



How to Choose a Hospice Agency

Selecting a hospice agency or company is one of the most important decisions you will make for yourself or a loved one. So how can you be sure you are choosing the right hospice provider?

When a patient is referred to hospice, they receive a list of local agencies to choose from. By law, every hospice program must offer the same basic services to patients and their families. Still, there are key differences between providers that may impact the quality of care you or your loved one receive.

As with any health care decision, it is important to be informed so you can make the best choice for yourself or your loved one. Here are the major factors to consider as you compare hospice agencies.

Medicare Certification

Hospice care is fully-covered for eligible Medicare recipients under [the Hospice benefit](#) – as long as the agency is certified by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Certification is a sign that the agency meets certain state and federal requirements for quality patient care. Most hospice providers are Medicare-certified, but it is still worth asking. Otherwise, you may end up with the bill.

Questions to Ask:

- Is your agency certified by CMS?
- How long have you been certified by CMS?

Accreditation

While a hospice agency or company does not need to be accredited to provide services, it can be a strong indication of their commitment to quality care.

Questions to Ask:

- Is your agency nationally accredited? By whom and for how long?
- What are the accreditation requirements?

Reputation & History

A strong reputation and history in the community can be important factors when choosing a hospice provider. A personal recommendation from a friend, family member, or healthcare provider is a good place to start.

Questions to Ask:

- How long have you been in business?
- How many patients do you serve each year?
- Are you inspected by an outside organization? If so, when was the last inspection?
- Are there families or healthcare professionals who recommend your agency?

24/7 Availability

It is important to choose a hospice provider that is ready and willing to care for you or your loved one 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. That means nights, weekends, and holidays, too.



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Questions to Ask:

- Is someone on call 24/7/365?
- What is your average response time?

Quality Scores

Medicare-certified hospice providers are required to report information about the quality of their care to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. CMS measures this data using a five-star quality rating system that measures the experience of patients and their families. You can look up and compare Star Ratings for hospice agencies in your area using the [Hospice Compare tool](#).

Questions to Ask:

- How do you measure quality?
- How do your quality scores compare to the state and national average?

Staff Credentials & Training

Your hospice team should include professionals with the appropriate licenses and certifications. Because the agency's staff will care for you in your own home, you should also ask how they screen their employees.

Questions to Ask:

- Does each care team member have the appropriate licenses and certifications?
- How do you screen your employees? Are they required to pass a background check and drug screening?

Speedy Admission Process

Some providers can admit patients and begin hospice care within a few hours – even at night or on the weekend. Finding a hospice that can start the admission process quickly ensures your loved one gets the care they need sooner rather than later.

Questions to Ask:

- How long does it take to start hospice services?
- What is the admissions process like?
- How often can I expect the hospice team to visit?

Family & Caregiver Services

Family caregivers are the primary source of support when a loved one is on hospice care. Some hospice agencies train caregivers and even offer respite care to give family caregivers a much-needed break.

Questions to Ask:

- What are family caregivers expected to do?
- Do you provide training and support for family caregivers?
- Do you provide respite care? How is that arranged?



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Bereavement Support

Grief support can vary significantly from one hospice provider to another. Some offer only basic services, while others provide education, counseling, remembrance events, and support groups.

Questions to Ask:

- What kind of bereavement support do you provide?
- Do these services continue even after my loved one passes on?

These are just a few factors that differentiate one hospice from another. Take the time to talk with a few providers and make an informed choice, ideally before your loved one is in crisis, so you get the services and support you need.

Find out if Intrepid USA Hospice at Home is right for you. Contact us today at (888) 800-5311 or by filling out [our Contact Form here](#).