

Factsheet 44

NHS services

October 2018

About this factsheet

This factsheet contains information about NHS '*primary care*' services – services you approach in a non-emergency situation when you first have a health problem.

It looks at services to help you identify:

- if you need to see a GP
- services provided by a GP and services you access via your GP
- services from your local pharmacy
- how the NHS helps you manage a long term condition that can be treated and managed but not cured
- NHS screening programmes and services for older adults.

Age UK produces other factsheets on NHS services. Factsheet 5, *Dental care: NHS and private treatment*, factsheet 61, *Help with health costs* and factsheet 66, *Resolving problems and making a complaint about NHS care*.

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.

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1 National Health Service

The fundamental principle of the NHS is that no one should be denied or charged for necessary *emergency* NHS treatment.

You can register with and consult a GP, regardless of nationality and residential status. You must pay NHS prescription charges unless you are in a group exempt from these charges. See section 9 for information on exemptions.

Non-urgent NHS hospital care is only free if you are living here lawfully and are '*ordinarily resident*' in the UK. '*Ordinarily resident*' is a legal term that broadly means living here voluntarily, for a properly settled purpose for the time being. If you meet these requirements, access to hospital treatment is based on clinical need. If there are doubts about meeting ordinary resident requirements, your case must be judged on its merits.

If visiting the UK, you may have to pay if you need *non-urgent* hospital treatment. Hospitals must follow *The National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 2015* and supporting guidance. The rules vary depending on whether you live in an EEA country or Switzerland and your healthcare is paid for by the UK via a UK-issued S1 form registered with relevant authorities; you are a visitor from an EEA country with a valid European Health Insurance Card; or are a visitor from a non-European Economic Area (EEA). You can read about your rights as a visitor at www.nhs.uk/ by searching '*visiting or moving to England*'.

2 NHS Constitution – your rights

The NHS Constitution establishes the **principles and values** of the NHS in England. It sets out the **rights** that patients, members of the public and NHS staff are entitled to, and the **responsibilities** they owe each other to ensure the NHS operates effectively and fairly.

NHS organisations, the independent and voluntary sector who provide NHS services and local authorities with a public health duty are required by law to take account of the Constitution when purchasing and delivering services.

An example of a patient right is: '*You have the right to be given information about test and treatment options available to you, what they involve and the risks and benefits.*'

An example of a patient responsibility is '*Please follow the course of treatment you have agreed and talk to your clinician if you find it difficult.*'

You can order a copy of the *NHS Constitution – the NHS belongs to us all* (ref 2900013) from DH publications or visit www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england

3 **Equality Act 2010 and age discrimination**

The *Equality Act 2010* looks to protect you from being unfairly discriminated against. It applies to anyone over the age of 18 and to all public services, and means it is unlawful for the NHS, without good and sufficient reason, to provide inferior services or refuse to provide them solely because of one of the Act's eight '*protected characteristics*'.

Note

The *Equality Act 2010* '*protected characteristics*' are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Under *the Act*, discrimination means *unfairly* treating you differently because of your age. The law only intends to prevent *harmful or unjustifiable* use of age, including a '*stereotypical view*' of a particular age group. It does not intend to prevent differential treatment where there is '*objective justification*'.

Cancer screening and flu vaccination programmes are examples of where there may be objective justification for the NHS to offer a service to a certain gender or people within certain age ranges.

Other situations where *the Act* applies to the NHS include:

- **When a GP, consultant or other health professional discusses treatment options with you or makes a decision about treatment or care.** Your age can play a part but staff should take account of your '*biological*' age, not simply your '*chronological*' age (your age in years).

If there are treatments for conditions such as cancer that are less successful or less well tolerated as people get older, the doctor should discuss this openly when explaining treatment options.

- **When providing NHS services or considering treatment options.** An example of '*Unjustifiable discrimination*' would be to stereotype someone of a particular chronological age.
- **When designing or providing a service (such as at a GP practice or out-patients clinic).** An example of age discrimination would be where staff treat you differently on the basis of your age or take a stereotypical view of people of a particular age.

You can often clarify and resolve a situation by discussing it with staff concerned. The law means that if necessary, you can take NHS organisations, clinicians or managers to court on grounds of age discrimination. You can speak to the Equality Advisory Support Service helpline if you think you have been discriminated against.

4 Accessible Information Standard

The Accessible Information Standard aims to make sure that when you have a disability or sensory loss, you receive information you can access and understand, as well as support you need to communicate, when you engage with NHS or social care staff. This means staff must:

- 1 **Ask** if you have communication or information needs relating to a disability or sensory loss, and if so what they are.
- 2 **Record** your needs in your electronic and paper records.
- 3 **Alert/flag/highlight** them, so your needs and how best to meet them are '*highly visible*' whenever staff access your records.
- 4 **Share** details of your information and communication needs with providers of NHS and social care services who have permission to see them, and make sure they keep your records secure.
- 5 **Act** by taking steps to ensure you get information you can access and understand and by arranging communication support.

For NHS services, it is likely that your GP **will** ask about and record your information and communication needs in your GP record. When referring you for an outpatient appointment or other NHS services, this information should be '*highly visible*' to the receiving department, who transfer it to your hospital record, making it '*highly visible*' and act upon it.

This might mean they send correspondence or information in large print, easy read, Braille or audio format or by email or arrange for a lip reader or British Sign Language Interpreter to be available for your appointment.

For information contact your GP practice, Action on Hearing Loss or The Royal National Institute of Blind People.

5 Local NHS services

5.1 Primary and secondary care services

Primary care services are often your first point of contact when you need healthcare. They include services available at a GP practice or walk-in centre, community pharmacy, and NHS services provided by dentists or high street opticians.

Secondary care services are usually, but not always, hospital-based. They include out-patient clinics, planned and emergency hospital treatment and associated diagnostic services, for example radiology.

Commissioning of NHS services

NHS England (NHSE) and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are responsible for buying (commissioning) NHS services from GPs, dentists and hospitals. For more information about their role see section 15.

6 Non GP services to help you when unwell

6.1 Getting help when feeling unwell

It is not always necessary to contact your GP practice when you feel unwell. There are other services to help you decide whether you need to see a doctor or to put your mind at rest. These include:

- your local pharmacist
- NHS 111
- NHS walk-in centre
- minor injuries unit or urgent care centre.

Local pharmacist

A pharmacist can help with sore throats, colds and aches and pains by suggesting non-prescription medicines to ease symptoms and advise whether you need to see a doctor. As experts on medicines, they can answer questions about non-prescription remedies you want to buy or prescription items you take.

To find out about your nearest late-opening pharmacy, call NHS 111 or visit NHS website: www.nhs.uk/service-search

NHS 111

NHS111 is a confidential, free 24-hour telephone line operating in England. It provides a single point of access if you are worried about an urgent medical concern, a dental problem or seeking advice in a non-life-threatening situation. You can access the service online by visiting <https://111.nhs.uk/>

Depending on your symptoms, NHS 111 staff may tell you how to look after yourself at home or recommend you see a pharmacist or GP. They may be able to offer to book you an appointment, for when your GP surgery is next open. If the problem is more serious, they may advise you go to your nearest walk-in centre, minor injuries unit, or Emergency department. If very serious, staff can send an ambulance directly.

Note

999 is the number to call in serious, life-threatening situations.

Urgent treatment centres (walk-in centre or minor injury unit)

The NHS offers a mix of services able to help in urgent but not life-threatening situations. Each offers a different level of service. By the end of 2019, they will all be called urgent treatment centres.

NHS walk-in centre

These centres open seven days a week from early morning until late evening. Often in town centres and usually run by experienced nurses, they treat minor illnesses and injuries. You do not need an appointment.

Minor injuries units and urgent care centres

These are for patients with non-life-threatening injuries. Often located in hospital grounds, they treat broken bones, minor burns, head and eye injuries, insect and animal bites.

Emergency and out of hours dental services

Call NHS 111 to find out where to access NHS treatment in an emergency or out-of-hours. If you have a usual dentist, the practice website or out-of-hours message often explains how to access emergency care.

6.2 Serious or life-threatening illness or injury

If your illness or injury is serious or life-threatening, call 999 or go to your nearest Emergency department. Life-threatening situations include:

- loss of consciousness
- persistent severe chest pain
- heavy blood loss that cannot be stopped
- medicine overdose
- signs that indicate a stroke. These include weakness on one side of your face making your eye or mouth droop; inability to lift both arms at the same time; difficulties in speaking or understanding what is said.

Waiting time targets

The aim is for 95 per cent of patients attending the Emergency department to be admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours of arriving. NHSE publishes waiting time figures and they take account of waits at Emergency departments and minor injury units. Hospitals are encouraged to publish their own figures.

If you attend an Emergency department or spend a night on a ward, the hospital should ask you the Friends and Family Test question, described in section 7.4.

7 GP services

GP practices in England must register with the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The CQC inspects practices regularly to ensure they meet its standards. To find out what a practice must do to meet these standards and about how the CQC rates practices, visit the CQC website or read the CQC booklet '*What can you expect from a good GP practice*'.

A range of services and health professionals

GP practices offer services to prevent and treat illnesses and support people with long-term conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Nurse practitioners, nurse consultants and specialist nurses frequently work alongside GPs and practice nurses. They can diagnose, treat and manage a variety of health conditions. Some staff, due to their additional training, can prescribe from a list of medicines. See section 7.10 for information about supporting people with long-term conditions.

7.1 Registering with a GP practice

You do not need to be '*ordinarily resident*' in England to receive NHS primary *medical* care. Anyone may register and consult with a GP without charge but must pay NHS prescription charges, unless in an exempt group, for example, being aged 60 and over.

For details of practices in your area, visit NHS website or call NHSE Customer Contact Centre.

You have a right to choose your GP practice and it must accept you, unless there are reasonable grounds to refuse. It is not considered reasonable to refuse registration because you do not have a proof of address or personal identification at hand. The same applies if you are an asylum seeker, refugee, a homeless patient or an overseas visitor, whether lawfully in the UK or not.

If the practice is refusing to register you, it must give reasons for its refusal in writing. It may refuse to register you because:

- it has no capacity to take on new patients
- may not be accepting patients who live outside its practice boundary
- in your particular circumstances, it may not be appropriate to register with a practice a long way from where you live.

Each practice has a boundary, enclosing certain streets or postcodes. Practices are free to register new patients who live outside their boundary, but it is for a practice to decide if it is clinically appropriate and practical to register you in this way. Conditions for registering a patient living outside a practice area are explained later in this section.

If you cannot find a practice to accept you, ask NHSE to allocate you one by calling their Customer Contact Centre.

Choosing a practice

If a practice is accepting new patients, collect a practice leaflet or look on their website. This explains how to register and more about the staff and services they offer, including:

- name and qualifications of health professionals and support staff
- services such as special clinics for diabetics, health promotion activities and whether it supports trainee GPs
- opening hours
- how to make an appointment to see or speak to staff or for a home visit
- how to request a repeat prescription
- how to contact a doctor out-of-hours
- information for patients with disabilities or special language needs
- how to comment or complain about services.

Identify and ask about things important to you, for example telephone access to a GP or nurse, ease of parking or support for carers.

Practices have a responsibility to ensure everyone who needs to use their practice can do so. If you have particular difficulties getting to the practice, due to disability or caring responsibilities, discuss them with the practice manager so they can do their best to address or resolve them. If you are a carer, ask the practice to note this in your records. This can help your GP understand your needs better and support you and the person you care for.

The GP contract requires every patient to have a named, accountable GP who takes responsibility for co-ordinating their care. You can express a preference for who you would like this to be and practices should make reasonable efforts to accommodate you. This does not mean this is the GP you must see each time you visit. New patients should know the name of their accountable GP within 21 days of registration.

The practice should invite you for a new patient check to discuss your general health and where necessary, offer this through a home visit.

Registering with a practice if you live in a care home

Your GP may be willing to continue to care for you if you move permanently into a local care home. Otherwise you must register with a new practice. Care homes in some areas, have a nominated GP from a local practice who is responsible for all residents. The aim being for you to have a GP who becomes familiar with your health needs and for the care home to build a relationship with the GP. You have the right to request to register with a different practice.

As a care home resident, you are entitled to the same range of services as people living in their own home. You should not be asked to pay for GP or NHS services the GP says you need.

‘Out of area’ patient registration option

GP practices are free to register patients who live outside their practice boundary. They can agree to accept your application but without any obligation to offer home visits. You may want to consider this option if you are in relatively good health and move locally outside your current practice boundary or if you work, would like a practice close to work.

Before agreeing to your request, the GP must:

- be satisfied it is clinically appropriate and practical in your case, and
- make sure you understand the consequences of this type of registration.

The practice should explain what happens during normal hours when illness means you cannot reasonably be expected to visit the surgery.

Your practice must monitor the effectiveness of this arrangement and if your health needs change, may consider whether it would be better to register with a practice closer to home.

Practices do not have to offer out of area registration - either without home visits or with home visits when needed - so an application may be refused. It applies only to GP practices based in and patients living in England, not in cross border situations with Scotland or Wales.

Registering as a temporary resident

If you are going to live away from your usual address for up to three months, you can apply to be a temporary resident at a local practice. They are likely to accept you unless their list is full.

If you become ill while staying with friends, approach their practice to see if they are willing to treat you. If staying in a hotel, it may have an arrangement with a local practice. Otherwise, call NHS 111 and they can recommend the most appropriate action to take.

Changing your practice

You do not need to tell your practice if you want to change or have found another one to accept you. But, as a courtesy, you may wish to tell them. Once a new practice accepts you, your old practice transfers your medical records. These include your **unique 10-digit NHS number**, which eliminates errors that could occur with name only identification.

7.2 Arranging to see a GP

Extended hours and out-of-hours services

An increasing number of practices offer appointments before 8am, after 6pm and at weekends. In some areas, this may be at a local hub, where GPs see patients registered at local practices. When calling your practice outside its normal hours, you are usually redirected to their out-of-hours service. For non-urgent care, you can call NHS 111 for advice.

Making an appointment

Practices have a system for booking appointments. GPs have a duty of care to ensure they offer services in a manner and time that meets your clinical needs. There is usually a system that allows you to see a GP in an emergency when there are no appointments, or speak to a GP or nurse on the telephone at an agreed time.

As well as booking by telephone, the **Patient Online service**, lets you:

- book appointments with a GP of your choice or cancel appointments
- order repeat prescriptions (see section 10)
- view parts of your GP record, including information about medication, allergies, vaccinations, previous illnesses and test results and clinical correspondence such as referral letters and discharge summaries.

Ask your practice receptionist to explain how to register for online access. For information about online services, go to NHS website www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/gps/gp-online-services/

Making the most of your appointment

A typical appointment slot is 10 minutes. If you have complex or multiple issues to discuss, ask for a double appointment. Make sure your GP record identifies your need for information in a different format or help to take part in discussions due to disability or sensory loss.

- Make notes beforehand, to remind you what you want to tell the doctor or to ask about. Do not miss things out because you think they are minor or trivial. GPs can only work with what you tell them, so let them decide what is significant.
- If worried about new symptoms, try to remember when you first noticed them. Does there seem to be a pattern or certain times when they are better or worse? Could they be linked to changes in medication?
- If you do not understand the answer to your questions or any words used, ask for an explanation or for the answer to be written down.
- If going for test results and to discuss treatment, your doctor should tell you if there is more than one treatment, about the pros and cons of each and whether there are common side effects.

Seeking a second opinion

If you have doubts about a diagnosis or suggested treatment after discussing it with your GP, you can ask to be referred for a second opinion. You do not have a right to a second opinion but GPs rarely refuse, unless they do not believe it is necessary.

The referral may be to another GP in your practice or a consultant. If your case is complicated or diagnosis unclear, your GP or consultant may want a second opinion to ensure they explore all possible options.

Home visits

The practice leaflet should explain criteria for home visits. While having a general policy, decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, based on clinical need. Giving a full description of your condition when you phone the surgery helps the doctor decide if you need a home visit.

7.3 Removing a patient from the practice list

A practice can make a written request to NHS England for you to be removed from their list. This can happen if you tell them you are moving outside the practice boundary or relocating abroad. It can happen if the practice believes your behaviour towards staff or other patients is unacceptable or your relationship with it has irrevocably broken down.

If the practice intends to request to remove you from their list, it must have given you a written warning in the previous twelve months prior to requesting your removal, unless you have been violent, threatened staff or other patients and the police have been informed; or the practice believes issuing of a warning was not reasonable or practical.

The practice should provide you with specific reasons for wanting your removal, unless it reasonably believes the circumstance surrounding the request are such that it is not appropriate to give a specific reason, and there has been an irrevocable breakdown in the relationship between you and the practice. If it is difficult to register with another practice, contact NHS England, as they can allocate you to a new practice.

If you disagree with the reasons for your removal and believe you have been treated unfairly, you can complain to NHS England. See section 14 for information about making a complaint.

7.4 Helping to improve GP services

Patient Participation Groups

GP practices must have a Patient Participation Group (PPG) and make reasonable efforts to make sure it is representative of the practice population. PPGs bring the patients' perspective into the practice so that services, plans and activities respond to patients' needs and priorities.

Providing feedback

GP practices should offer you the opportunity, after an appointment, to respond to the Friends and Family Test question: *"how likely are you to recommend the practice where you've been treated to your friends or family if they needed similar treatment?"*

You can also provide feedback on NHS website and Care Opinion.

For more about the Friends and Family Test, go to www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/Pages/nhs-friends-and-family-test.aspx

7.5 Help with hearing difficulties

If hearing difficulties affect your daily life, make an appointment to see your GP. If there is no medical reason, such as an ear infection or build-up of wax, your GP can refer you to a local audiology department or specialist provider for a hearing test.

Audiology staff discuss the results with you and your options, including whether the test indicates you would benefit from a hearing aid in one or both ears. NHS hearing aids are provided on long term loan and batteries are supplied free of charge. If you want to buy a hearing aid privately, check the hearing aid dispenser is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

NICE produces a patient version of its guidance *NG98 Hearing loss in adults: assessment and management*, go to www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng98/informationforpublic

Action on Hearing Loss provides information about hearing loss and aids. Hearing Link helps people manage hearing loss.

Note

You can check your hearing using the Action on Hearing Loss online or telephone check. It is not a medical diagnosis but aims to identify hearing loss and if necessary, prompt you to visit your GP.

7.6 Help with mental health needs

Mental health issues are as important as physical illnesses and like physical illnesses, respond better when diagnosed and treated early. It is important to speak to your GP if you experience periods of anxiety, low mood, poor sleep or a loss of interest in things you used to enjoy on several days a week and this goes on for a month or more. A range of treatments can help, depending on the severity of your symptoms.

Talking treatments such as counselling can help you understand and manage your feelings. They are available through your GP under an initiative called '*Increasing Access to Psychological Therapy*' (IAPT).

Research shows older people benefit from talking treatments just as much as younger people.

Find out more by speaking to your GP or search NHS website at www.nhs.uk/service-search Click on the 'P' tab, choose '*Psychological therapies (IAPT)*' and enter your postcode to find your nearest service.

7.7 Referral for a physical or mental health condition

If you and your GP agree you should see a consultant about a physical condition, you have a right to choose a consultant-led team. For a mental health condition, you have a right to choose the consultant or named health care professional who leads the mental health team.

You can choose to have your first outpatient appointment at a hospital where that consultant works and be treated by their team. The hospital must be in England but can be an NHS or independent hospital that offers suitable treatment and provides services to the NHS for that treatment.

The consultant will not necessarily be present for this or future appointments but retains overall clinical responsibility for your care.

This choice is available in most circumstances but not if you need urgent or emergency care, for example if you have chest pains or cancer is suspected or if detained under the *Mental Health Act 1983*.

If you are not offered a choice, despite further discussion with your GP, contact your local CCG to find out what choice should be available to you. Search for your CCG on the NHS website.

Choosing your hospital – practical and quality issues

You can discuss your preferences and options with your GP, compare hospitals, including comments from patients recorded on NHS website or read hospital inspection reports published on the CQC website. As well as clinical care, you may be influenced by practical issues, such as car parking or public transport access.

Booking an appointment through NHS e-referral Service

The NHS e-referral service allows you to choose your hospital and book an appointment on a day and time convenient to you. If you choose your hospital and know when you could attend an outpatient appointment, you may be able to book the appointment before you leave the surgery.

If you want to think about your options, discuss them with family or friends or decide a convenient time to attend outpatients, your GP gives you an appointment request letter containing a *unique reference number and a password* so you can book an appointment later on.

To book an appointment later on:

- log into NHS e-referral online at www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/hospitals/nhs-e-referral-service/ or
- call Appointment Line on 0345 6088 888 or textphone 0345 850 2250.

You need the unique reference number and password for security. It ensures only you or someone you nominate can make or change your appointment. You can change an appointment online or by telephone.

Waiting times

You have a right to access certain services within maximum waiting times. You have the right under the NHS Constitution to:

- start your NHS consultant-led treatment within a maximum of 18 weeks from referral for non-urgent conditions
- be seen by a cancer specialist within a maximum of two weeks from referral, if a GP makes an urgent referral because cancer is suspected.

If this is not possible, the hospital responsible for your treatment should take all reasonable steps to offer you a choice of other hospitals that can see or treat you more quickly.

Although not a right, if your operation or treatment is cancelled for non-clinical reasons, on or after the day of admission (including the day of surgery), the NHS should aim to offer you another binding date within 28 days to be funded at the time and hospital of your choice.

7.8 Chiropody, physiotherapy and other services

Your GP can refer you to other health professionals for a diagnosis or treatment. You can see them at a local practice, health centre or hospital or they may visit you at home.

Chiropodists (also known as podiatrists) help with problems with your lower legs or feet. In some places, you can self-refer to the chiropody service but in many cases, you need a GP referral.

To receive NHS treatment, you must meet local eligibility criteria. This can mean having a medical foot problem, or being at risk of foot-related problems because you have diabetes, arthritis or circulatory problems.

The NHS is unlikely to offer routine care such as nail cutting but local voluntary organisations such as Age UK may do so.

Physiotherapists help with back pain and muscle strains. They may be members of a multi-disciplinary team offering rehabilitation following a fall or stroke or for conditions such as osteoporosis and asthma.

Continence services. See your GP if you have bladder or bowel problems. Your GP may decide to refer you to a district nurse or continence clinic for assessment and to discuss treatment or ways to manage a problem. Staff may decide you need pads or other products for long term management and as appropriate, include this in your care plan. Each CCG has criteria for deciding when continence products are necessary, which products it prescribes and may limit the number of pads per day. If the prescribed number do not meet your needs, speak to the health professional treating you and explain why. If unhappy with the outcome, you can make a complaint. There is information on managing continence issues in Age UK Guide IG15 *Bladder and bowel problems*. Continence Product Advisor gives evidence-based advice on how to choose and use suitable products.

Occupational therapists (OTs) advise on home modifications or equipment to make living at home easier.

Your GP or social services can refer you to an OT. They can be members of a multi-disciplinary team offering rehabilitation support.

Speech and language therapists (SLT) help with speech and communication. They can help with eating and swallowing difficulties that can occur following a stroke or in people with dementia.

Dietitians are experts in nutrition and special diets and work with SLTs to help patients with swallowing difficulties. They can advise on meals or supplements for people with poor or small appetites.

Marie Curie nurses offer free nursing care to support people with a terminal illness, as well as support for family and friends. They generally provide one-to-one nursing care and support overnight in your home.

Macmillan Nurses help patients with cancer and their families through diagnosis and treatment. They also advise on aspects of care when treatment is for comfort and not cure, known as palliative care.

Note

If you approach health professionals to treat you privately, contact the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to check they are registered to practice. The HCPC registers 15 health professions.

7.9 Falls Prevention Services

If you have a fall or start to feel unsteady, discuss this with your GP, even if you generally feel fine and were not injured by the fall. Your GP may want to check your medication or arrange tests to see if there is a medical reason to explain why you fell.

With your permission, your GP can refer you to the local falls prevention service for a falls risk assessment. Here they aim to:

- try to work out what is making you unsteady
- listen to what you think the problem might be
- work with you to develop a plan to help reduce your risk of falling.

This can include checking your eyesight, investigating any continence problems, checking your home for potential hazards, or attending an exercise class to improve your strength and balance.

As well as considering your risk of further falls, your GP may review your risk of osteoporosis. This condition affects bone strength and means you can break a bone following even a minor fall. If you are at significant risk, your GP should discuss options to reduce your risk. The National Osteoporosis Society provides information about osteoporosis.

7.10 Supporting people with long-term conditions

Millions of people have one or more '*long-term*' conditions (LTCs) such as diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or other lung diseases. LTCs can be managed with medication and other treatments but cannot be cured.

Staff involved in your care should be keen to help you better understand and manage your health. This may include asking about your health priorities and goals, then drawing up a care plan to help you manage your condition(s) on a day-to-day basis. Ask them about national support organisations and how to contact local support groups, where you can share experiences with people living with the same condition(s).

Many patients benefit from self-management courses. Ask your GP or support group if there are local courses you could attend.

NICE Quality Standards

NICE Quality Standards (QS) aim to help with the planning and delivery of quality of care by indicating what achievable markers of quality care look like. There are QS for chronic heart failure, COPD, dementia, type 2 diabetes, depression and stroke.

NICE also develops QS for NHS services, social care and public health. There are QS to help people live well with dementia and to support the mental wellbeing of older people in care homes. You can refer to them when discussing your care. Go to NICE website for QS information.

7.11 Supporting people to maintain their independence

Having one or more '*long term*' conditions can have an impact on your independence and wellbeing. It is important to tell your GP if you notice small, gradual changes in your ability to manage everyday things such as getting in and out of the bath, notice unintentional loss of weight; are suffering minor health setbacks or found it difficult to bounce back after an illness. This is sometimes described as '*showing signs of frailty*'.

When staff know about such things, they can work with you to keep you as well and independent as possible. They may invite you to discuss any worries about your health or ability to manage and find out what is important to you.

This might involve looking at your medication, or if you have become unsteady on your feet or had a fall, looking for possible reasons why. They may identify signs and symptoms for you to watch out for and explain what to do if you notice them. If you care for a partner, it can be helpful to look at what this role entails and identify local support to help you both.

They may discuss adding information to your Summary Care Record (SCR), (described in section 13).

7.12 Personal health budgets

A Personal Health Budget (PHB) aims to give you more choice, flexibility and control over how money is spent meeting your long term health and wellbeing needs. It is not new money but money the NHS would have spent on your care. If you have PHB, you and your NHS team agree how to spend it.

You have the right to have a PHB if eligible for NHS continuing healthcare (NHS CHC), unless there are clear clinical or financial reasons why it would not be appropriate. If you are not eligible for NHS CHC but are interested in having a PHB, speak to one of the health professionals managing your care. They can discuss this with you and approach your CCG if you would like to make a case for having one.

You can manage a PHB in one of three ways:

- a) **notional budget** where money is held on your behalf by the NHS who then arrange your care, or
- b) **real budget held by a third party organisation** that arranges your care, or
- c) by **direct payment** giving you control to manage the budget and care agreed with your NHS team.

You do not have to have a PHB if you do not want one. You only need to take as much control over decisions about your care as you wish.

For more information about PHB's, go to NHS website.

www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/help-with-health-costs/what-is-a-personal-health-budget/

8 NHS services for older people

8.1 Over-60s – free prescriptions

NHS prescriptions are free for people aged 60 and over.

8.2 Over-60s – free NHS sight tests

Anyone aged 60 or over is entitled to a free NHS sight test. This checks your vision and eye health and can pick up conditions, such as glaucoma, in the early stages before long-term damage is done.

Adults should have a test every two years. If aged 70 and over, you should have one as often as your optician recommends. They can use their professional judgement to decide the frequency of your sight test.

If you find it difficult to visit an optician, your usual optician may be able to visit you at home. If they cannot, call your CCG or local Healthwatch for information about opticians offering home visits.

Many care homes arrange for an optician to visit on a regular basis.

8.3 Over-65s – free seasonal flu jab

A dose of flu can lead to complications such as pneumonia or severe bronchitis in some people. As the flu virus is always changing, there is a new vaccine every year that targets viruses likely to be in circulation. This is why you need a flu jab every year.

The NHS offers a flu jab to people aged 65 and over, and to under 65s at risk of complications if they have flu. This includes people who have:

- specific long-term conditions, including chronic lung disease, a heart problem, diabetes, liver or kidney disease or multiple sclerosis
- had a stroke or a mini stroke – the latter is known as a transient ischaemic attack or TIA
- a lowered immune system because of cancer treatment or taking steroid medication.

You can have a free jab if you receive Carer's Allowance or are the main carer of an older or disabled person who would be at risk if you were ill.

GP practices usually start their flu jab service in September or early autumn. Community pharmacists offer free flu jabs in some areas.

8.4 Over-65s – free jab against pneumonia

You are eligible for this jab, commonly called the pneumo or PPV23 jab, if you are aged 65 and over, to protect against pneumonia, septicaemia and bacterial meningitis. You do not need one every year and most people have it only once. It is available through your GP practice.

8.5 Shingles vaccination

The shingles vaccination programme, introduced in 2013, recommends vaccination for people aged 70 to 79. The vaccine aims to reduce your risk of shingles. If you go on to have shingles, symptoms are likely to be milder and last for a shorter time.

You are eligible for vaccination as you turn 70 or 78 years old. You can also be vaccinated if you are in your 70s, were born after 1 September 1942 but did not have it when first eligible. You remain eligible until your 80th birthday. You can be vaccinated at any time but may find it convenient to have it when you have a seasonal flu jab. Your GP decides if you are vaccinated, as some people are not suitable, for example if your immune system is weakened after cancer treatment.

The vaccine is not available on the NHS to anyone aged 80 and over, as it seems to be less effective in this age group.

Your GP practice may have a leaflet explaining about shingles, possible side effects of the vaccine and the vaccination programme. To read more about it, go to the NHS website

www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/shingles-vaccination

8.6 NHS screening programmes

You must be registered with a GP practice to be included in a screening programme, as they use GP patient lists to issue invitations. Screening brings potential risks as well as benefits so the NHS produces information to help you decide whether to take part.

The **NHS breast screening programme** invites women aged between 50 and 70 for screening every three years. It is up to you whether to go for screening. You should receive a leaflet with your screening invitation, explaining the benefits and risks. A research programme is looking at extending the age range to include women between the ages 47 and 73.

Note

You will stop receiving screening invitations over the age of 70 but are still eligible for screening every three years. Contact your local breast screening clinic to request screening. Go to www.nhs.uk/ and search for '*breast screening services*'.

The **NHS cervical screening programme** invites women between the ages of 50 and 64 for screening every five years. Once you reach the age of 65, you are only invited if you have not been screened since the age of 50 or have had a recent abnormal result.

NHS website has information about the risks and benefits at www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Cervical-screening-test/Pages/Introduction.aspx

The **NHS national bowel screening programme** offers two types of screening to adults.

- '**Faecal occult blood (FOB) test**'. You are automatically sent a test kit every two years by post, between the ages of 60 and 74. There are instructions for use and you post it to a laboratory for analysis. If over the age of 75, you can request a screening kit every two years by calling the Bowel Screening helpline.
- '**Bowel scope screening**' is a one-off test gradually being offered to men and women around their 55th birthday. About two thirds of screening centres now offer this test. A doctor or nurse uses a thin, flexible instrument to look inside the lower part of the bowel and remove any small growths, called polyps that could turn into cancer. If you decide not to have it straight away, you can ask for it any time up to the age of 60, by calling the Bowel Screening helpline.

Go to NHS website for more information www.nhs.uk/conditions/bowel-cancer-screening/Pages/Introduction.aspx

NHS Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) screening is offered to men in their 65th year. This uses an ultra sound scanner (as used to monitor a developing baby during pregnancy). It can detect a symptom-free abnormality that can develop in the aorta – a major artery.

AAA screening is offered to men because aneurysms are more common in men. A large aneurysm can be serious but if detected at an early stage, it can be monitored and treated if necessary.

For more information go to NHS website
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/abdominal-aortic-aneurysm-screening/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Anyone aged 12 and over who has diabetes should be invited for screening every year to detect an eye condition: **diabetic retinopathy**. You can opt out but speak to your GP if you are not invited. There is a Public Health England leaflet: *Your Guide to diabetic eye screening* at www.gov.uk/government/publications/diabetic-eye-screening-description-in-brief

There are no plans to screen men to detect risk of **prostate cancer** because it has not been proven that the benefits of testing outweigh the risks. Speak to your GP if you want to know more or to understand the benefits and risks of having a blood test that could lead to a prostate cancer diagnosis.

NHS service to keep you well

NHS health check is a service that aims to assess your health and if necessary help you lower your risk of common but preventable diseases: heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, kidney disease.

It is offered every five years to people between the ages of 40 and 74 who have not already been diagnosed with one of these conditions. If you meet these criteria, you can expect a letter from your GP or local authority inviting you for a check. If you have the check when over 65, they will tell you of the signs and symptoms of dementia to watch out for.

Read more on the NHS website at
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/nhs-health-check/Pages/What-is-an-NHS-Health-Check.aspx

9 Help with health costs

Most NHS services are free but some groups of the population, including people aged 60 and over, must pay for services such as NHS dental treatment, and for glasses or contact lenses. If you are on a low income, you may be eligible for help with these costs.

If you receive Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, Income Support or Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, you are automatically entitled to help with the cost of dental treatment and glasses.

If you are on a low income and have savings of less than £16,000 (£23,250 if you live in a care home) you may be entitled to full or partial help with these costs through the NHS Low Income Scheme.

If you receive Universal Credit you may be eligible for help through the low income scheme, including sight tests and prescription charges.

Go to the NHS website for information

www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/universal-credit.aspx

If you receive Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, one of the other benefits above, or are eligible for help through the NHS Low Income Scheme, you may be eligible for help with the cost of travel when referred to see a consultant on NHS premises. In some circumstances, referrals by a GP or dentist mean you are entitled to help with travel costs. Ask the referring doctor or dentist whether their referral qualifies for help.

For more information, see factsheet 61, *Help with health costs* or the NHS website at www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/help-with-health-costs.aspx

10 Services at your local pharmacy

Pharmacists are experts on medicines and help if you have questions about, or difficulty taking prescribed or over-the-counter medicines. They may offer cholesterol testing, blood pressure checks and stop smoking advice.

Speak to your pharmacist if you find labels difficult to read, the usual packaging hard to open, or tablets difficult to swallow. If you must take many tablets on several occasions at different times of the day, let your pharmacist know if you find it difficult to take them as prescribed. Your pharmacist may offer a simple solution or be able to decide if you are eligible for special help due to disability.

In line with local CCG protocols, pharmacies may offer the following services:

- **Prescription collection service** – where the pharmacy receives or collects repeat prescriptions on behalf of a patient. Some CCGs do not allow pharmacies to *order* repeat prescriptions on behalf of patients.
- **Home delivery service** – delivers prescriptions to your door. While helpful, this limits the opportunity to ask questions about your medicines. Most pharmacists are happy to speak to you on the phone, so always call the pharmacy if you have questions about your medicines.

Electronic Prescription Service (EPS)

Electronic prescribing aims to improve efficiency and safety when dispensing medicines. It is particularly useful if you need repeat prescriptions. For repeat prescriptions, you nominate a pharmacy you want to dispense your prescription on a regular basis.

When you request a repeat prescription, it is sent quickly and securely, via the practice IT system, to your chosen pharmacy. This eliminates paper prescriptions and errors from reading handwriting.

Prescriptions are ready to collect an hour or two after you request them. If your prescription is unlikely to change, the GP can agree to set up automatic delivery of your prescription for a specified number of repeats.

You can amend your nominated pharmacy or amend it temporarily if you are going away and likely to need a prescription during that time.

Watch a video about EPS at www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaPJJEx5hjU

‘New medicines’ service

The New Medicines Service aims to support you in the early days of taking a new medicine, so you get maximum benefit from it. If prescribed new medicine for asthma, type 2 diabetes, COPD, high blood pressure or any blood thinning medicines, ask your pharmacy if you can take part.

For more about this service, see

www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/pharmacists/Pages/medicine-service-qa.aspx

Medicine Use Review (MUR)

Your GP should regularly review your medication to make sure you take the most appropriate medicines at the most appropriate dose.

In addition, your pharmacist may invite you for a MUR if you:

- have recently been discharged from hospital and changes were made to the medicines you take
- take multiple medications or take one where the dose is critical
- take medicines to help your breathing
- have cardiovascular disease or cardiovascular risk factors and take four or more regular medicines.

MUR helps make sure you get the most benefit from your medicines. It offers a chance to learn more about how they work and discuss side-effects you think they are causing, raise any problems taking your medicines and get advice on how to take them in the best way.

If you take non-prescription medicines, bring them with you so the pharmacist gets a complete picture of the medicines you take.

The pharmacist asks you to sign a consent form to have a MUR and to sharing feedback with relevant health professionals, such as your GP.

10.1 Reporting unwanted side effects from medication

The Yellow Card Scheme allows health professionals and patients to report unwanted side effects from prescription or non-prescription medicines or herbal remedies; defective medicines of an unacceptable quality; counterfeit medicines and problems with devices such as catheters or ear thermometers. A yellow card form is available in most pharmacies or you can complete an online form or call the yellow card hotline.

11 End of life care

Palliative care is care and support provided for people living with a *terminal illness*, which is defined as one where cure is no longer possible. It can help at any stage, not simply during the final months and weeks of an illness. It is not only offered to people with cancer. The aim is to address your physical, emotional and spiritual needs, make life more comfortable and support your family before and after your death.

Developed by the hospice movement, palliative care skills are increasingly available outside a hospice environment for example in hospital or as part of care in your own home. Marie Curie Care has information to help people affected by a terminal illness, see www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/terminal-illness

End of Life care refers to NHS-provided care and support if you are likely to be in the last year of life and offers support to your family or informal carers too. The focus should be on the quality of your life and death, rather than the length of your life.

Choice about end of life care

Many people die in hospital, yet most people say they would prefer to be cared for at home. If you are about to make such a decision, talk it over with your GP and seek thoughts of people you live with. Find out what you can expect as your illness progresses, what support is available from NHS staff to help you and informal carers during the day and at night. If you live alone, ask what 24-hour support would be available.

If diagnosed with an advanced, progressive, incurable illness, the NHS team caring for you should offer, or you can ask for, the opportunity to discuss your future care. This is often referred to as '**advance care planning**'. You can choose to involve your family or nominate someone else in the discussions. Either at one or over several meetings, you can:

- discuss treatment options and likely progression of your illness
- express your thoughts, concerns, wishes and preferences, including where you would like to be cared for
- ask about support available locally to support you and family members.

Staff should record your wishes and preferences in an '*advance care plan*' or '*preferred priorities for care*' document and review it with you regularly. They must seek your consent to share it with professionals involved in your care, so it can be called upon if you are unable to explain your wishes. It is a 'live' document, so can be amended and added to at any time.

You may consider making a Lasting Power of Attorney, advance statement or advance decision to refuse treatment. See factsheet 22, *Arranging for someone to make decisions on your behalf* and factsheet 72, *Advance decisions, advance statements and living wills*.

In some areas, there is an **Electronic Palliative Care Co-ordination System (EPaCCS)**. It holds care plans and end of life preferences of people with incurable or life-limiting illnesses. Out-of-hours doctors and paramedics can access it with your consent, so they can consider and meet your end of life choices and preferences where possible. Ask your GP if EPaCCS is available or planned for your area.

One Chance to get it right: improving peoples experience of care in the last few days and hours of life, identifies **five priorities for care of the dying patient** that staff should follow when it is thought someone may die within the next few days or hours, irrespective of where they are living at the time.

One Chance to get it right recommends that staff should ensure:

- 1 That if a patient may die in the next few days or hours, this is recognised and communicated clearly, decisions made and actions taken in accordance with the person's needs and wishes, and these are regularly reviewed and decisions revised accordingly.
- 2 Sensitive communication takes place between staff and the dying person, and those identified as important to them.
- 3 They involve the dying person and those identified as important to them in decisions about treatment and care to the extent they would like.
- 4 They explore and respect the needs of families and those identified as important to the dying person and meet them as far as possible.
- 5 An individual plan of care, including food and drink, symptom control and psychological, social and spiritual support, is agreed, co-ordinated and delivered with compassion.

Useful publications and websites on end of life care

- *'Planning for your future care'* explains the rationale behind advance care planning. You can download from the National Council of Palliative Care website at www.ncpc.org.uk/freedownloads
- *Ambitions for palliative and end of life care – a national framework for 2015 - 2020*, published by the National Palliative and End of Life Partnership, describes the six ambitions that 27 partnership members, with a deep commitment to improving end of life care, would like to be achieved. You can read it at www.endoflifecareambitions.org.uk/
- *Dying Matters* and its partner website *'Find me help'* <http://findmehelp.org.uk/>
- *Gold Standards Framework* – an established training programme and accreditation scheme for front line staff caring for people in the last years of life. You can find information and search for accredited care homes at www.goldstandardsframework.org.uk/patients-amp-carers
- *'Thinking about end of life'* information guide available from Age UK Advice or at www.ageuk.org.uk

12 Complementary therapies

These include therapies such as acupuncture, chiropractic, osteopathy, homeopathy and herbal medicine. They are not generally available as NHS treatment but your GP will know of circumstances when they may be. If considering these therapies on a private basis, speak to your GP before making an appointment. If you take prescription medicines, you must be sure that any medicine or herbal remedy recommended by a therapist is compatible with your prescription medicines.

Always check a therapist has appropriate qualifications and insurance to treat you. Osteopaths and chiropractors must register with their own regulatory bodies – General Osteopathic Council and General Chiropractic Council - in order to practise legally in the UK.

Other professions such as acupuncturists and herbal medicine practitioners have their own professional bodies but not a regulatory body. These bodies can apply to the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) to receive the PSA Quality Mark and be accepted on the PSA Accredited Register. Go to PSA website to read about accreditation, check Registers online and find a local registered practitioner.

13 Accessing your health records

A health record is a historical record of your illnesses and NHS care. It contains information about your physical and mental health, medication, vaccinations, consultation notes, investigations such as blood, referrals, hospital discharge letters. You may have paper and electronic records.

Staff based at your GP practice add to your GP record at each appointment. Hospitals you visit will hold their own records about your care, as will your dental practice and opticians. This means various places hold personal and health related information about you and must keep this information confidential and secure.

You have the right under *The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)* and *Data Protection Act 2018* to apply for access to personal information held about you free of charge, by making a Subject Access Request, known as a SAR. You can request electronic access or paper copies. You can give another person permission to access your health records.

A person responsible for data management within an organisation is called a data controller. They can only refuse to give access to information if, in their opinion, disclosure would cause serious harm to your physical or emotional health or another party; *or* it relates to a third party who has not given consent for disclosure (where that third party is not a health professional who has cared for you) and after taking into account the balance between the duty of confidentiality to the third party and right of access of the applicant, they conclude it is reasonable to withhold third party information.

GP records

Registering at your practice for Patient Online, gives you online access to parts of your electronic GP record and clinical correspondence. You can choose to nominate someone you trust to access your record.

To access parts not visible through Patient Online, write to the practice manager explaining the dates of the record you wish to see and anything else to help staff fulfil your request.

You will have a **Summary Care Record (SCR)**, created from your GP record, unless you choose not to have one. It contains information about your current medication, allergies and medication you react badly to. You can choose to include additional information for example about long term health conditions, treatment preferences or significant medical history. Access to your SCR helps an authorised doctor or health professional treat you and respect your preferences, if you cannot communicate with them and need health care away from the practice, particularly if it is an emergency. Speak to your GP if you would like to see your SCR, as you cannot view it via Patient Online.

Hospital records

To access hospital records, apply in writing to the records office. They require proof of your identity or of your right to access, if applying on behalf of someone else. You can ask to view or for paper copies of all records and test results the hospital holds or for those relating to a health condition or period of care. Many hospitals have an application form to help them provide what you want.

Time scales

The *GDPR* requires organisations to respond to your request within 28 days, counting from the day after they received it.

Access to medical records of a deceased person

Access to Health Records Act 1990 covers records of a deceased person. To access a record under this Act, you must be:

- a personal representative (executor or administrator of an estate), or
- have a claim resulting from the death (either a relative or other person).

Ask the deceased person's GP how to access their GP record. For their hospital records, contact the records office at the hospital they attended.

14 Resolving problems and making a complaint

Each GP practice, pharmacy, opticians and dental practice providing NHS services must follow the NHS complaints procedure and have a senior staff member responsible for resolving concerns and problems.

Try to raise concerns at the time with the member of staff, their manager or the person responsible for complaints handling. Some problems can be resolved informally in this way. If this does not resolve your complaint or you want to make a formal complaint, ask for a copy of their complaints procedure. This should tell you what to do.

If you feel uncomfortable making a complaint to the staff or organisation providing the service, raise it with organisation that commissions the service. NHS England is the commissioner of the services listed above.

Every area of England has a free **NHS independent complaints advocacy service** commissioned by the local authority. Contact them if you are thinking of making, or want to make, a complaint about NHS care or services. Your local Healthwatch has details of the local service.

Advocacy staff do not suggest any course of action but:

- help you think through exactly what you want to complain about and what you want to achieve by making the complaint
- help you write letters and prepare for meetings
- arrange for an advocate to support you at meetings if you want one.

If your complaint is about services or care in hospital, there will be a hospital Patient Advice Liaison Service, known as PALS. They can try to help you informally or explain how to make a formal complaint. Hospitals must follow the NHS complaints system.

For information about what should happen when you raise concerns or wish to make a formal complaint see factsheet 66, *Resolving problems and making complaints about the NHS* and factsheet 5, *Dental Care: NHS and private treatment*.

15 Health and social care organisations

The following organisations were introduced by the *Health and Social Care Act 2012*. The Act applies in England only.

NHS England (also known as NHS Commissioning Board)

NHS England works to the Department of Health mandate and oversees delivery of NHS services. It is nationally accountable for achievements of NHS organisations and for continued improvement in the quality of treatment and care.

Commissioning role of NHS England

Through its **four Regions**, NHS England is responsible for commissioning (buying):

- local GP services (in some cases co-commissioned with a CCG), dental services, opticians and pharmacy services
- all healthcare for prisoners and the armed forces
- specialised services for a range of conditions including rare conditions.

Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)

Every GP practice must be a member of a CCG, which is made up of GPs from local practices. CCGs have representatives from other health professionals on their Board. There are 195 CCGs.

Commissioning role of CCGs

CCGs buy local services for their local population such as NHS 111, out-of-hours and emergency care, community services, hospital care, NHS continuing healthcare, mental health and learning disability services.

When commissioning, they must take account of the NHS Constitution, their local health and wellbeing strategy and take advice from bodies including their clinical networks and senates.

Some CCGs have fully delegated responsibility for commissioning general practice, while others have joint commissioning responsibilities with NHS England.

Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB)

Each local authority (county and unitary authority) has a HWB. It plays a key role in the purchase of local services, by bringing together leaders of the local health and social care system (CCGs, local councillors, Director of Adult Social Care, Director of Public Health and local Healthwatch) to work in partnership and agree how to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population. HWBs can invite representatives from voluntary and community organisations to be members.

The HWB must prepare **joint strategic needs assessment** of the local population and a **joint health and wellbeing strategy (JHWS)**.

Local CCG's and NHS England Regional Teams use these documents to inform their commissioning plans. The HWB scrutinises these plans to ensure they reflect JHWS needs, support joint working by health and social care services to the benefit of patients and lead to continuous improvement in the quality of care.

Public Health England (PHE)

PHE is an executive agency of the Department of Health. It provides national leadership and expert services to support public health in England. It develops plans to protect the population from infectious diseases – ranging from influenza pandemics to terrorist attacks. It is responsible for reducing health inequalities, by enabling and supporting individuals and communities to improve their own health.

It buys and delivers programmes to promote health and wellbeing and works with NHS, local government and other agencies to address factors that can affect our health, for example housing, transport and leisure services.

Public Health – local authority

Each local authority (LA) has a Director of Public Health and is responsible for local public health improvement and putting PHE plans into action at a local level such as the Heatwave Plan. Directors of Public Health are statutory members of HWBs.

LAs must arrange services such as NHS health checks and implement national plans to protect the nation's health, for example against pandemic flu. The NHS, working closely with LA's, retains responsibility for public health services such as national screening programmes.

Healthwatch England

Healthwatch England is the national consumer champion created to gather and represent views of health and social care service users, members of the public and local Healthwatch. It aims to influence policy and service delivery through advising NHS England, local authorities, CQC and Secretary of State for Health.

Local Healthwatch

There are 152 local Healthwatch bodies commissioned and funded by their county council or unitary authority. They gather views and experiences of users of health and social care services and carry out and publish reports on their investigations of local services. As HWB members, they help make sure views of patients and carers are taken seriously and are an integral part of local commissioning.

Local Healthwatch provides information, advice and support on local health and care services. In some areas, it provides the local NHS independent complaints advocacy service to support people making or thinking about making a complaint about NHS services. If not providing the service, it can signpost to it.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Each hospital Trust operates a PALS service. PALS staff can tell you about Trust services and are keen to hear from patients who wish to make complimentary comments or have concerns about their care.

Early intervention by PALS staff can help resolve problems before they become major issues. They can give details of the NHS complaints process, local NHS independent complaints advocacy service and put you in contact with the complaints manager.

Useful organisations

Action on Hearing Loss

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Charity tackling hearing loss and providing information about specialist equipment and services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Bowel screening programme

Telephone 0800 707 6060 (free call)

Call if you are over 70 and would like to request a bowel screening kit.

Care Opinion

www.careopinion.org.uk/

Telephone 0800 122 31 35

Enables the public to give feedback on their experience of NHS or social care services and the organisation to respond.

Carers Direct

www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/

Telephone 0300 123 1053

Provides free and confidential information seven days a week for people who have care and support needs, their carers, and people who are planning their future care needs.

Carers UK

www.carersuk.org

Telephone 0808 808 7777

Provides information, advice and support to carers, has local support groups, and campaigns on carers' issues.

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

www.cqc.org.uk/content/help-advice

Telephone 03000 616161

Regulates and inspects hospitals, care homes, care agencies, GP and dental practices in England. It accepts comments from the public about the quality of services but does not investigate complaints.

Continence Product Advisor

www.continenceproductadvisor.org

Website offering evidence based information to help you choose continence products.

Dying Matters

www.dyingmatters.org

Telephone 08000 21 44 66

Aims to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement and make plans for the end of life. Provides information for professionals and the public and has a useful website offering postcode links to local services, information and a supportive online community.

Department of Health (DH) publications

www.orderline.dh.gov.uk/ecom_dh/public/home.jsf

Telephone 0300 123 1002

When ordering, have the publication title and reference number to hand.

Equality Advisory Support Service

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

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

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

Hearing Link

www.hearinglink.org

Telephone 0300 111 1113 Mon-Fri 10am-2pm

Charity for people with hearing loss and their families. It aims to give knowledge, skills and confidence to manage practical and emotional challenges hearing loss can bring.

Local Healthwatch

www.healthwatch.co.uk

Telephone 03000 68 3000

Each local authority has a Healthwatch body that offers information on local care services and may run or signpost to the local independent NHS complaints advocacy.

NHS Digital

<https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/our-work/keeping-patient-data-safe/how-we-look-after-your-health-and-care-information>

The provider of data and IT systems for health and social care.

National Osteoporosis Society

www.nos.org.uk

Helpline 0808 800 0035

Provides information about osteoporosis, its prevention and support available for those with osteoporosis.

NHS website cancer screening

www.nhs.uk/conditions/cancer/

Provides information on breast, cervical and bowel cancer screening.

NHS website

www.nhs.uk

Comprehensive online information service to help you find NHS services, identify how you can improve and make choices about your health and manage long term conditions.

NHS England

www.england.nhs.uk/contact-us/complaint/

Customer Contact Centre: 0300 311 22 33

Commissions GP, dentists, pharmacy and optical services. If you cannot access the NHS website, call them for details of local services.

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

www.rnib.org.uk

Telephone 0303 123 9999

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

Self Management UK

www.selfmanagementuk.org/

Telephone 0800 988 5560

Run courses to help people with long-term conditions maintain their health and improve their quality of life.

Yellow Card Scheme

<https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>

Telephone 0800 731 6789 Mon-Fri 10am and 2pm

Allow you to report unwanted side effects or reactions to prescription, non-prescription or herbal medicines; report counterfeit or fake medicines, defective medicines or problems with medical devices. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency administers the scheme.

Health professional organisations

General Chiropractic Council (GCC)

www.gcc-uk.org

Telephone 020 7713 5155

Regulate the practice of UK chiropractors. Chiropractors must register with the GCC to practise. Use their website to find a local chiropractor.

General Osteopathic Council (GOC)

www.osteopathy.org.uk

Telephone 020 7357 6655

Regulate the practice of UK osteopathy. Osteopaths must register with the GOC in order to practise. Use their website to find a local osteopath.

Health and Care Professions Council

www.hpc-uk.org/

Telephone 0300 500 6184

Regulates and registers health, psychological and social work professionals, with register of those who meet their standards.

Professional Standards Authority

www.professionalstandards.org.uk

Telephone 020 7389 8030

Oversees statutory UK health and social care regulatory bodies and sets standards and accreditation for organisations with voluntary registers.

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 or Age Cymru 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

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

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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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