

Factsheet 42

Disability equipment and home adaptations

March 2023

About this factsheet

This factsheet covers the help you can get from the local authority to manage your daily life at home by the provision of disability equipment and home adaptations.

It can be read in conjunction with other Age UK factsheets and information guides including:

- factsheet 46 *Paying for care and support at home*
- factsheet 41 *How to get care and support*
- factsheet 67 *Home improvements and repairs*, and
- information guide 17 *Adapting your home*.

The information in this factsheet is applicable in England. If you are in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, please contact Age Scotland, Age Cymru or Age NI. Contact details can be found at the back of this factsheet.

Contact details for any organisation mentioned in this factsheet can be found in the *Useful organisations* section.

Note: Landlines are currently switching to a new digital system which may affect the telecare devices and personal alarms described in this factsheet. This will be completed by the end of 2025. Your telephone service provider should contact you with further information.

Contents

1 The law and terms used in this factsheet	4
2 Disability equipment and adaptations from the local authority	5
2.1 Assessment	5
2.2 Free disability equipment and minor adaptations	7
2.3 Reablement and prevention	7
2.4 Equipment to meet health-related needs	7
2.5 Disability equipment prescriptions	8
2.6 Disability equipment in care homes	9
2.7 Moving to another area	9
3 Major home adaptations	10
3.1 Disabled Facilities Grant	10
3.2 The eligibility criteria	10
3.3 What types of works may be covered?	10
3.4 Applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant	11
3.5 The means test	13
3.6 Discretionary assistance	14
3.7 Property charge	14
3.8 Problems and complaints	15
3.9 Home improvement agencies (HIA)	16
4 Community alarms and assistive technology	16
5 Equipment for employment	20
6 Wheelchairs	20
7 Buying and borrowing equipment	23
7.1 Private companies and shops	23
7.2 Independent Living Centres	23
7.3 VAT relief on disability equipment	24
7.4 Things to consider when choosing equipment	24

7.5 Short-term loan of equipment such as wheelchairs	26
8 Other sources of funding	26
8.1 Disability benefits	26
8.2 Local Welfare Assistance	27
8.3 Charities and other sources	27
9 Concerns about doorstep selling	27
10 Problems with equipment and complaints	28
11 Fire Service home safety checks	29
12 Information, advice and advocacy	29
Useful organisations	31
Age UK	35
Support our work	35

1 The law and terms used in this factsheet

The information about social care in this factsheet is based on the *Care Act 2014* ('the Act') brought into force in April 2015.

The *Care and Support (Charging and Assessment of Resources) Regulations 2014* ('the charging regulations'), the *Care and Support (Eligibility Criteria) Regulations 2015* ('the eligibility regulations') and the *Care and Support Statutory Guidance* ('the guidance') are the main evidence sources. Information about Disabled Facilities Grants is based on the *Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996* and *Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) delivery: Guidance for local authorities in England*.

We use 'local authority' to refer to the adult social services department of the local authority or council. It is used to describe similar departments within: a county council, a district council for an area in which there is no county council, a London borough council, or the Common Council of the City of London.

There are various names for specially designed equipment that assists disabled people to manage daily living tasks more independently and safely. In the charging regulations, they are called 'community equipment' or 'aids', but we use 'disability equipment'. Disability equipment is usually removable or portable, whereas home adaptations are attached to a property and permanently change its fabric.

2 Disability equipment and adaptations from the local authority

2.1 Assessment

If you think you need disability equipment or adaptations to help you manage more safely and easily around your home, contact the local authority and ask for a **needs assessment**. They must assess you if it appears you may have needs for care and support. The assessment is used to work out whether your needs meet the eligibility criteria for care and support (*'eligible needs'*). If you are found to have eligible needs, the local authority has a duty to ensure they are met. Providing disability equipment or adaptations may be a way of meeting your eligible needs.

Eligibility requires having difficulty in achieving at least two *'outcomes'* from a list in the eligibility regulations, resulting in a *'significant impact'* on your wellbeing. The meaning of wellbeing is defined in the Act and includes things like *'control by [you] over day-to-day life'* and *'suitability of living accommodation'*.

Outcomes include: managing and maintaining nutrition; maintaining personal hygiene; managing toilet needs; being able to make use of your home safely; and maintaining a habitable home environment.

The local authority must ensure the needs assessment is carried out by staff with the skills, knowledge, and competence to understand your particular needs. An occupational therapist (OT) may need to be involved if you have a need for disability equipment or adaptations. The assessment may lead to other services being provided, such as domiciliary care services i.e. care at home.

Your needs should be agreed and set down in your care and support plan, which must include a personal budget figure showing the overall cost of meeting your needs. The support needs of your carer can be assessed if you have one. Disability equipment and adaptations can often assist their caring role and may be provided by health professionals such as physiotherapists and nurses, as well as OTs.

For more information about assessments and the duty to meet needs, see factsheet 41, *How to get care and support*.

Examples of disability equipment and adaptations

There is a wide range of disability equipment and adaptations including:

- **hygiene maintenance:** grab rail, bath board, electric bath lift, lever tap extension, wheeled shower chair/commode
- **toileting:** raised toilet seat, toilet frame, grab rail, and commode
- **food preparation:** adapted kitchen utensils
- **beds:** bed raisers to increase height, bed rails, machines to help you sit up, slide sheets to help you move position with assistance
- **chairs:** riser/recliner chair and chair raisers
- **pressure care:** various pressure relieving cushions
- **transfers:** mobile electric hoist with various slings and slide sheets
- **mobility:** standing/turning frame for use with assistance and various walking frames with or without wheels
- **access:** portable, or fixed concrete wheelchair ramp and outdoor rails.

DLF provide free information on disability equipment and adaptations.

Problems and delays

There can be long waiting times for an OT assessment. There is no time-limit to provide disability equipment or adaptations but you should not have to wait longer than is reasonable. Excessive delays can be challenged and high-risk needs should be assessed promptly.

If there is a delay in providing equipment or adaptations, the local authority still has a duty to meet eligible needs in the meantime. For example, if there is delay providing adaptations to help you use the bath or shower, that might mean the local authority must temporarily arrange a care service to help you with washing.

2.2 Free disability equipment and minor adaptations

Local authorities have a general power under the Act to charge for services they provide to meet needs. However, they cannot charge for a service consisting of the provision of disability equipment or minor adaptations that assist with nursing at home or aid daily living.

A minor home adaptation is defined in the charging regulations as one costing £1,000 or less. These are often related to mobility and falls prevention, for example: a short concrete ramp or shallow steps, a grab rail or longer external metal handrail, automatic lighting at the front access, or a door-release intercom system.

See section 3.1 for information about help with the cost of major home adaptations.

2.3 Reablement and prevention

Short-term rehabilitation provided by the local authority should be provided free of charge for up to six weeks. Known as intermediate care or reablement, it can be recommended to meet your assessed eligible needs, or as a preventive service.

Local authorities have a duty to provide services to prevent, reduce, and delay needs. The guidance notes that disability equipment, telecare and home adaptations can support reablement and promote independence that contributes to preventing care and support needs.

For further information, see factsheet 76, *Intermediate care and reablement*.

2.4 Equipment to meet health-related needs

In each locality, disability equipment stores are jointly funded and run by the NHS and local authority. Equipment is loaned to you. Some items of equipment, such as commodes or walking aids, can meet both health and social care needs. Your GP, district nurse, or community physiotherapist can ask for these items to meet your needs. Other professionals such as a local falls prevention service may be trained and able to recommend certain equipment from the store.

Sensory impairment – hearing and sight

If you have hearing problems and might benefit from a hearing aid, ask your GP to refer you for a hearing test. The NHS issues hearing aids on free loans.

Low vision aids may be able to help with particular sight problems. You usually find low vision services in hospital eye departments. They can give you magnifiers and other low vision aids on loan. The local authority may provide support services or employ specialist social workers to help if you have sight or hearing loss.

NHS charges

NHS services are generally free. However, some items such as wigs or fabric supports (including spinal or abdominal supports) may be issued on an NHS prescription with charges.

If you receive Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, you do not have to pay for such items. If you are on a low income, you may qualify for help with charges under the NHS Low Income Scheme. For more information, see factsheet 61, *Help with health costs*.

2.5 Disability equipment prescriptions

The local authority may run a scheme where simple pieces of equipment are provided by a prescription. This runs alongside the traditional equipment loan described in section 2.4.

The key difference is if the needs assessment identifies a need for equipment, you are given a written prescription that lets you to buy the equipment from an accredited local retailer. You own the equipment. You can buy higher cost equipment provided it meets your identified needs and you must pay the difference.

A local authority offering this choice usually publishes a full list of the types of simple equipment available with prices, which informs the amount in your prescription. These include: raised toilet seats, toilet frames, bath boards, easy-reach grabbers, trolleys, perching stools, adapted cutlery, bed levers, back-rests, and walking frames. Home delivery and fitting are funded in your prescription if they are part of your identified needs, for example if you have no one to help you.

Complex equipment

Complex equipment requiring regular servicing and maintenance, such as mobile hoists and electric beds, are always delivered and fitted. They are loaned to you with the local authority retaining responsibility for them. You cannot get a prescription for this type of equipment. A one-off, bespoke, piece of equipment can also be loaned to you.

2.6 Disability equipment in care homes

If you live in a care home, you are entitled to local authority services in the same way as anyone else. If you need disability equipment beyond what your care home has a legal duty to provide, this can be provided by the local authority. Request an assessment from the local authority who can assess and recommend what you need.

It can also be provided by a local health professional such as a nurse or GP. An example is a riser/recliner chair with spinal supports and a belt if you have scoliosis or a neurological condition seriously affecting your seating posture and positioning.

2.7 Moving to another area

If you have been provided with disability equipment and subsequently move to another local authority area, the guidance states it should move with you if you want this to happen and it is the most cost-effective solution. Consideration should be given to any contract for maintenance of the equipment and whether it is due to be replaced.

As adaptations are fitted based on your accommodation, it may be more practicable for the receiving authority to organise the installation of any new adaptations. For example, walls need to be checked for the correct fixing of rails.

If you have a piece of equipment on long-term loan from the NHS, the receiving local authority should discuss this with the relevant NHS body. They are jointly responsible for ensuring you have adequate equipment when you move. See section 13 of factsheet 41, *How to get care and support* for more information about local authority duties when you move.

3 Major home adaptations

3.1 Disabled Facilities Grant

You may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) in certain circumstances to adapt your home. They are means-tested, so your income and savings are taken into account. The local authority must make a decision no later than six months after the date of your application. See section 3.8 for information about the timescales and complaining if there is a delay.

The maximum mandatory DFG in England is £30,000, although there is discretion for higher amounts to be paid.

3.2 The eligibility criteria

A DFG is a mandatory grant, meaning it must be paid by the local authority if you satisfy the qualifying criteria.

The basic criterion you must meet is the disability description within the *Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996*.

You are treated as disabled if one or more of the following apply to you:

- your sight, hearing, or speech is substantially impaired
- you have a mental disorder or impairment of any kind
- you are physically substantially disabled by illness, injury, impairment present since birth, or otherwise, or
- you are registered as being sight impaired by the local authority, or you are, or could be, registered with the local authority in other circumstances, due to a disability or impairment, for example.

3.3 What types of works may be covered?

The following types of adaptations may be funded by a DFG:

- **Access:** door widening, removing a door threshold, long wheelchair ramp, external wheelchair lift, or provision of a new room if access is not possible.
- **Moving around and between floors:** stairlift or through-floor wheelchair lift, ensuring sufficient turn-circle for a wheelchair user.

- **Washing:** level access or wet-room wheelchair accessible shower, or one with a seat; wheelchair accessible wash basin and wider bathroom.
- **Toileting:** hands-free automatic toilet.
- **Eating/food preparation:** wheelchair accessible kitchen facilities.
- **Transfers:** ceiling attached electric hoist.
- **Controls:** adapting heating or lighting controls to make them easier for you to use e.g. for poor grip strength.
- **Heating:** improving the heating system in your home to make it suitable for your needs, for example if it directly affects your medical condition.
- **Garden:** improving access to a garden by making it easier or safer.

Note

A DFG can potentially be provided to adapt common parts within a building containing one or more flats to meet your individual needs.

However, general safety and usage issues for other residents must be considered before this can take place.

3.4 Applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant

You can approach either the housing department or the social services department to apply for a DFG. The formal application must be made to the housing department, but in many cases, you may be advised to approach the social services department first. You can ask a local Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to assist with your application.

The housing department is responsible for deciding if you get a DFG. They consult the social services department to decide if the proposed adaptations are '**necessary and appropriate**'. This normally means you are visited by an OT, who assesses you and makes recommendations on what needs to be done.

The housing department must also be satisfied the works are '**reasonable and practicable**', in relation to things such as the age and condition of your property. The assessment is usually carried out by an environmental health officer, a building surveyor, or someone from a HIA jointly with the OT who carried out your needs assessment.

Who can apply?

You can apply for a DFG whether you are a homeowner or a tenant of the property. Certain licensees or occupiers of houseboats or park homes can also apply. You do not have to be the disabled person for whom the works are required. For example, a landlord can apply to have their property adapted for a disabled tenant.

The applicant must sign a certificate stating the disabled occupant will live in the property for at least five years after the works are completed or for a shorter period if there are health or other special reasons. This may be difficult for private tenants with assured-short-hold tenancies, which give security of tenure for only the first six months of a tenancy. For more information about DFG's and private and social tenancies, see section 1.1.1 of factsheet 67, *Home improvements and repairs*.

Tenants of the local authority or registered social housing providers are eligible to apply for a DFG and are assessed based on their needs in the same way as private tenants and owner-occupiers. The local authority or housing association decide whether to carry out the work using its own resources for capital works or to refer for a DFG.

You may need more home adaptations over a period of time. You can make successive applications for DFG's, as your needs change.

Note

You will not normally get a DFG if you start work on your property before the local authority approves your application.

3.5 The means test

The DFG is means tested in all cases, unless the application is made by a landlord on behalf of a disabled tenant.

In the financial assessment, your income and savings are taken into account as well as your partner's if you have one. If you are a single disabled person living with an adult child, it is only your income and not theirs that is included.

Your capital is taken into account, together with your partner's if you have one. Certain capital is disregarded, for example your own property. The first £6,000 of your capital is ignored. If you are under 60, you are assumed to have income of £1 a week for every £250 you have over £6,000. If you are over 60, you are assumed to have £1 a week for every £500 over £6,000.

Your income is worked out as an average over the past 12 months, or a shorter period if this improves accuracy. There are certain earnings and income disregards.

An **applicable amount** is calculated based on your weekly living needs and those of your family, with a housing allowance of £61.30 a week. If your income is less than, or equal to, the applicable amount, you are not normally expected to contribute to the costs of the works.

A '*loan generation factor*' calculation is applied to any income exceeding the applicable amount to work out your contribution. The amount of grant you receive is the cost of the works less your contribution. If your contribution exceeds the cost of the work, you are not entitled to a grant.

If you receive the following benefits, you do not normally have to make a contribution:

- Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- Income Support
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit with gross taxable income of less than £15,050

- Universal Credit.

A step-by-step guide on working out your contribution is in the *Disability Rights Handbook*, published by Disability Rights UK, or contact the local authority, a local Age UK, or HIA to get further information.

Foundations, the national body for HIAs, provides a DFG eligibility self-assessment tool, including a calculator to work out how much you may need to contribute to a DFG.

See www.foundations.uk.com/how-we-help/adapt-my-home/

3.6 Discretionary assistance

Local authorities have powers to give discretionary assistance for adaptations or to help you move to alternative accommodation. There is no restriction on the amount of assistance that may be given. It may be paid in addition, or as an alternative, to the DFG.

Discretionary assistance may be given to:

- provide small adaptations not covered by the DFG or to provide urgent adaptations more quickly
- top-up the DFG because the work is particularly expensive, you cannot afford the contribution, or some work required is not eligible for a DFG
- assist you to move to a more suitable property, if this is more cost effective than adapting your current home, even though the new property may also need some adaptations.

3.7 Property charge

A local authority has discretion to impose a maximum charge of £10,000 on an owner-occupied property adapted using a DFG. It must be paid back if it is sold within 10 years of the work taking place. The charge is placed on the Land Registry.

It only applies to DFG costs exceeding £5,000. If the DFG cost is £6,000 for example, the local authority can put a £1,000 charge on. If the cost is £10,000, they can put a £5,000 charge on. A charge should only be imposed or repaid after taking into account all your individual circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

3.8 Problems and complaints

There can be lengthy delays in the DFG process, often because of a long waiting list for assessment by an occupational therapist. As you have rights to assistance, you should not have to wait an unreasonable amount of time. The law says the local authority must make a decision about your application '*as soon as reasonably practicable*' and no later than six months after the date the application was made.

The decision must be in writing and specify the eligible DFG works and the amount to be paid. If the local authority decides you are eligible, the grant can be paid on completion of the works or in instalments as they progress. If you are eligible, they cannot refuse to pay on the grounds it has not got enough money. If your application is refused, you must be told why.

The local authority can delay payment of the grant, but this must not be more than 12 months after the date your application was made.

The works should usually be completed within 12 months of the date your application was approved or, if the local authority delayed payment of the grant, within 12 months of the payments being started. However, the local authority may have grounds to delay completion of the works if, for example, more work is required than was reasonably foreseeable at the time of your application.

The above timescales are the maximum time you should have to wait from the date of the application to the works being completed. The local authority should take into account your individual needs and circumstances and decide if it is appropriate for you to wait for the maximum periods.

If you do not get a decision about your application within six months, make a formal complaint, using the formal complaints procedure of the local authority. If you still do not get a decision, complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, or consider a judicial review. You need legal advice if you want to pursue a judicial review.

For more information see factsheet 43, *Getting legal and financial advice*.

3.9 Home improvement agencies (HIA)

Home improvement agencies (HIAs), sometimes called *Care & Repair* or *Staying Put*, are not-for-profit organisations run by local authorities, housing associations, and charities. They support older and disabled people to enable them to remain in their own homes and live independently for longer.

HIAs provide different services, including advice on improving the condition and energy efficiency of your home, housing options, benefits and financial advice, and help with applying for grants and loans.

HIAs can identify reputable local contractors and oversee works for you. Many run their own handyman services, carrying out small home improvement works such as gardening, minor repairs and adaptations, safety and security checks, and energy efficiency measures.

Even if you can afford to pay for the work yourself, you can take a lot of the worry out of organising it by using an agency service. To find out if there is one in your area, contact:

- your local Age UK
- the local authority housing department, or
- Foundations – the national co-ordinating body for HIAs.

You can find your nearest HIA at www.findmyhia.org.uk

4 Community alarms and assistive technology

Community alarms

Community alarm systems allow you to be linked up 24 hours a day to a central service offering help in an emergency. The link is usually by telephone, pull cord, pendant worn round your neck, or a combination of these.

If you need to summon help urgently and are unable to make a normal telephone call, you can use the pendant, pull the cord, or use a special button on the telephone to contact a control centre. This centre has people who talk to you, find out what you need and summon help as appropriate.

In an emergency, the alarm operator gets in touch with people you have agreed should be contacted in such circumstances, such as neighbours or relatives living nearby. They have a set of keys to your home. The alarm operator also contacts the appropriate emergency service.

The local authority may provide an alarm service. Each one has different rules about who they supply, how they run the service and how much they charge. Contact the local authority or local Age UK for details about local schemes. The DLF website features information about various alarm systems, including community alarms.

Telecare

Telecare allows remote monitoring and communication if you are isolated in your own home to help you manage risk and to promote independent living and wellbeing. This can be for short or longer periods of time during a day. GPS-type equipment has been developed to monitor you outside of your own home in the local area.

Telecare covers a wide range of equipment (detectors, monitors, alarms, pendants etc) and services (monitoring, call centres and response teams, who may work alongside emergency services). Items include: a fall detector, epilepsy sensor, chair and occupancy sensor, flood detector, gas leak valve shut-off sensor, and a property exit sensor.

There are three types of telecare systems, parts of which may be used together:

1) **Systems that help predict problems:** These systems depend on software that takes signals from sensors and analyses the frequency and severity of monitored events, such as minor falls and alerts carers to visit you to find out what has changed.

2) **Systems that reduce the chance of problems**

occurring: For example, a bed sensor can help prevent falls by activating a light when you get out of bed. This helps because you do not need to reach for the light switch or move around in the dark.

3) **Systems that reduce risks:** Devices such as pendant alarms, heat sensors, smoke detectors, or bed sensors send alerts to a call centre after a pre-determined event so help can arrive quickly. The bed sensor, for example, raises an alarm if you do not return to bed within a predetermined time. An alternative approach is the Alertacall Safety Confirmation system where an alert is raised if you fail to press a button by a certain time each day to confirm you are OK.

Telehealth

Telehealth is the remote monitoring of your vital signs in chronic condition management e.g. blood pressure, glucose level, and heart and lung function. For example, the correct daily dose of tablets can be pre-set and monitored. It can assist with diagnosis, review assessment, and prevention.

This must be in conjunction with suitably qualified clinicians as part of an agreed healthcare pathway. The aims of Telehealth include improving your quality of life such as wellbeing, increased safety, and independence. It aims to reduce unplanned hospital admissions and emergency ambulance call outs, reduce pressure on GPs and nurses, help manage long-term conditions, improve carer's quality of life, and reduce public costs.

It is important to remember that technology cannot be a substitute for human interaction and support. It should never be inappropriately used as a replacement for this.

Environmental Control Systems

Environmental Control Systems help maintain and improve your independence and security if you have a severe physical disability and poor manual dexterity. The ability to control everyday equipment such as the phone, TV and lighting is provided via a central control unit and a single switch. It can be used to control access into the home and summon emergency help.

A wide variety of switches are used to operate the systems including those controlled by hand, head, or chin. The switch initiates a scanning process of displayed functions until the desired function is reached when it is again operated. Switches and the control unit can be mounted in a convenient position, usually on a wheelchair or bed.

To obtain this equipment, you are assessed at home by a specialist Occupational Therapist (OT) at a local Environmental Control System service, sometimes called an Assistive Technology service. The local OT department can advise you how to get this service.

Referrals to the specialist OT are normally received from Social Services or Health OTs working in the community. Referrals may be received from other professionals, family, or carers following discussion with the Environmental Control System service.

The equipment is carefully tailored for you, taking into account your goals. Following installation of a system, an engineer provides training in its use. Maintenance and regular servicing are provided by the assistive technology provider. Reviews, on-going support, and advice by the OT is provided to you, your carers, and healthcare professionals.

Environmental Control Systems are provided by the NHS on a long-term loan basis. There is no charge for standard equipment. Arrangements are put in place for maintenance and emergency response.

If you buy new appliances such as a television or music system, you should contact the Environmental Control System provider, who can arrange a visit to programme them into the system.

The Environmental Control System service does not fund the following:

- additional phone lines
- additional power sockets
- window, curtain and door operators
- door locks
- electrical or carpentry work.

Contact the local OT service to ask about the funding these items.

5 Equipment for employment

The *Access to Work* scheme can fund equipment you need for work. You can apply for a grant if you have a disability or physical or mental health condition that makes it difficult for you to work or get to work. The money you get can pay for things like:

- specialist equipment
- travel if you cannot use public transport
- a support worker or job coach to help you at work
- a communicator at a job interview.

Contact your local Jobcentre Plus for advice and assistance. There is further information at www.gov.uk/access-to-work

6 Wheelchairs

If you have long-term mobility problems, using a wheelchair can help you maintain your independence and get out into the local community. A GP, hospital consultant, or social services staff can refer you to the local NHS wheelchair centre for an assessment of your medical and lifestyle needs. If you are eligible, they help you to choose a suitable chair. Each centre has its own eligibility criteria.

The NHS provides wheelchairs on a free, long-term loan. They are either self-propelled with large rear wheels, attendant propelled, or electrically powered with various control designs. They can give you an electrically powered wheelchair suitable for indoor and outdoor use, if you are assessed as needing one. This means if you need an electric wheelchair indoors, the model provided may also allow some outdoor use.

Any wheelchair provided to you is lent for as long as required. The NHS pay for and arrange servicing and repairs.

The wheelchair voucher scheme

You may be offered wheelchair vouchers if assessed as needing a manual wheelchair, if the wheelchair department runs a voucher scheme. The voucher is worth the value of a standard chair and can be put towards buying a more expensive wheelchair. You may not be able to use the voucher scheme to get a powered wheelchair.

Standard option: You are provided with a wheelchair that is supplied, repaired and maintained free of charge.

Partnership option: You choose an alternative to the type of wheelchair you are assessed as needing. The voucher reflects the value of the wheelchair originally recommended and you pay the difference in cost. This lets you buy a higher standard wheelchair. The wheelchair is repaired and maintained free of charge. You must use an approved supplier who must meet certain standards including quality of service.

Independent option: This is similar to the partnership option, but you own the wheelchair and are responsible for its repair and maintenance. Your voucher includes an amount towards repair and maintenance costs.

Other things to know: The voucher period is generally five years and you are not normally entitled to a new voucher until it has expired. However, if your needs change so the wheelchair you bought becomes unsuitable, you are eligible for a reassessment of your needs.

You cannot exchange the voucher for cash and if you buy a wheelchair privately from a commercial company or individual, you cannot claim the money back from the NHS Wheelchair Service.

The voucher is non-taxable and does not affect any disability benefits.

Personal wheelchair budgets

The NHS may offer you the choice of a personal wheelchair budget. You are allocated a budget, made up of the cost of meeting your needs via local wheelchair services. You can use the budget to buy a wheelchair from the NHS, or from an independent provider, with the option of topping up the amount for a more expensive chair. Staff may give you the option of having the budget paid to you as a direct payment, allowing you to make your own arrangements to buy a wheelchair.

Motability scheme

If you receive high rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance, enhanced rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment, or War Pensioner's Mobility Supplement and you need an **electric wheelchair, scooter or a car**, you can use the Motability scheme to pay for it. Contact Motability for more information.

Outdoor electric scooters and buggies

The NHS and social services do not directly provide outdoor electric mobility scooters or buggies. It is important to trial this type of equipment before use. A reputable company should belong to a trade association guaranteeing a good level of customer service, assessment, and commitment to safe practices. You must be aware of government regulations for scooter use on the pavement or road. Storage, charging, and maintenance are also important to consider. DLF can provide further information.

Charitable funding

It may be possible to get charitable help to buy a wheelchair. Discuss this with staff at the local wheelchair department who should have information on funding bodies and may help to make an application. You might find a charity through the Turn2Us website at www.turn2us.org.uk

If you need a wheelchair temporarily, you may be able to hire or borrow one from the British Red Cross or another voluntary organisation.

7 Buying and borrowing equipment

7.1 Private companies and shops

Private companies selling disability equipment have websites, mail order catalogues, shops or showrooms. Some large high street chemists stock small items of daily living equipment or have mail order catalogues.

Different specialist equipment is available to buy to help with: mobility; eating, drinking; cooking and preparing food; dressing, grooming; bathing, showering and using the toilet; and hobbies and interests.

The DLF AskSARA website has a free online, guided self-assessment tool, with links to product suggestions and useful help and advice. See <https://livingmadeeasy.org.uk>

The local authority may use this tool to help you assess your own needs for basic pieces of equipment. They must always ensure this is an appropriate and accurate way to assess your needs.

If you have any concerns, ask to be assessed face-to-face and given information and advice. Some equipment needs training for safe use, such as hoists, so seek advice if you are unsure how to proceed.

See section 2.5 for information about local authority prescriptions for the purchase of disability equipment, which may offer an alternative solution.

7.2 Independent Living Centres

There is a network of Independent Living Centres (ILC) around the country. You can try disability equipment and get advice from an occupational therapist or other suitably skilled professional.

It can be difficult to know if a piece of equipment or a planned adaptation is safe or suitable without trying it out, for example manoeuvring a wheelchair in a small space. A trip to an ILC can help you understand the reality of using equipment prior to purchase and how your carer may cope if you have one. Ask your local authority about a local ILC.

7.3 VAT relief on disability equipment

Disabled people do not have to pay Value Added Tax (VAT) when buying equipment designed or adapted to help with daily living. To qualify, the equipment must be intended for use by a disabled person and must relate to their disability.

There is also no VAT payable on the costs of servicing or maintaining disability equipment. Ask whether you can receive a VAT exemption before buying or ordering equipment. The supplier needs to be VAT-registered and you need to sign a form declaring you have a chronic illness or disability. If you are unable to sign, a GP or other responsible person can sign on your behalf.

Certain building works and other goods and services qualify for the VAT exemption. For information see the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) leaflet 701/7, *VAT reliefs for people with disabilities*. Copies of the leaflet and further advice is available from HMRC on 0300 123 1073.

Five per cent VAT rating for mobility aids for older people

People aged 60 or over can get mobility aids for their home at a reduced rate of five per cent VAT. This can cover the supply and installation of grab rails, ramps, stair lifts, bath lifts, built-in shower seats, or showers containing built-in shower seats and walk-in baths with sealable doors.

If you have been wrongly charged VAT because you meet the exemption requirement, contact your equipment supplier and ask for a refund. The reduced rate does not apply if goods are supplied without installation.

7.4 Things to consider when choosing equipment

OTs or physiotherapists from a hospital, local authority social services department, or an ILC can advise you on equipment suitable for your needs. Think about the following points if buying equipment for yourself:

- Make sure products comply with the British Standards. Equipment that has been tested and approved by the British Standards Institution (BSI) is marked with the BSI Kitemark.

- Check how comfortable the equipment is and that it is easy for you to use. Where possible, try it out beforehand. If buying expensive equipment to help with bathing or toileting, ask for a trial in your own home to try it out properly. Make sure it can be used in the environment in which you want to use it.
- Make sure equipment is in good condition and is suitable for the task you require it for. Check it is easy to use, with or without help, and that appropriate and clear instructions for use or training in use are provided.
- If you need to transport the equipment, for example a wheelchair or other walking aid, consider how easy this will be. Does it fold up or come apart? Is it easy to do this? Will it fit in your car? Consider whether there is enough space to store it in your home.
- Think about repair and maintenance of the equipment. Is it possible to find spare parts and someone to repair the equipment if necessary?
- Does the equipment need to be serviced regularly and if so, how much does this cost? What sort of after-sales service does the company provide? Does the equipment come with a guarantee?
- Check the company policy on returning equipment if you no longer need it, for example your needs change or you move to a care home. Some companies have a buy-back guarantee scheme but check the details about how much money you receive if you return the item.
- Consider getting insurance to cover accidents and breakdown repairs for larger items such as electric scooters or power chairs.

Note

Always seek independent or professional advice when choosing disability equipment, particularly if it is a large or expensive item.

7.5 Short-term loan of equipment such as wheelchairs

Your local Red Cross can often loan wheelchairs and other equipment for short periods, for example for the visit of a relative or a temporary injury. They should be listed in the local telephone directory under British Red Cross or see the Red Cross website at www.redcross.org.uk

Your local Age UK can sometimes loan wheelchairs. They should be listed in your local telephone directory or call Age UK Advice.

Shopmobility schemes lend or hire out manual and powered wheelchairs and powered scooters if you need them to shop and use other facilities in town centres. There are schemes throughout the UK: some are free and some make a charge.

You can search for local schemes local schemes on the Shopmobility website at www.shopmobilityuk.org

An ILC may be able to give you information about local wheelchair hire services or Shopmobility schemes (see section 7.3).

8 Other sources of funding

If buying equipment privately, you may be able to get help with the cost from other sources of funding.

8.1 Disability benefits

If you are disabled and over State Pension age, you may be entitled to Attendance Allowance (AA). If you are under State Pension age, you may be able to claim Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

These benefits are to help meet the extra cost of living expenses related to your disability or impairment. Although they are paid for care needs (and mobility needs with PIP), you are free to spend your award anyway that you wish. Note however that saving up these benefits to pay for equipment or adaptations may have an impact on other benefits claimed like Pension Credit.

For more details, see factsheet 34, *Attendance Allowance* and factsheet 87, *Personal Independence Payment and Disability Living Allowance*.

8.2 Local Welfare Assistance

A Local Welfare Assistance scheme can help if you are in urgent need following an emergency or unforeseen event and have no other source of help. They are run by the local authority, they vary in what they offer, and some areas no longer have schemes.

You may be able to get vouchers to pay for food, fuel, or clothing, or bigger basic living items such as beds, cookers, and fridges. You may also be able to access a grant or a loan. For more information, see factsheet 49, *Social Fund, Advances of Benefit and Local Welfare Provision*.

8.3 Charities and other sources

You may be able to get financial help to buy mobility and disability-related equipment from charitable organisations.

It is best to first find out if this should or could be provided by the local authority, the NHS, or another statutory organisation. Charities do not generally provide funding unless these options have been fully investigated. Your occupational therapist may be able to help you apply for funding.

Two examples are SSAFA, and the RAF Benevolent Fund, which support those who have served in the forces. The Turn2Us website can help find funding bodies at www.turn2us.org.uk

9 Concerns about doorstep selling

Concerns about inappropriate, high pressure, doorstep sales techniques being employed by companies selling disability products have been raised. The *Consumer Contracts Regulations* aim to protect you if you take out a contract when a salesperson comes to your home, place of work, or during an excursion arranged by a company.

The cancellation period for doorstep sales is 14 calendar days after delivery of the goods. For service contracts, the cancellation period is 14 calendar days after the contract has been entered into. If you want the service to start immediately, you can still cancel in the 14-day cooling-off period but you may not get a full refund. Providers can deduct an amount for the service you receive before cancelling.

You can cancel ancillary contracts for a product such as a warranty. There are situations where the regulations do not apply, for example goods and services costing less than £42.

You should be given information about your cancellation rights by the seller. The charity Which? Provides information and advice about how to deal with poor sales practices.

See www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/advice/ive-been-mis-led-by-a-doorstep-seller-what-should-i-do

10 Problems with equipment and complaints

Problems with privately purchased equipment

If you are not happy with equipment you have bought, contact the supplier as soon as possible. They may be able to arrange an exchange or replacement. If equipment is faulty, it should be repaired or replaced, or you should get a refund. You do not have to accept a credit note when returning a faulty item.

You may want to complain first verbally to the seller. If you are not happy with the outcome, you should complain in writing. You may decide to report the seller, with details of your complaint, to the Trading Standards service at the local authority. They can investigate false or misleading claims about services or products and advise on consumer problems.

If the equipment supplier is a member of the British Healthcare Trades Association (BHTA) and you are unhappy with its service, complain to BHTA. You can also seek help with consumer rights and advice from Citizens Advice Consumer Service.

Health and social care complaints

The local authority is required to have a complaints procedure. You can use it to complain about any aspect of their care and support duties, including the assessment of your needs and services arranged or provided, such as disability equipment. If you cannot resolve the problem using the local authority complaints procedure, complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Complain using the NHS complaints procedure if you have a complaint about an NHS service, such as the local wheelchair service. You may be entitled to an Independent NHS advocate to help you make a complaint. If you cannot resolve the complaint using the NHS procedure, you can escalate it to the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman.

See factsheet 59, *How to resolve problems and complain about social care* and factsheet 66, *Resolving problems and making a complaint about NHS care* for more information.

11 Fire Service home safety checks

Most local fire brigades offer a free home safety check. They will:

- identify potential fire risks within your home
- advise on what to do to reduce or prevent fire risks
- ensure you have working smoke alarms
- devise an escape plan with you in case a fire breaks out.

You can find out more at www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/

12 Information, advice and advocacy

Every local authority must provide an information and advice service to everyone who needs it in the local area. This must cover a range of areas related to accessing and funding care and support, including disability equipment, home adaptations, and financial issues.

This should include information and advice on the availability of services that may enable you to remain independent for longer such as home improvement agencies, handyman or maintenance services.

The independent advocacy duty

If you struggle to understand or make decisions about your care and have no one you want to help you engage in the process, such as a relative or friend, the local authority must offer you an independent advocate.

An advocate's role is to support and represent you throughout the care and support process, ensuring you are involved as fully as possible. You may need this assistance when the local authority is assessing your needs, or preparing or reviewing your care and support plan.

The duty applies if you have '*substantial difficulty*' in:

- understanding relevant information (about social care and health issues)
- retaining that information
- using or weighing up the information
- communicating your views, wishes or feelings.

This builds on the advocacy requirement under the *Mental Capacity Act 2005* for people who lack mental capacity.

Useful organisations

British Healthcare Trades Association

www.bhta.com/

Telephone 020 7702 2141

British Red Cross

www.redcross.org.uk/

Telephone 0344 871 11 11

Provides wheelchairs and other equipment on a loan basis.

Citizens Advice Consumer Service

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/if-you-need-more-help-about-a-consumer-issue/

Telephone 0808 223 1133

Provides specialist consumer advice.

DLF (formerly Disabled Living Foundation)

www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk

Telephone 0300 999 0004

Provides advice and information on disability equipment and assisted products.

Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS)

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Telephone helpline 0808 800 0082 Mon-Fri 9am-7pm,
Sat 10am-2pm

Funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the helpline provides information and advice about the *Equality Act 2010* and human rights.

Foundations

www.foundations.uk.com/

Telephone 0300 124 0315

The national body for Home Improvement Agencies in England.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

www.lgo.org.uk

Telephone 0300 061 0614

Investigates complaints about local authorities and care providers.

Motability

www.motability.co.uk

Telephone 0300 456 4566

Use DLA/PIP mobility element to lease a new affordable car, Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle, scooter or powered wheelchair.

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

www.ombudsman.org.uk

Telephone 0345 015 4033

Investigates complaints about NHS care.

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

www.rafbf.org/

Telephone 0300 102 1919

Provides support to serving and former members of the RAF as well as their families.

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

www.rnib.org.uk

Telephone 0303 123 9999

Provides information and advice about sight problems and products and publications to support blind or partially sighted people.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

www.rnid.org.uk

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Campaigns and raises awareness of deafness and hearing loss and offers information on deafness, hearing loss and tinnitus.

Shopmobility

www.shopmobilityuk.org

Nationwide network of centres which hire out mobility equipment to the public.

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)

www.ssafa.org.uk/

Telephone 0800 260 6767

Provides support to armed forces veterans and their families.

Turn2Us

www.turn2us.org.uk

Telephone 0808 802 2000

A charitable service helping people access financial support through welfare benefits, grants and other help.

Which?

www.which.co.uk

Telephone 029 2267 0000

National membership organisation aimed at supporting consumers by testing goods, providing information and campaigning.

Age UK

Age UK provides advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online. Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

Age UK Advice

www.ageuk.org.uk

0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8.00am to 7.00pm

In Wales contact

Age Cymru Advice

www.agecymru.org.uk

0300 303 4498

In Northern Ireland contact

Age NI

www.ageni.org

0808 808 7575

In Scotland contact

Age Scotland

www.agescotland.org.uk

0800 124 4222

Support our work

We rely on donations from our supporters to provide our guides and factsheets for free. If you would like to help us continue to provide vital services, support, information and advice, please make a donation today by visiting www.ageuk.org.uk/donate or by calling 0800 169 87 87.

Our publications are available in large print and audio formats

Next update March 2024

The evidence sources used to create this factsheet are available on request.

Contact *resources@ageuk.org.uk*

This factsheet has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be of use to you. Nothing in this factsheet should be construed as the giving of specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. Neither Age UK nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure that the information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this factsheet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this factsheet is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek expert advice on your personal situation.

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is 7th Floor, One America Square, 17 Crosswall, London, EC3N 2LB. Age UK and its subsidiary companies and charities form the Age UK Group, dedicated to improving later life.