

Factsheet 42

Disability equipment and home adaptations

February 2017

About this factsheet

This factsheet covers the help you can get from the local authority to manage your daily tasks at home through the provision of specially designed equipment or 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 *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 for their version of this factsheet. 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.

Contents

1	The relevant legislation	4
2	Terms used in this factsheet	4
3	Disability equipment provided by local authorities	4
3.1	Assessment for disability equipment	4
3.2	Free disability equipment and minor adaptations	6
3.3	Reablement and prevention	6
3.4	Equipment to meet health-related needs	6
3.5	Disability equipment prescriptions	7
3.6	Disability equipment in care homes	8
3.7	Moving to another area	8
4	Major home adaptations	8
4.1	The Disabled Facilities Grant	8
4.2	What types of works are covered?	9
4.3	The eligibility criteria	9
4.4	Applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant	10
4.5	The means test	11
4.6	Discretionary assistance	12
4.7	Property charge	12
4.8	Problems and complaints	12
4.9	Home improvement agencies (HIA)	13
5	Wheelchairs	13
6	Community alarms and assistive technology	15
7	Equipment for employment	17
8	Buying and borrowing equipment	18
8.1	Things to consider when choosing equipment	18
8.2	Independent Living Centres	19
8.3	Private companies and shops	19
8.4	VAT relief on disability equipment	19

8.5	Short-term loan of equipment such as wheelchairs	20
9	Sources of funding	21
9.1	State benefits	21
9.2	Local Welfare Provision	21
9.3	Charities and other sources	21
10	Concerns about doorstep selling	22
11	Fire Service home safety checks	23
12	Problems with equipment and complaints	23
13	Information, advice and advocacy	24
	Useful organisations	25
	Age UK	28
	Support our work	28

1 The relevant legislation

The information about social care in this factsheet is based on the *Care Act 2014* (*the Act*) and supporting regulations and statutory guidance, introduced in April 2015.

The *Care and Support (Charging and Assessment of Resources) Regulations 2014* (*the charging regulations*), the *Care and Support (Eligibility Criteria) Regulations 2014* (*the eligibility regulations*) and the *Care and Support Statutory Guidance 2014* (*the statutory guidance*) are used in this factsheet as sources along with the Act.

2 Terms used in this factsheet

The terms '*community care*', '*care and support*', '*social services*' and '*social care*' are used interchangeably to describe the range of statutory services provided by local authority adult social care departments. In this factsheet, we use '*local authority*' to refer to all these terms. It is also 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*' 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.

3 Disability equipment provided by local authorities

3.1 Assessment for disability equipment

If you need disability equipment to help you manage more safely and easily around your home, contact your local authority and ask for a **needs assessment**. They must assess you if they might have a duty to meet your needs and the provision of disability equipment may be one way to do this. If you are found to have eligible needs, your local authority has a duty ensure they are met.

Eligibility requires having excessive difficulty in achieving at least two of a list of outcomes 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 can 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 assessment is usually carried out in your own home by a local authority occupational therapist (OT). An OT rather than a social worker takes the lead if the main issue is a need for disability equipment or a home adaptation. An equipment need may be identified by an assessing social worker alongside other requirements such as home care support.

Your needs should be agreed and set down in your care and support plan, which must include a personal budget figure showing the cost to the local authority of meeting your needs. The needs of your carer can be assessed if you have one. Disability equipment may be provided via health professionals such as physiotherapists and nurses.

Examples of disability equipment

There is a wide range of disability equipment including:

- **hygiene maintenance:** grab rail, bath board, electric bath lift, lever tap extension, a 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 rail, machines to help you sit up and 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 wheelchair ramp.

The Disabled Living Foundation provides free information on disability equipment. For more information about assessments and services, see factsheet 41, *How to get care and support*.

Problems and delays getting equipment

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

There should be no reason for delay regarding the vast majority of standard pieces of equipment as they are stored in a local community equipment store. The local authority OT department should have procedures for appropriate prioritisation and risk assessment and for arranging prompt equipment delivery in each particular case following a needs assessment.

3.2 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 are prohibited from charging for a service consisting of the provision of disability equipment and/or minor adaptations that assist with nursing at home or aid daily living.

A minor home adaptation is defined as one costing £1,000 or less in the charging regulations. 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 hand rail, automatic lighting at the front access, or a door-release intercom system.

See section 4.1 for the charging rules for more major home adaptations.

3.3 Reablement and prevention

Short-term rehabilitation provided by your local authority should be provided free of charge for at least the first 6 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 under section 2 of the Act. The statutory guidance notes that disability equipment, telecare and home adaptations can support reablement and promote independence that contributes to preventing care and support needs.

3.4 Equipment to meet health-related needs

In each locality, disability equipment stores are jointly funded and run by the NHS and local authority. Equipment from the store 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.

The Disabled Living Foundation produces a factsheet called *Choosing walking equipment* which can help you make the right choice.

Sensory impairment – hearing and sight

If you have hearing problems and might benefit from a hearing aid, ask your GP to refer you to your local hospital for a hearing test. You have a right to have your hearing assessed, particularly if you think your hearing loss is becoming a problem. 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 make magnifiers and other low vision aids available on loan. Your local social services department may provide support services or employ specialist social workers to help if you have sight or hearing loss. For more about help with hearing or visual impairments, see section 9.

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. Ask for a copy of NHS leaflet HC11 *Help with health costs* at your local post office or see factsheet 61, *Help with health costs*.

3.5 Disability equipment prescriptions

Your local authority may run a system where simple pieces of equipment are provided by a prescription. This scheme runs alongside the traditional equipment loan described above. The main difference is that if a needs assessment identifies your need for equipment, you are given a written prescription by the assessor. This lets you to buy the equipment from an accredited local retailer. You own the equipment. You can buy higher cost equipment if you like as long as it meets your need and you are prepared to pay the difference.

Each local authority providing this choice publishes a full list of the types of simple equipment available with prices which, in turn, informs the amount in your prescription. These can 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 no one is able 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.

3.6 Disability equipment in care homes

If you live in a care home, you are entitled local authority services in the same way as anyone else living in your area. If you need specialist, bespoke, disability equipment beyond what the care home has a legal duty to provide, this can be provided by your local authority.

It can also be provided through a local health professional such as a nurse or GP. You can request an assessment by a local authority OT who can assess and recommend what you need.

An example could be 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.

3.7 Moving to another area

If you have been provided with disability equipment and subsequently need to move to another area, the statutory guidance states that it should move with you if you want this to happen and it is suitable for your new home. 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 your receiving authority to organise the installation of any new adaptations. For example, walls need to be checked for the correct fixing of rails.

Where 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. The parties are jointly responsible for ensuring that you have adequate equipment when you move.

4 Major home adaptations

4.1 The Disabled Facilities Grant

You may be eligible for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) in certain circumstances to adapt your home. There are a wide range of home adaptations available to assist you to live more independently and safely at home. These are means-tested which means your income and savings can be taken into account. It can take a few months for the DFG means-test and home adaptation process to be completed.

The maximum mandatory DFG in England is £30,000, although there is discretion for higher amounts to be paid. A recent report found the average DFG is around £7000 with 58 per cent under £5000 and only 5 per cent more than £30,000.

See our information guide, *Adapting your home*, for more information about the types of adaptations that may be covered.

4.2 What types of works are covered?

The types of work that can be covered by a DFG include:

- **Access:** door widening, removing a door threshold, long wheelchair ramp, external wheelchair lift
- **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
- **Toiletting:** 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 will need to be considered before this could take place.

4.3 The eligibility criteria

A DFG is a mandatory grant in certain circumstances, which means you have an absolute right to it. This is, for example, where a local authority OT assesses you and thinks a home adaptation is the best or only way to meet your eligible needs. The DFG becomes the cost to the local authority of ensuring your eligible needs are met. This is within the means-test requirements in section 4.6.

The basic criterion is you have to meet the disability description within the *Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996*. This is if:

- 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
- you are, or could be, registered disabled with a social services department under the *National Assistance Act 1948* or the *Children Act 1989*.

4.4 Applying for a Disabled Facilities Grant

A DFG is available from the housing department of the local authority. You can approach either the housing department or the social services department to apply for a DFG. Whilst the formal application must be made to the housing department, in many cases you may be advised to first approach the social services department. You can ask your local home improvement agency (HIA) to assist you with the application.

The housing department is responsible for deciding if you get a grant. They must consult the social services department to decide what adaptations are '**necessary and appropriate**'. This normally means you receive a visit from an OT. They assess you and make recommendations on what needs to be done.

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

Who can apply?

You can apply for a DFG whether you are a homeowner or the 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 is health or other special reasons. This may be difficult for private tenants as most have assured-short-hold tenancies with security of tenure for only the first six months of a tenancy. For more information about DFG's and private tenancies, see factsheet 67, *Home improvements and repairs*.

Local authority tenants and tenants of registered providers of social housing are eligible to apply for a DFG and are assessed based on their needs on the same basis as private tenants and owner-occupiers. In these circumstances, 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.

Note

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

4.5 The means test

The DFG is means tested for adults. In its financial assessment, the local authority takes into account your income and savings and that of your partner if you have one. This applies even if the application is made by someone else such as the owner of the property. This means if you are a single disabled person living with a grown-up daughter in your home, it is only your income and not hers that is included in the means test.

Your capital is taken into account, together with your partner's if you have one. Certain capital is disregarded, for example your property. The first £6000 of your capital is ignored. If you are under 60, a tariff income of £1 is added for every £250 you have over £6000. The tariff income is £1 for every £500 if you are 60 or over. Tariff income is an assumed addition to the income part of the means test.

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 worked out related to your weekly living needs and those of your family, with a housing allowance of £61.30 a week added. 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. If your income is more than the applicable amount, you may only receive part of the DFG amount or possibly none at all.

- **If you live in England and receive the following benefits**, you do not normally have to make a contribution unless there are other people also being assessed who do not receive such benefits:
 - Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
 - Income Support
 - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
 - Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
 - Housing Benefit
 - Council Tax Reduction/Support
 - Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit with gross taxable income of less than £15,050.

Note

At the time of writing the government has not stated how the means test will take account of Universal Credit

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

4.6 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 grant 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 the grant
- assist you to move to a more suitable property where it is more cost effective than adapting your current home to make it suitable for your needs, even though the new property may need some adaptations.

4.7 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 will be placed on the local Land Charges Register.

It only applies to DFG costs exceeding £5,000. If, for example, the DFG cost is £6000, the local authority can put a £1000 charge on and if the cost is £10,000, they can put a £5000 charge on. A charge should only be imposed or repaid after taking into account all individual circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

4.8 Problems and complaints

There can be lengthy delays in applying for DFG, often because there is 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 you should not have to wait more than six months after you make a formal application to hear if you can get one. The decision must be made in writing and specify the works that are eligible for a grant and the amount of grant to be paid. If your application is refused, you must be told why.

If you do not get a decision within six months, you can complain to the local authority and request they make a decision promptly. If you still do not get a decision, you can complain to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or possibly initiate judicial review proceedings. You need legal advice if you want to pursue a judicial review. For more information see factsheet 43, *Getting legal advice*.

If you are eligible for a DFG, the housing department cannot refuse to pay on the grounds it has not got sufficient money. The law says you should not have to wait more than 12 months from the date you apply for a grant until the money is paid.

4.9 Home improvement agencies (HIA)

Home improvement agencies, sometimes called *Care & Repair* or *Staying Put*, are not-for-profit organisations managed locally by housing associations, councils or charities. They provide support for vulnerable homeowners and people living in private rented accommodation to help them undertake adaptations, repairs and improvements to their home.

Their service includes guidance on how to get financial support to undertake work, help in accessing financial support, technical support in planning the work and ensuring the work is undertaken by accredited trade persons.

Most HIAs provide a range of housing-based services for vulnerable people that enable them to retain independence in their own home. These may include a handyman service, gardening and decorating services, safety and security improvement, and improved 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
- your local authority housing department, or
- Foundations – the national co-ordinating body for HIAs.

You can find your nearest HIA on the Elderly Accommodation Counsel website at www.housingcare.org.

5 Wheelchairs

If you have long-term mobility problems, using a wheelchair can help you to maintain your independence and get out into the local community. Your 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. The NHS can provide an electrically powered wheelchair suitable for indoor/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 to buy a higher standard wheelchair. The wheelchair is repaired and maintained free of charge. You must use an approved supplier who has to 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 you need 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 it does not affect any disability benefits.

The Motability scheme

If you receive higher 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 **outdoor 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 will belong to a trade association guaranteeing a good level of customer service, assessment and commitment to safe practices.

You should be aware of government regulations for scooter use on the pavement or road. Issues of storage, charging and maintenance are important to a planned purchase and on-going use. A good source of information on these products is the Disabled Living Foundation.

Charitable funding

It may be possible to get charitable help to purchase a wheelchair. You can discuss this with staff at the local wheelchair department who should have information on funding bodies and may help to make an application. This website may be useful: www.grantsforindividuals.org.uk/

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

6 Community alarms and assistive technology

Community alarms

Community alarm systems allow you to be linked up 24 hours a day to a central service that can offer help in an emergency. The link is usually by telephone, pull cord, a pendant that you wear 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 is staffed by 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.

Your 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 your local social services department, housing department or Age UK for details about the schemes available locally. The Disabled Living Foundation produces a factsheet *Personal alarm systems and telecare*.

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 and. 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:** These devices, such as pendant alarms, heat sensors, smoke detectors or bed sensors send alerts to a call centre after a pre-determined event so that 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, if you fail to press a button by a certain time each day to confirm you are OK, an alert is raised.

Telehealth

Telehealth is the remote monitoring of your vital signs in chronic condition management (eg 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, and 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.

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

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 Assistive Technology Service.

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.

Following the installation of an Environmental Control System the company engineer train you in its use. Ongoing support and advice should be given by the service and reviews carried out as necessary.

7 Equipment for employment

The *Access to Work* scheme can fund equipment you need for work. You may be able to apply for a grant if you have a disability, health or mental health condition. The money you get can pay for things like:

- specialist equipment
- travel if you cannot use public transport
- a communicator at a job interview.

Contact the disability employment adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus for advice and assistance. See this for further information:

www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

8 Buying and borrowing equipment

8.1 Things to consider when choosing equipment

Occupational therapists or physiotherapists from a hospital, local authority social services department or employed by a Disabled Living Centre can advise you on equipment suitable for your needs and on what is available. You may want to consider the following points when choosing equipment for yourself:

- Make sure products comply with the British Standards. Equipment that has been tested and approved by the British Standards Institute (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, you may want to ask for a trial in your own home so you can try it out properly. Make sure it can be used in the environment in which you want to use it.
- Make sure the 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.
- Check 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 do not need it any more, 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.

You may be able to buy equipment second-hand. The Disabled Living Foundation provides information on this.

Note

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

8.2 Independent Living Centres

There is a network of independent living centres throughout the country. Visitors 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 actually trying it out, for example manoeuvring a wheelchair in a small space. A trip to one of these centres can help you understand the reality of using the equipment prior to purchase and how your carer may cope if you have one. The Disabled Living Foundation lists existing centres on the following link: http://www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk/contacts_edc.php

8.3 Private companies and shops

Private companies that sell disability equipment may have websites, mail order catalogues, shops or showrooms. Some large high street chemists stock smaller items of daily living equipment or have their own mail order catalogues.

The Disabled Living Foundation's AskSARA website provides a free online, guided self-assessment, tool. It contains more than 1,300 links to product suggestions, useful help and advice and case studies. For more information, see <http://asksara.dlf.org.uk/> .

Some local authorities use this tool to help people assess their own needs for basic pieces of equipment. They must always ensure this is an appropriate way to assess you and, if used, that outcomes are accurate. If they have any concerns, they should assess you face-to-face and provide all necessary information and advice. Some equipment requires training for safe use, for example a hoist, so seek advice if you are unsure how to proceed.

Organisations such as Age UK sell a range of specialist equipment that assist with: mobility; eating and drinking; cooking and preparing food; dressing and grooming; bathing, showering and going to the toilet; and hobbies and interests.

See section 3.5 for information about local authority prescriptions for the purchase of disability equipment, which may offer an alternative solution.

8.4 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.

In addition, there is 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 registered for VAT and you need to sign a form declaring you have a chronic illness or disability.

Further information on VAT exemption is in 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 200 3700.

5 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 5 per cent VAT. This covers 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. The reduced rate does not apply where goods are supplied without installation but does apply to installation services alone or for repairs or maintenance of items once installed.

If you have been wrongly charged VAT because you meet the exemption requirement, contact your equipment supplier and ask for a refund.

8.5 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. It should be listed in the local telephone directory under British Red Cross or see the Red Cross website: www.redcross.org.uk

Your local Age UK can sometimes loan wheelchairs. It 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. A printed directory of shopmobility schemes in the UK is available by sending a cheque for £5 (including postage and packing) payable to the National Federation of Shopmobility UK. You can find out about a scheme in your area on their website: www.shopmobilityuk.org

- **Disabled Living Centres** may be able to provide you with information about wheelchair hire services or Shopmobility schemes locally.
- **The Disabled Living Foundation** can provide a list of wheelchair hire services in London.

9 Sources of funding

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

9.1 State benefits

If you are disabled, you may be entitled to Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment. These are benefits to help you meet the extra cost of living expenses relating to your disability. For more details, see factsheet 34, *Attendance Allowance* and factsheet 87, *Personal Independence Payments and Disability Living Allowance*.

9.2 Local Welfare Provision

Local Welfare Provision replaced Social Fund crisis loans and community care grants in April 2013. Every local authority now decides what help they do, or do not, provide to help you in a crisis or if you need help to remain living in the community. They generally do not offer cash except in exceptional circumstances and usually limit payments to small amounts or offer a loan.

See factsheet 49, *Social Fund, Advances of Benefit and Local Welfare Provision*.

9.3 Charities and other sources

You may be able to get financial help buying mobility and disability-related equipment from charitable organisations. It is advisable to find out if equipment should be provided by your local authority, the NHS or another statutory organisation first because charities do not generally provide funding unless this option has been fully investigated. Your occupational therapist may be able to help you apply for charitable funding.

Two examples are the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association, generally called SSAFA, and the RAF Benevolent Fund, which support those who have served in the forces. This website can help find funding: www.grantsforindividuals.org.uk

10 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* look 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 the company. You also have protection when you take out a contract during off-premises sales.

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 within the 14-day cooling-off period but you may not get a full refund. Providers are allowed to make a deduction for the amount of the service you have benefited from before cancelling.

You have the right to cancel any ancillary contracts for the product such as a warranty. There are certain situations where the new regulations do not apply, for example for goods and service costing less than £42.

You should be given information about your cancellation rights by the seller.

An example of a Code of Practice is that of the Association of Energy Suppliers, which says that salespeople:

- can call at your home only between 9am and 8pm (unless you ask for a visit outside of these times)
- must say who they are and show a valid ID card
- must do their best to make sure you understand any contract you've signed, and your right to cancel
- must not exploit you, give you false information, or use high-pressure sales tactics
- must leave your home if you ask them to.

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

11 Fire Service home safety checks

Your local fire brigade offer a free home safety check. They will: identify potential fire risks within your home; advise on what to do in order to reduce or prevent fire risks; ensure you have working smoke alarms; and devise an escape plan with you in case a fire breaks out. You can find out more on the following website: <http://www.fireservice.co.uk/safety/>.

12 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.

You may want to complain first verbally to the seller. If you are not happy with the outcome, you should put it in writing. You may decide to report the seller, with details of your complaint, to the Trading Standards service at your 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. Citizens Advice Consumer Service can also help with consumer rights and advice.

Health and social care complaints

Your local authority social services department must have a complaints procedure you can use it to complain about your service or the assessment of your needs. You can approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, usually only after you have exhausted the local complaints procedure.

If you have a complaint about a service from an NHS hospital, contact their Patient Advocacy and Liaison Service (PALS). They try to help you resolve the problem informally. If they cannot, they can give you information about the NHS complaints procedure and the local NHS Complaints Advocacy Service, which can help you make your complaint.

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

13 Information, advice and advocacy

Each local authority must provide an information and advice service to everyone who needs it in its area. It must provide information and advice on 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 you to remain independent for longer such as home improvement agencies, handyman or maintenance services.

The independent advocacy duty

Your local authority must provide an independent advocacy service for people who struggle to understand or make decisions about their care and have no one to help them engage in the process. It applies to people who have 'substantial difficulty' in:

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

This builds on the advocacy requirement that already exists under the *Mental Capacity Act 2005* for people who have a significant mental impairment.

Useful organisations

Action on Hearing Loss

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Telephone 0808 808 0123 (free call)

Action on Hearing Loss campaigns and lobbies, raising awareness of deafness and hearing loss, providing services and through social, medical and technical research.

Alzheimer's Society

www.alzheimers.org.uk

Telephone 0300 222 11 22

Provides information and factsheets about all types of dementia and supports people, their families and carers.

Arthritis Care

www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Telephone helpline 0808 800 4050

Advice and information by trained counsellors, some of whom have arthritis. Over 400 branches, for people with arthritis and their families.

British Healthcare Trades Association

www.bhta.net/

Telephone 020 7702 2141

British Red Cross

www.redcross.org.uk/

Telephone 0344 871 11 11

Can provide information about individual and personal budgets, and the retail model for providing community equipment.

Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS)

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/

Telephone 03454 04 05 06

Provides trained advisers who can give consumer advice.

Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs)

www.scope.org.uk/support/disabled-people/local/about

Telephone 0808 800 3333

A network of local groups throughout the country providing information and advice to disabled people. They should be able to tell you if there is a group in your local area or it may be in the local telephone directory.

Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)

www.dlf.org.uk

Telephone 0300 999 0004

The DLF provides advice and information on disability equipment and assisted products. It has factsheets on a variety of subjects, including choosing wheelchairs and other equipment.

You can also visit the Equipment Demonstration Centre where a large number of items are displayed. The Centre does not sell, hire or lend equipment. If you would like advice from trained staff you need to ring for an appointment; telephone: 0207 432 8015.

Equality Advisory Support Service

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Telephone helpline 0808 800 0082 Mon-Fri 9am-8pm, Sat 10am-2pm

Funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the EASS Helpline provides information and advice about the *Equality Act 2010*.

Foundations

wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com/

Telephone 0300 124 0315

An organisation appointed by the Department of Communities and Local Government to oversee a national network of home improvement agencies across England.

Motability

www.motability.co.uk

Telephone 0300 456 4566

National Federation of Shopmobility UK

www.shopmobilityuk.org

Telephone 01933 229644

Parkinson's UK

www.parkinsons.org.uk

Telephone 0808 800 0303 (free call)

Helps people with Parkinson's and their relatives with problems arising from this disease; collects and disseminates information on the disease; encourages and provides funds for research.

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

www.rnib.org.uk

Telephone 0303 123 9999

Information and advice about sight problems.

Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund

www.rafbf.org/

Telephone 0800 169 2942

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

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA)

www.ssafa.org.uk/

Telephone 0800 731 4880

Provides support to armed forces veterans and their families.

Scope

www.scope.org.uk

Telephone 0808 800 3333 (free call)

Disability organisation with a focus on people with cerebral palsy – provides information and advice.

Stroke Association (The)

www.stroke.org.uk

Telephone 030 303 3100

Provides an information service and has some community services in different parts of England and Wales. Can also refer enquirers to stroke clubs throughout England and Wales.

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

www.agecymru.org.uk

0800 022 3444

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 February 2018

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 Tavis House, 1–6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. Age UK and its subsidiary companies and charities form the Age UK Group, dedicated to improving later life.