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1 The law and the law

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 s

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 on a £1,000 charge. If the cost is £10,000, they can put on a £5,000 charge. 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

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 homes.

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 enhanced rate mobility component of Personal Independence Payment, high rate mobility component of Disability Living

electric wheelchair, scooter or a car, you can use the Motability scheme to pay for it. Contact Motability for more information.

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

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 with

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.

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

Provides information about disability equipment and home adaptations

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

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The evidence sources used to create this factsheet are available on request. Contact resources@ageuk.org.uk

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