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Consumer Advisory Bulletin

How to Find Reputable In-Home Health Care and Service Plans

We all imagine living in our own homes for as long as we possibly can, but this often means finding extra help at home with health care or other services.

Many reputable agencies and businesses provide high-quality in-home services ranging from skilled nursing to preparing meals, helping with dressing and bathing, and providing services such as transportation, cleaning, laundry, home maintenance, and repairs.

Unfortunately, there are some unscrupulous operators as well. Some have taken a large fee in advance, but then failed to deliver any services. And some have obtained extensive personal and financial information that they used in other schemes.

Here are some ways to find reputable in-home health care and service plans:

- Contact your local Area Agency on Aging to assist you or direct you to the services you need. (Find the number locally, or call the Iowa Dept. of Elder Affairs at 515-242-3333, or 1-800-532-3213, or the National Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116.)
- Contact the Department of Human Services or your County Health Department for more information on in-home health care and other services.
- Before you sign a contract, make sure that the services are available when you need them. Don't rely on promises that staff will be hired in the future.
- Be cautious if a salesperson claims a health service is affiliated with or approved by Medicare or Social Security. You can check out this claim by calling the Iowa Dept. of Inspections and Appeals at 515-281-4115.
- Take time to consider your decision and shop around. Be very wary of high-pressure tactics urging you to make an immediate purchase. It may be very helpful to invite a friend or family member to be another listener during the sales "pitch" before you sign a contract.

There are many reputable in-home health care services available. However, if you believe you may have been cheated by a "scam," contact local authorities or write to the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, Hoover Building, Des Moines, IA 50319. The telephone number is 515-281-5926.

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