

Intentional Communities for Aging in Place

Choosing a Home Care Provider

Because most intentional community founders have little personal or professional experience with the home care industry, they often look for guidance in selecting a home care provider. The following suggestions and criteria can help founders make the best possible choice for their communities.

Essential Service Components

1. Personal care (hands-on), homemaking, and companionship
2. Hourly and live-in options
3. End-of-life care
4. Capacity to fill short and long hours, from two to 24/7.

Customer Service Considerations

To find out what a provider means by “great customer service,” you need to ask very specific questions. Can the provider answer them without hesitation or qualification?

- *What if I don't like the person you send to the home? What if there's no real problem with the person, but I'm just not comfortable with him or her?*
- *What happens if the person I like leaves the agency or can't help me any longer?*
- *What if the person isn't doing what he or she is supposed to be doing?*
- *Can you fill requests on short notice?*
- *What if I call on a Friday or just before a holiday and need help right away?*
- *When a hospitalized member calls to request post-discharge services, will you visit him or her in the hospital on the same day to assess needs and make arrangements?*
- *Is your telephone always answered by a live person? Can we reach a knowledgeable supervisor 24/7?*

The Selection Process

1. Meet the management team face to face. Do you like them? Is there a rapport? Are they passionate about their business? Are they focused on you and your needs, or do they mainly talk about their company?
2. Conduct due diligence.
 - *Does the company provide all of the essential service components? (see above)*
 - *How long has the company been in business? Has it grown? Is in-home care the primary focus?*

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- *Does the company employ its associates (direct-service staff) or is it a placement agency?*
- *How many clients does the company serve?*
- *What is the company's capacity? How many active associates does the company employ? (To insure responsiveness, there should be approximately 1.3 associates per client).*
- *Does the company need to recruit or do associates seek it out as an employer of choice?*
- *Can the provider accept complex cases?*
- *Does the company have a nurse on staff or a close relationship with a private nursing agency?*
- *What are the limitations of the service? Are there cases the company will not take? Is there a minimum shift or minimum notice requirement?*

When conducting due diligence, listen closely to the language providers use. Do they say, "We will fill the case" or do they say, "We'll try our best, but of course it depends on who we have available"? Do they say, "We always replace the associate if a client isn't completely pleased" or do they say, "We'll try to find another match"?

General Advice

1. Focus on the quality of the essential home care services rather than the variety of services the provider offers. To deliver quality home care, the provider must have adequate volume and a home-care focused operations.
2. Make sure you clearly communicate to members what the home care provider can and cannot do. Avoid the temptation of over-promising.
3. Be willing to allow members to contact the home care provider directly when they want services, particularly when they are in the hospital and complex arrangements must be made to get the right services in place before discharge.