



Choosing a care home

How to find a residential care home that's right for you

Going into care in old age can seem like a big upheaval. But many elderly people discover that it's also an opportunity for change – a chance to meet new people and be part of a safe, secure environment where they know their care needs will be met.

In this factsheet, we want to outline the process of finding a home and the issues to consider when making your choice.

The care assessment

If you feel you or a family member needs some form of care, you should first contact the Adult Services department of your/their local authority for a care assessment. The assessor will then draw up a report on your care needs and the type of care which would best suit you, including any specialist requirements. All further discussions about care and funding will be based on these 'assessed needs'.

Researching homes

Care homes broadly fall into two categories – those with nursing care and those without (details overleaf). You can obtain a list of care homes in your area from your Adult Services department. Your library may also have directories such as the *A-Z Care Homes Guide*.

The Care Quality Commission (details overleaf), has a useful online search tool to find homes by location, services and quality rating. You can also download the CQC's inspection reports (in Scotland, contact the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care).

Standards of care

Care homes may be run by the Local Authority, a private operator or a voluntary organisation.

All must be registered with the Care Quality Commission and it's important to read the latest inspection report for any home you have shortlisted. In the past, homes in England have been graded by the Care Quality Commission using a three star rating system. This system ceased on 30 September 2010, and a new rating system will be introduced in May 2011, subject to consultation. For further information, contact the Care Quality Commission on **03000 616161**.

Choosing a care home

Continued



Visiting homes

Once you have a shortlist of homes, arrange the visit. It's advisable to visit each home a couple of times at different times of the day and take along someone else for a second opinion.

Many organisations can provide an extensive checklist of factors to consider when visiting a home. Issues to consider include:

- Are the staff welcoming and happy to answer all your questions?
- Are rooms clean and private? Are there communal areas and gardens?
- Is there a choice of meals and mealtimes?
- What activities, services and events are provided for residents?
- Do residents appear happy and well cared for?
- Do staff genuinely seem interested in the residents?
- Is each resident allocated a primary staff member?
- Would you receive regular care assessments?
- Can it meet your specific care needs?

Options for care	
Care at home	This may be cost-effective if you only require a few hours help a day and your home can be adapted to help you manage. But if you need live-in care, a residential care home will usually work out cheaper.
Sheltered housing	Designed for people who are still relatively mobile and independent, but who like the reassurance of an on-site warden. Not intended for people who need round-the-clock care.
Care villages	Combine the support of sheltered housing with more on-site facilities and social activities.
Care homes without nursing care ('residential homes')	These provide accommodation (either single or sharing rooms), meals and help such as assistance with dressing and washing.
Care homes with nursing care ('nursing homes')	Provide all the services of a residential home with the addition of qualified registered nurses on site at all times. Some homes may specialise in nursing specific illnesses, such as dementia.
NHS Continuing Healthcare	NHS Continuing Healthcare is a package of care arranged and funded by the NHS. It is not means tested. To be eligible, your main or primary need must relate to your health and meet the criteria set out by The National Framework. Care may be provided in a care home or in your own home.



Choosing a care home

Continued

Trial periods

It is often possible to have a trial stay in a home before you commit to a longer-term arrangement - or agree with the home that the first few weeks are a trial and you can leave at, say, a week's notice.

Agreeing the contract

Once you have selected a home, a legal contract needs to be drawn up.

If you are paying for your own care, the contract and fees can be agreed between you and the care home. If your local authority is paying, the home must agree the contract and fees with them. You will normally be asked to sign an agreement and receive a statement of terms and conditions.

Take time to check the agreement carefully and don't be worried about raising anything you don't understand with the home or local authority. Issues to consider include:

- What are the fees and what do they cover?
- What services will be charged on top of the fees?
- Is a deposit required - how much?
- How is the NHS Funded Nursing Care contribution accounted for in the fees?
- What notice is given for fee increases?
- How are temporary absences, such as hospital stays, charged for?
- What charges are made after a resident's death?

Top-up payments

Even if your local authority is funding your care, you are free to choose any home that accepts local authority funding, meets your 'assessed needs' and has room available.

However, the local authority will have a limit on how much it will pay for a given level of care. If your chosen home costs more than this, a third party such as a relative, will have to meet the shortfall.

The relative will have to agree to a top-up arrangement with the home. Be sure there are ongoing funds to meet this before an agreement is signed.

Getting help

We hope this factsheet has been useful. If you require more information on funding care, including local authority means-testing, please request Partnership's *'Funding care in old age'* guide from your IFA.

Finally, if you have any difficulty finding a suitable home, contact your local authority. It has a duty to provide assistance, advice and ensure that appropriate care is available to you, even if you are funding care yourself.

Cost of care: Local authorities can usually negotiate lower fees with homes rather than individuals who are funding care themselves. Since September 2006, all care homes are required by law to detail their charges, including any difference between their fees for local authority placements and people making their own arrangements.

Choosing a care home

Continued



Sources of information and support

Care Quality Commission

The health and social care regulator in England. Publishes inspection reports and quality ratings with an online search tool to find care homes in your area.

www.cqc.org.uk
03000 616161

Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care

Information on care homes in Scotland.

www.carecommission.com
0845 603 0890

Elderly Accommodation Counsel

Charity providing information and guidance on care.

www.eac.org.uk
020 7820 1343

First Stop Advice Service

Free advice and information for older people, their families and carers about care and housing options.

www.firststopcareadvice.org.uk
0800 377 7070

Registered Nursing Home Association

Organisation for care homes with nursing care. Nursing homes that reach RNHA member standards carry a Blue Cross.

www.rnha.co.uk
0121 451 1088

For more information

■ www.partnership.co.uk

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