Take it Easy

Avoid Mobility Aids Scams
What is a mobility aid?

Some of the most common products which help people who have mobility issues or who need assistance with daily living are:

- mobility scooters
- heating pads for chairs and beds
- stairlifts
- orthopaedic chairs and beds
- hand rails

Who is affected by mobility aids scams?

Mobility aids scams directly target elderly and vulnerable consumers, many of whom have recently used NHS services or who have previously purchased mobility aids.
How do mobility aids scams work?

Fraudulent companies usually begin by cold calling people. They might say that they are carrying out a medical survey or imply that they are affiliated with the NHS. They then offer to visit the consumer at their home. Once they are in the consumer’s house, the salesperson can use pressure selling tactics to wear them down, often refusing to leave until the consumer has agreed to buy a product.

These salespeople can appear trustworthy - they might wear similar outfits to nurses or physiotherapists, claim to be endorsed by the NHS or even claim to be working for the NHS or an associated company.

What if the consumer changes their mind after the salesperson leaves?

Any consumer who purchased goods or services worth over £42 has the right to cancel the contract within 14 days, unless the product is bespoke.

Do most people just cancel their contracts then?

Many consumers try to cancel their contracts, but are told that they can’t because the product they have bought is bespoke. If a product is being custom made to the consumer’s specifications, they no longer have the same cancellation rights.

However, in many cases, although companies tell consumers that they products they are purchasing are bespoke, the salesperson has not actually taken any measurements. Several consumers have been told that they will receive a custom-made product, but when it arrives it is clearly an ‘off-the-shelf’ size.
What happens next?

The businesses and individuals involved in these scams can prove very difficult to contact if there are any problems and many customers have to go through lengthy and stressful processes to try to get their money back.

A lot of the consumers affected by these scams are already vulnerable and can become increasingly anxious when trying to deal with fraudulent companies. They might not have been given much paperwork and it might not be clear how much they have paid and what they have paid for.

I’m worried that an elderly or vulnerable friend or relative may fall victim to one of these scams. How can I protect them?

The best way to prevent mobility aids scams is to make sure that as many people as possible are aware of them. If a friend or relative is becoming increasingly anxious about unsolicited phone calls from potential scammers, you might want to install a call blocking device, which will prevent the majority of nuisance calls from getting through.

If you know that they have agreed to a home visit from a salesperson, you might want to be in the house with them during the appointment to provide a second opinion.

What can I do if someone I know has bought mobility aids that they don’t need or want or that are of poor quality?

If you have any concerns, your first port of call should be Advice Direct Scotland (0808 164 6000). They will be able to advise you of the relevant consumer legislation and will let you know what to do next.

www.tsscot.co.uk