

In-Home Care: Hope and Help for Families

by Curt Foust



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Caring for someone with Alzheimer's or other dementias often requires a great deal of time and patience, and it can cause great stress to the family (particularly to the family caregiver). "Whatever happens to me, I don't want to end up in a nursing home!" Sound familiar? It is no surprise but almost all of us commonly express that wish, fearing the possibility of becoming completely dependent on others. However, when loved ones develop a progressive disease like Alzheimer's or other dementias, reconciling their wishes with the reality of their needs can pose challenges and feelings of guilt for even the most devoted family caregiver. You want to do everything you can for your loved one, but as the disease progresses, it is likely you and your loved one will eventually need some type of outside help.

Despite the very real challenges associated with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or other form of dementia – for the patient and their family – there is hope and help for families facing this diagnosis. Although there are many care options available, In-Home Care can be an important part of that solution, whether temporarily while finding the proper memory care community, or more permanently so that you can honor your loved one's wishes to stay at home.

What is In-Home Care and What Value Can It Bring to Families? In-Home Care allows your loved one to remain in the comfort of familiar surroundings while maintaining a level of independence — which can be particularly important to someone suffering memory loss, social isolation, and confusion. In-Home Care services include assistance with basic tasks of daily living such as preparing meals, dressing, bathing/grooming, housekeeping, laundry, transportation to appointments, medication reminders, incontinence care, and much more. However due to the significant issues arising from social isolation, the most important aspects of In-Home Care are companionship, mental stimulation, and supervision, which can bring peace of mind to family members, whether they live nearby or miles away. In these daily social interactions with mental stimulation, care providers can recognize and alert family members if there are signs of changing behavior or declining health. Care providers may include family members, friends, neighbors, or professional caregivers employed by a home care agency. Professional caregivers with specialized Alzheimer's



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training provide personalized one-on-one care, customized to your loved one's individual interests, abilities, and behaviors. Many home care agencies, such as Home Instead Senior Care, offer free, no-obligation consultations to help you determine if this option is right for you and your loved one.

In addition to the benefits described above, In-Home Care provides significant value to you and your loved one by:

- Alleviating caregiving tasks, saving family caregivers time, allowing them to stay on the job, miss fewer work days, and stay focused at work.
- Reducing the health and stress related problems for the family caregiver -- getting a much-needed break has a profound impact on a family caregiver's physical and emotional health.
- Addressing the individual needs of your loved one. Unlike home health agencies that are only in the home for typically less than an hour a day to address a specific set of tasks (vital signs, wound care, medicine allocation), In-Home Care can be customized from as little as 3 hours per visit to everyday assistance.
- Reducing the risk of falls. Falls are the #1 cause of ER visits for seniors over 65. People are twice as likely to fall at home than anywhere else. Falls can happen while attempting simple household tasks such as carrying laundry. Caregivers can complete these tasks, helping prevent accidents.
- Keeping your loved one healthy. In-Home Care can ensure medication regimens are followed which is crucial as med errors frequently happen. Caregivers can also help seniors by preparing nutritious meals and maintaining a healthy and balanced diet, while encouraging physical activity (physical therapy exercises or simply encouraging a walk on a nice day).



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How to Choose a Professional Home Care Agency?

There are ten important steps to follow when searching for professional home care services:

1. Ask if the agency is licensed in your state with the applicable governmental agency.
2. Ask how long the agency has been in business. **WARNING**— certain agencies will say they have been in business for several years when, in reality, they may be part of a home care franchise whose franchiser has been in business that long—not the local franchise. Ask how long that specific operation has been serving your community. There are plenty of agencies in your area with well-established and favorable histories of being in business to choose from. It is best to choose an agency that has been in business in your community for at least 10 years.
3. Ask if the agency requires all caregivers to pass an extensive multi-year background check and drug screening before they are hired. Most agencies say they perform background checks but many don't require drug screening. The agency you choose should be doing an extensive multi-state, multi-year background check performed by a private company, and should also drug screen all new hires, along with random drug screenings during employment.
4. Ask if their caregivers are bonded. Some agencies say they are bonded and insured when in reality only the owners / managers / company are bonded.
5. Ask the agency if it directly employs its caregivers. **BEWARE**—if an agency does not directly employ their workers (such agencies are typically called placement agencies or registries), this means the caregivers are not covered by worker's compensation and other protective insurance, and you or your loved one is assuming substantial risk if the independent contractor injures themselves while on your property or steals valuables. Always require the agency to produce a current certificate of worker's compensation insurance and a crime/theft policy with a phone number for you to call and confirm these policies are in good standing. If your caregiver is not directly employed by



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the agency, then you or your loved one can be considered the employer and therefore responsible for employer forms, taxes, and employee taxes if the agency does not pay them, and you may be at a complete loss in the event of any theft or damage of property caused by the caregiver.

6. Review testimonials and reviews on the internet (such as google and yelp). Although it is not unheard of for a reputable agency to have a few poor reviews due to disgruntled clients or employees, there should be a strong amount of favorable/positive reviews by both clients and caregivers that have been recently posted.
7. If possible, make a personal visit to the agency's office. You'll be surprised at what you'll learn. Some agencies don't even have an office. When visiting the office of an agency, look at how well organized the office is. Does the office appear to be a vital place of business?
8. Ask about the agency's procedure for interviewing and hiring. Look for rigorous protocols and standards by which people are employed. How thorough is it?
9. Ask about the agency's protocol for supervising their employees while in your or your loved one's home. Who manages the case? What are his or her credentials? How frequently do they visit?
10. Consider how professionally the agency dealt with you. Did they ask you a series of questions regarding your specific needs before quoting you a price for services, or did they just quote you a price? If an agency quotes you a price for services before understanding your specific needs—be cautious! Be sure their paperwork was well organized and thoroughly explained to you. Get the cost for their services provided to you in writing before services are initiated.



What is the Cost of In-Home Care?

Although cost is always important, be very wary of low prices. Unlike milk or gasoline, good human resources are a rare commodity. If an agency is selling cheap services, be assured you will get what you pay for. For high-quality, well-supervised, and properly

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insured professional caregivers, expect to pay a minimum of \$23.00 to \$27.00 per hour for shift work.

Resources

www.HelpForAlzheimersFamilies.com

www.CaregiverStress.com

Home Care Services: www.HomeInstead.com

Home Care Solution Guide: <http://www.caregiverstress.com/home-care/planning/senior-care-resources-trust>

Funding Solutions guide: https://www.homeinstead.com/Documents/Funding_Solutions_Guide.pdf

Home Care Association of America: www.hcaoa.org

