

TOP 10 TIPS

**when choosing a
support provider**

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Top ten tips when choosing a support provider

This is a guide to help anyone who is looking to buy social care support for themselves or a friend or relative. It has been developed by VODG (the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group) which provides support to charities that work with disabled people and promotes good practice.

The guide will help you think about the differences between employing your own personal assistant (PA) and receiving support from a provider organisation. If you decide that you would prefer to engage a PA, it tells you where you can find out more information about this option. If you choose support from an organisation, it helps you consider what to look for when choosing a provider that is right for you or your relative.

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Under the Care Act 2014 your local authority must undertake an assessment to determine whether you need care and support to live your life. The assessment should include your day-to-day needs, the things that are important to you and your individual circumstances, such

as where you live. If the local authority agrees that you are eligible for funding, a Care Manager will make a plan with you about how your care needs will be met and will let you know how much money is available to pay for your support. This is your personal budget.

If you are entitled to NHS Continuing Healthcare funding, then you may also receive a personal health budget. You can spend your personal health budget on healthcare and support such as treatments, equipment and personal care. You must agree how your personal health budget will be spent with a healthcare professional, such as your GP.

If you are making arrangements for someone who cannot choose for themselves, then decisions about their care must be made in line with the Mental Capacity Act 2005. Their care manager will help to guide you through this process.

The Care Act 2014 also makes provisions for people who are caring unpaid for a family member or friend. Carers are entitled to a carer's assessment and can receive support in their own right. Information for carers can be found at www.carers.org

The care manager or health professional working with you should help you think about the following things:

What are your personal strengths, abilities and skills?

Who is in your network of friends and family? How do they help you?

What community resources (such as clubs or drop-ins) do you use?

What is working well for you?

What is not working so well?

What is important to you?

What will make a difference?

What are your goals?

How can you reach them?

1

Think about how you want to be supported

Once you have been allocated a personal budget, you can then choose the type of support you want. There are two main options available to you. You can either:

- **Employ a PA directly, or**
- **Buy support from a provider agency**

There are important differences between how these work so make sure you think about what's best for you.

Employ a PA directly

If you are employing somebody directly, i.e. if there is no agency involved in your support, you will be classed as their employer. It is important to make sure you are clear about all your legal responsibilities before employing anyone.

If this is the option you choose, you need to ensure you are able to pay their wages on a regular basis. This must be at least the National Minimum Wage for under 25's and the National Living Wage for over-25's. You must also pay their tax, national insurance and workplace pension contributions.

You will need to make sure they have a contract of employment.

You need to check and meet your responsibilities to make additional payments, such as sick pay or maternity pay.

You also need to check that you have the right

insurance in place, as you are responsible for your PA as their employer.

Your PA may need to have a check of whether they have a criminal record. You should check current requirements about this with your local authority or clinical commissioning group.

There is no legal requirement for your PA to have specific training, but if you think they need training, you will need to arrange and may have to pay for this. If you receive a budget for your care either from a local authority or from the NHS, they may ask for your PA to have specific training and may fund this. If you receive a personal health budget and your care plan identifies training that your PA needs, the NHS will provide or fund this.

Finally you need to make sure that you have a back-up plan in case your PA is off sick or on holiday. Will someone else be able to support you?

1

Think about how you want to be supported

Help to employ a PA

Becoming an employer may seem daunting at first, but it may help you get the right support that is tailored to your requirements. If you like the idea of employing your own PA but are concerned about managing the employer's responsibilities there are organisations that can support you with this. There are links to help you find out more about employing a PA in the section called **Find out more**.

In some areas there are PA agencies that will help you find a PA. If you decide to use a PA agency, you should check whether you or the agency will be the PA's employer.

The rest of this resource applies primarily to people who choose to buy support from a provider agency.

Buy support from a provider agency

If you are buying your support from a provider agency they will usually be your support worker's employer. A provider agency may be a charity, a not-for-profit organisation or a private company.

Make sure that the provider agency will be responsible for paying your support worker's wages, tax, national insurance, workplace pension contributions and all other payments including sick pay and maternity pay.

Agree with them at the beginning how you will be involved in decisions about who supports you.

You can buy your support from more than one agency. For example you could buy support for your specialist needs from a specialist provider and your general care needs from another, less specialist, provider.

1

Think about how you want to be supported

Employing a PA directly	Buying support from a provider agency
You are the employer.	The agency is the employer.
You have more responsibilities.	You have fewer responsibilities.
You have more flexibility and choice about whom you have as your PA.	You have some control, but often not as much as when you employ your own PA.
You must honour your PA's contract and follow employment law; you will find it difficult to change your PA without very good reason.	Your provider agency will have a pool of staff, so may agree to swapping your support worker in some circumstances, for instance if you don't get on well together.
You are responsible for arranging alternative support if your PA is on holiday or off sick.	The agency is responsible for providing cover if your support worker is on holiday or off sick.

Other ways you can spend your money

You don't have to buy support from a PA or provider agency. For instance you could choose to use your personal budget to buy assistive technology or to take part in activities, such as using local clubs. Or you can choose to spend your budget on a mix of things. You can talk to your care manager about this.

2

Note your first impressions

Your support provider should offer long-term, high quality support. The initial conversations you have will be a good indication of your future relationship and how easy it will be to talk to them.

What should I look for?

They do what they promise. They get back to you when they say they will. You can get hold of them when they say you can.

They are interested in you. They show an understanding of your needs and wishes.

They recognise that you are the expert in your (or your relative's) support needs.

They offer you the opportunity to talk to other people they support or other family members about their experiences.



3

Check how the provider will develop your support package

Your support provider should be willing to spend time getting to know you to find out about your needs and wishes and what is important to you.

What should I look for?

Ask how they will approach getting to know you.

If you are a family member, ask how they will involve you.

They should develop a person-centred plan with you, detailing what you want to achieve.

You should receive a contract that sets out what support you will receive and when.

A decision making agreement should also be developed which clarifies who needs to be involved in decisions or making changes to the support you receive.

Ask what happens about holiday arrangements, both for the staff member and for you or your relative. You might want to choose another support worker for when your usual support worker is on holiday. Or while they are away, you might prefer to get support from a friend or family member. It is also important to tell the provider if there are times when you might need extra support, such as when a family member is away. Make sure you discuss these things when you are drawing up the contract.



4

Check how your support will be monitored and changed

Your support provider should carry out a review of your support – sometimes called a “person-centred review” – at least once a year and this should be led by you.

What should I look for?

Find out how your support will be reviewed.

Ask how you, and people who are important to you, will be involved.

You should be able to contact your provider easily to make changes to your support at any time – not just at your annual review.

Check what happens if you want to make a change at short notice, for instance if you have another arrangement that clashes with the time of your support. How much notice does the provider require? Will they be able to provide your support at a different time? Are there any charges associated with making changes?



5

Check the price

Your support provider should confirm a price that will not change after you and they have signed the contract, unless the contract allows this or it is by mutual agreement.

What should I look for?

Check how the price is put together.

If it is an hourly rate for support, is this for 1:1 support or shared support?

Check what the rate includes and what is “free”.

Check if there are any extra charges that you need to know about.

Check that the rate covers everything you will need, such as personal care, finding somewhere to live, etc.

Check what you will get for your money. Bear in mind that specialist provider agencies may cost a bit more but they may have more skills to support you and so be a better choice. Make sure you consider this when making a decision.

Check what extra specialist support you will be getting and how this differs from a “standard” agency.

Check what will happen if you need more support during the contract. How will this be charged?

Check who pays for the support worker if you go into hospital and still need support to be provided.

Check how the agency will manage the money you pay them. Do you want them to invoice you or will you pay another way? Will they send you a regular statement, telling you how your money has been spent?

Your support provider might want to include an annual review of prices to allow for staff pay uplifts in line with inflation or to agree an annual percentage increase up front. Make sure you ask how this will be agreed with you.

There may be other circumstances when prices have to be reviewed. Make sure there is a clear process for how you will be consulted on this.

6

Check the staff who will be supporting you

Your support provider should arrange high quality staff who will support you based on your individual needs and preferences.

What should I look for?

Check how the provider plans to involve you in the recruitment process. How will your views be listened to and actioned? Will you be able to be involved in drawing up the job description of the person who supports you? Will you be on the interview panel, if you want to be?

Ask if staff training complies with, or exceeds, the legal requirements.

Find out how staff will be trained to provide the support you need if they do not have the required skills already.

Check who pays for staff training. Who will support you when your support worker is away being trained?

Check that each staff member has regular supervision and a development plan that sets out their personal training requirements.

Ask if all support workers have criminal records checks. You should not be charged for this.

Criminal records checks

In England and Wales a check on a person's criminal record is called a DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check.

In Scotland the equivalent scheme is known as the PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) scheme.

In Northern Ireland it is called AccessNI.

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Check how the provider will make sure you are safe and supported properly

Your support provider should meet certain standards. This will increase your confidence that you will receive the highest quality support possible.

What should I look for?

Check the provider is registered with the appropriate regulator. This is:

- ▶ In England, the Care Quality Commission (www.cqc.org.uk)
- ▶ In Scotland, the Care Inspectorate (www.careinspectorate.com)
- ▶ In Wales, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (www.cssiw.org.uk)
- ▶ In Northern Ireland, the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (www.rqia.org.uk)

You can check out the provider's most recent inspection report on the website of the relevant regulator.

Ask what other quality checks the provider carries out; these should include health and safety.

Check what reporting is done; this should include incidents, complaints and health and safety.

Find out what safeguards are in place if there is an emergency.

Ask if they carry out any regular surveys on the support they provide. Will you be able to take part in these?

Care Quality Commission

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is responsible for regulating and inspecting adult social care services in England. Their inspection reports are published on-line, including a rating which indicates whether a service is:

- Outstanding**
- Good**
- Requires improvement**
- Inadequate**

Reading an inspection report will help you understand the quality of the service on offer and think about what questions you might want to ask the provider.

To find an inspection report go to: www.cqc.org.uk. On the home page of the website, type in the name of the service you are interested in and click on the "search" button.

8

Check your right to complain

Your support provider should make sure that if things go wrong, you can be certain that any problems can be solved quickly and efficiently.

What should I look for?

Ask for a named contact in case something goes wrong.

Ask for a copy of the complaints procedure. Make sure that it is provided in a way which is accessible to you.

Does the complaints procedure assure you that any concerns would be taken seriously and investigated promptly?

Does it tell you how they will feed back to you about what is happening as a result of your complaint, and what you can do if you are still not happy?

9

Check how you can end your agreement

People's circumstances change and there may come a time when you need to cancel your agreement with the provider agency. You need to know you can do this easily.

What should I look for?

Check the procedure for ending your agreement.

Find out what notice period is required.

Check if there are any exit fees.

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Find out more

You can find a list of **care and support providers** who are committed to delivering personalised support and are VODG members at: www.vodg.org.uk/members.html

Information about the Mental Capacity Act can be found at: www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/mental-capacity.aspx

Skills for Care has a range of support for people who employ a PA, including funding to support learning and development of both PAs and PA employers; see www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Recruitment-retention/Employing-your-own-care-and-support/Employing-your-own-care-and-support.aspx

Information about **personal health budgets** can be found at: www.nhs.uk/choiceintheNHS/Yourchoices/personal-health-budgets/Pages/about-personal-health-budgets.aspx

If you are looking for an organisation that will help you with the practical arrangements of **employing a PA**, your local authority or personal health budgets team should be able to signpost you to local sources of advice. Another good place to start is: www.shop4support.com/s4s/CustomPage/Index/62

The **Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities** and **Thera** have both developed free resources to help families plan for the future with a relative with a learning disability.

You can download the **Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities' guide** at: mhf-ld.unified.co.uk/content/assets/pdf/publications/thinking-ahead-planning-guide-23042013-D2143.pdf?view=Standard

You can order a free copy of **Safe and Secure: six steps on the path to a good life for people with a learning disability** by Al Etmanski at: www.thera.co.uk/safeandsecure

JARGON BUSTER

There is a lot of jargon in social care.
Here are some of the key terms used in this leaflet:

Agency/provider:

An organisation that supports disabled people.

Assessment:

The process of working out what your needs are.

Assistive technology:

Equipment that helps you carry out daily activities and manage more easily and safely in your own home.

Care manager:

The person employed by your local authority who is responsible for commissioning and reviewing your support.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS):

A government organisation that checks people's criminal records in order to prevent unsuitable people from working in care and support services.

Personal Assistant:

A person you employ directly to provide support to you.

Personal budget:

Money that is allocated to you by your local authority to pay for care or support to meet your assessed needs.

Personal health budget:

Money that is allocated by the NHS to meet your assessed healthcare needs.

Person-centred:

Support that puts you at the centre of working out what your needs are, choosing your support and having control over your life.

Responsibility for any errors or omissions remains the responsibility of VODG.

VODG welcomes comments about this resource.
Please send your feedback to info@vodg.org.uk



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