

# Care and Support

## Hiring private care services and tradespeople



If you plan to hire a private contractor for personal care, home support or home maintenance services, here are some suggestions you might like to consider.

### Personal care and home support

Personal care and home support services could include nursing, assistance with showering, dressing, shopping, cleaning and assistance with attending appointments and social activities. The questions below might be useful when choosing a service provider. Ask a friend or family member to be with you during the initial interview to provide support, if needed.

#### At the initial interview:

1. Are you being listened to? Are your questions being answered? Are you being pressured into accepting the service? Are you being treated with respect?
2. Are there any pamphlets or fact sheets, which tell you about the services provided by the agency?
3. Are the agency staff police checked or security checked?
4. Does the agency hold public liability insurance?
5. Who is assessing your needs? Are they qualified to do so?
6. Are the staff trained/qualified in the necessary skills to fulfil your needs?
7. Will the agency staff co-operate with other health professionals, i.e. doctor, nursing service, or medical specialists if necessary?
8. Does the agency offer pensioner or Seniors Card holder discount?
9. Is the agency prepared to provide a contract of service, and does that contract clearly indicate:
  - o Precisely which services you will receive and how often?
  - o How much time the agency sets aside for providing each service?
  - o What is the cost for each service? Are there hidden extras? Is there a set-up fee?
  - o Under what conditions can any cost increases be passed on to you?
  - o What opportunity do you have to seek variation or termination of services being offered if your needs or preferences change?
10. Can you select, within reason, the staff that will care for you, or will it be whoever is on the roster?
11. Who will have access to the keys to your house (if necessary), and where will the keys be kept?

#### When the service commences:

1. Ask to see agency staff members' identification.
2. Insist on itemised receipts that show the agency's name for all payments to the agency.
3. Make sure all valuables/money are out of sight.
4. Close the doors to all rooms the agency staff are not required to enter.

### Home maintenance/building services

Home maintenance services include gardening, plumbing, tiling, changing tap washers, changing light bulbs or cleaning gutters.

Home modifications commonly required when a person becomes frail or acquire a disability may include installation of ramps or handrails, widening of doorways, etc.

Check to see if your local council has a trade services register and/or ask family or friends to recommend agencies or tradespeople they have used.

Ask a friend or family member to be present when conducting business and when having work done if you feel uncomfortable about having a stranger in your home.

#### Licence and registration

Any person who carries out plumbing, electrical, gas fitting or building work must be licensed and/or registered. Building work includes painting and refurbishment, erecting carports, verandas, pergolas, garages, fencing and construction of swimming pools.

Ask to see their licence/registration as this will tell you what they are licensed to do. The licensing system is there to protect you from unsafe work and poor business practices.

If you are having gas or electrical work done, a licensed electrician or gas fitter is required to give you a Certificate of Compliance. This is your safeguard that the work has been carried out properly and checked to comply with Australian Standards and Codes.

If you do not receive a Certificate of Compliance, or the electrical or gas contractor refuses to issue one, contact the **Office of the Technical Regulator, tel. 8226 5500.**

The State Government **Consumer and Business Services'** website includes a search facility that allows you to find a licensed person by suburb or to check whether a person is licensed:

[www.cbs.sa.gov.au/occupational-licensing-and-registration/find-a-licence-holder/](http://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/occupational-licensing-and-registration/find-a-licence-holder/). The list includes builders, plumbers, gas fitters and electricians.

If the building work costs \$12,000 or more, the building contractor must provide a written contract.

Builders doing minor work may have their own terms and conditions and it is wise to read the terms carefully before agreeing to use the builder. Be careful about paying a large deposit before work commences, and be prepared to shop around.

Here are some tips for hiring tradespeople to do work around your home:

1. Make sure all valuables/money are out of sight if the tradesperson has to enter your home.
2. Obtain several detailed, itemised and legible quotes – a minimum of three for a large job. Ensure quotes contain a breakdown of costs for comparison with other quotes. Is there a charge for getting a quote? Does the quote include GST?
3. Is there a ‘call out fee’? - That is a set charge for just turning up on your doorstep.
4. Is there an ‘inspection fee’? There could be an hourly charge for determining the cause of the problem and what needs to be done to fix it.
5. Ask the tradesperson for references and check these out.
6. Does the tradesperson have public liability insurance?
7. Do the tradesperson and his/her staff have police clearances?
8. Ask about terms of payment. You should not have to pay until the work is completed. Do they offer pensioner or Seniors Card discount?
9. Will the licensed tradesperson supply a statement of compliance (builder) or certificate of compliance (plumber, gas fitter, electrician) on completion of the job?
10. After the work is completed make sure you get a detailed and signed receipt. It should show the business or company name. Keep the receipt for your records.

**Consumer and Business Services** publish *Building, extending & renovating a home – A consumer guide*. Printed copies can be obtained from the agency. It is also available online at: [www.cbs.sa.gov.au/assets/files/buildingextendingrenovatingahome.pdf](http://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/assets/files/buildingextendingrenovatingahome.pdf)

For further information on building and renovation issues contact the **Consumer and Business Services**, tel. 131 882.

See also the *Law Handbook*, published on line by the Legal Services Commission of South Australia, for further information on legal rights and obligations related to building works:

<https://lawhandbook.sa.gov.au/>

### What do I do if things go wrong?

If you are not satisfied or you feel you have been misled in relation to the services provided – by either personal care services or by tradespeople – you are entitled to make a complaint.

First try to resolve the issue by talking directly to the provider/contractor. Have relevant documents handy, such as quotes and receipts. Discuss solutions that will satisfy you.

If you are still not satisfied put your complaint in writing. Your letter should give the details of your complaint and ask for a written response within a reasonable timeframe. Keep the original letter and send a copy. Keep a record of events and note what is said in telephone calls. Give the contractor the opportunity to fix the problem.

If you are still not happy with the situation contact the Consumer and Business Services. They have a free information service and may be able to advise you on how you can negotiate with the provider. They also offer a dispute resolution or conciliation process.

For further advice about your consumer rights contact the **Consumer and Business Services**, tel. 131 882, [www.cbs.sa.gov.au](http://www.cbs.sa.gov.au)

### Other useful contacts

**Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service)**, tel. 8168 8776 can assist with finding organisations providing private services providers.

People who are receiving Commonwealth-funded home support and care services and are happy with the current provider may wish to check whether they can provide additional (private) services not included in the subsidised support plan.

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