

## How to complain about a health or social care service

### About this information

Although most people have no problems when using health care or social care services, sometimes things can go wrong. This information explains what to do if you, or a member of your family, want to complain about the care that you have received.

### How to complain

Who you contact to complain will depend on:

- whether you are complaining about health care or social care, and
- whether that care is paid for by public funds or you have paid for it yourself.

It is usually a good idea to keep a record of what you said and who you said it to if the complaint is made verbally. Your local Healthwatch will be able to tell you if you can get free help, advice and support in making your complaint.

### How to make a complaint about health care

- (1) If you are unhappy with the care you have received from NHS-funded services (even if the service was from an independent provider), you have the right to make a complaint.
- (2) Ask to see a copy of the complaints procedure for the NHS service you are unhappy about. This will tell you who to contact, how they will handle your complaint and how they will learn from your complaint.
- (3) You can choose who you make your complaint to, you can either:

- a. Contact the NHS-funded service directly (hospital, GP practice, dentist etc.). OR
  - b. You can take your complaint to the NHS organisation that pays for the service:
    - (i) If your complaint is about a hospital, NHS community service or how your local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group buys services, contact your **Local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group**.
    - (ii) If your complaint is about GPs, dental services, community pharmacists, high street optometrists or certain 'specialised' NHS services, please contact **NHS England**
- (4) You can make your complaint in person, by telephone, email or letter. This will give the NHS service a chance to sort out any problem you might have and put things right for you. If you make your complaint by telephone or in person, then you should receive a written copy of your complaint.
- (5) If you are still not sure who to complain to: contact any NHS organisation or NHS PALS service and they will make sure that your complaint goes to the right people who can help you. You can also contact your local Healthwatch who can direct you to the best place to make your complaint.

### **If you are not content with the reply you get**

- If you are not content with the outcome of your complaint or how it was dealt with, you have the right to ask the Health Service Ombudsman investigate your complaint. This is a free, independent service.
- They will usually only investigate a complaint after the NHS have had a chance to try to sort it out.
- If they decide the NHS have got things wrong, they can make recommendations to put things right.

**You can contact the Ombudsman on:**

0345 015 4033

Email [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk)

Textphone 0300 061 4298 if you are deaf or have problems using a standard telephone

Request a call by texting 'call back' with your name and mobile number to 07624 813 005

or write to: Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP.

You can also visit their website at [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)

### **How to make a complaint about health care that you have paid for yourself**

If you have had care that was not paid for by the NHS:

- (1) In the first instance you should contact the person or organisation that provides the service and give them the chance to put things right for you.
- (2) If you are not happy with their response, you can contact The Independent Healthcare Advisory Service (IHAS) [www.independenthealthcare.org.uk](http://www.independenthealthcare.org.uk).

### **How to make a complaint about care homes and social care services**

- (1) If you are unhappy with the care you have received from a care home, nursing home, home-care agency or other social care service, you have the right to make a complaint. If the service is provided in a social care setting but is funded by

the NHS, e.g. dental services, you will need to follow the NHS complaints process, which you can find in the previous section called 'How to complain about health care'.

- (2) Ask to see a copy of the complaints procedure for the care service you are unhappy about. This will tell you who to contact, how they will handle your complaint and how they will learn from your complaint.
- (3) You should contact the care service directly (care or nursing home, etc.). You can do this in person, by telephone, email or letter. This will give the care service the chance to sort out any problem you may have and put things right for you.
- (4) If the care you received was arranged or funded by the council you can also complain to them. You can find the address of your local council at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) or you can ask your local Healthwatch

### **If you are not content with the reply you get**

- If you are not happy with the final reply from the care service or your local council, you have the right to ask the Local Government Ombudsman to investigate your complaint. This is a free, independent service.
- This right applies whether you pay for your own care or your local council pays for it.

You can contact the Local Government Ombudsman on 0300 061 0614, or write to: Local Government Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH.

You can also visit their website at [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk).

### **The NHS Complaints Advocacy Service**

A free confidential service that helps and supports people who are complaining about the NHS. This service is independent of the NHS and has offices throughout England. To find your nearest one, ask your local Healthwatch.

## **Healthwatch**

Healthwatch England is the independent consumer champion for health and social care in England. Working with a network of 152 local Healthwatch, we ensure ensure consumers' views are represented both locally and nationally to those who run, regulate and plan health and social care services. Healthwatch does not investigate individual cases or complaints. But your local Healthwatch will be able to point you in the direction of organisations that can help you. You can find your local Healthwatch contact details here

<http://www.healthwatch.co.uk/find-local-healthwatch>.

## **The Care Quality Commission**

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health care and adult social care services in England. It is responsible for checking that the care provided by these services meets important standards of quality and safety. CQC also protects the interests of people whose rights are restricted under the Mental Health Act.

Information from people who use health care and social care, and their families and carers, plays a vital part in our work and helps us to focus our inspections and target areas of poor practice that are brought to our attention. Although CQC's role does not include investigating complaints you can still share your experience, by calling 03000 616161 or provide feedback online at [www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk).

**This document was produced with the help of the Care Quality Commission, the Health Service Ombudsman and the Local Government Ombudsman**