

Raising a concern or complaint about an NHS service

About NHS Complaints

The NHS works hard to provide a high-quality service, but if something goes wrong and you are unhappy with the service you or someone you know has received, you have the right to raise concerns. By doing so, the NHS can try to put things right and learn from your experiences.

What are NHS services?

NHS services can include hospitals, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, ambulances and opticians. These services can be delivered in hospitals, clinics, in the community, or in prisons. They can also be delivered in private health establishments where the NHS has paid for the treatment. This can also include NHS-funded nursing or residential homes.

Who can complain?

Anyone affected by NHS care or decisions can complain, including on someone's behalf with their consent—even if the person has died. Young people under 18 can complain independently. The NHS cannot accept complaints on their behalf without consent unless the young person is unable to complain themselves.

If you paid for treatment privately or through insurance, you cannot complain to the NHS. Private providers (e.g., hospitals, dentists, care homes) have their own complaints procedures. Complaints about care homes or nursing homes only go through the NHS if the NHS paid for the care.

Different ways to raise concerns

- **Speak to a member of staff directly** – You can speak to a member of staff who is delivering the NHS service, or their manager, to express what you're unhappy about.
- **Speak to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** – PALS aim to ensure that the NHS listens to all patients and their relatives, carers and friends. They aim to answer your questions and resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. Note that not all NHS services have such teams.
- **The NHS Complaints Procedure** – This may be the best option if you have already raised your concerns but they have not yet been fully resolved. You may also want to make a complaint if you have serious concerns about standards of care or a complex issue which you consider requires formal investigation. See Factsheet #3 for more information.

What is the time limit for making a complaint?

You should normally raise a complaint as soon as possible – ideally within 12 months of the incident or from the date you became aware of the issue you are complaining about. NHS organisations may waive this time limit if there are valid reasons why you were unable to complain sooner.



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