that background checks must be done for staff. However, clients should be familiar with what the background checks include.
What kinds of ongoing training do the caregivers take? How might that impact care?
Who is the coordinator for the services within the agency?
What is the agency’s process for care on holidays? Is there coverage for those days?
How often will a supervisor be in contact with the client or their family? What happens if there is a problem with the caregiver? Who should be contacted? What is the back-up plan if the caregiver can’t make it?
What if the client simply doesn’t get along with the caregiver or the agency?
Can Medicare/Medicaid/Veteran’s benefits be used to pay for services? If not, what is the payment plan?
Does the agency have 24-hour live phone coverage if there’s a problem?

Tips for Choosing a Home Health Care Provider

Choosing a home care provider to help you or a loved one can be a daunting task. Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota has partnered with representatives in the Home Care industry to develop these tips to assist you in making the best choice for your needs.
Payment Methods
The agency will ask how you will pay for the services. One question you should ask is how much the service will cost. Find out if you can use Medicare, Medicaid, Veteran’s Benefits, or insurance plans to cover the services. You may need to pay out of your own pocket. Long term health care is different from home health care. A reputable agency will explore all sources of payment for the client in order to help minimize the client’s payment responsibility.

Frequently Used Terms
• Services:
  - Hands-off Care:
    • Non-medical care: homemaking, light housekeeping or chore service, companionship, medication reminders, and food preparation are generally considered ‘hands off’ care. This used to be referred to as ‘non-skilled’ care.
  - Hands-on Care:
    • Medical Care: mobility or movement assistance, rehabilitation services, medication management, wound care, physical therapy or other skilled medical or nursing. This used to be referred to as ‘skilled’ care.

• Personal Care: dressing, grooming, and bathing are generally considered ‘hands on’ care.

• Activities of Daily Living (ADL): Refers to daily self-care activities such as eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring (walking) and continence. ADL limitation may be temporary or permanent such as an accident or chronic illness. Health care professionals provide assistance if activities cannot be adequately performed.

• Companion: A person who serves a non-medical role in a client’s life. Duties performed vary from reminder services, assisting with mobility, providing companionship, organizing and more.

• Homecare: Any form of care given within the home, which can range from care provided by a home health aide, home health nurse, companion, or caregiver. The term covers both medical and non-medical forms of care.

• Home Health Aide: A trained professional who provides non-medical health services such as personal care and assistance with activities of daily living.

• Home Health Care: Refers to medical-related homecare and provides services that include caregiver services, home health nursing, home therapists, home health aides, etc.

• Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL): Often performed by a person living independently in a community setting during a normal day, such as money management, telephone use, commuting, housekeeping, preparing meals, and taking correct medications.

• Private Duty or Home Care nurse: A nurse who comes to the home, but called upon to take special care of an individual and provides skilled nursing under the direction of a physician for longer periods than 1-2 hour visits.

• Respite Care: the agency gives a primary caregiver a break; this can be long term, but is often short term. For example, family members are often caregivers, but may need to be away for a time; an agency can provide care during that time.

• Therapy: this can refer to speech, physical or occupational therapy as well as medical therapies.

• Specialty trained staff: this may include physical, speech or occupational therapists, IV therapists, licensed social workers or nurses with additional training for specific types of treatments.

Additional Resources:

Minnesota
Minnesota Board on Aging
mnaing.org

Minnesota Department of Health
health.state.mn.us

Patient Bill of Rights:
health.state.mn.us/divs/fpc/consinfo.html

MinnesotaHelp.info
MNNHelp.info
(Minnesota wide resource for public programs and services)

Minnesota HomeCare Association
mnhomecare.org

United Way
help line - call 211

North Dakota
North Dakota Department of Health
ndhealth.gov

North Dakota Department of Human Services
nd.gov/dhs

Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services
cms.gov

National Association for Home Care & Hospice (NAHC)
nahc.org

These tips were created by Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota, with input from businesses in the Home Health Care Industry, to assist consumers in making educated buying decisions.