



Community Health Councils (CHC) advocacy guide

This guide will tell you what to expect if you decide to work with the CHC advocacy service to raise a concern about NHS care and/or treatment.

We have complaints advocates who can use communications toolkits and have access to interpreters. We can provide information in different languages, large print, easy read and audio format.

The different ways to contact us are on the back page. Please let us know what you need and we will do our best to help.

Your right to complaints advocacy

By law, people who wish to complain about the care and /or treatment they receive from the NHS are entitled to free, independent and confidential advocacy services to help them make their complaint.

Call us on

Community Health Councils (CHCs) are independent of the NHS. CHCs are governed by volunteer members who are local people.

About our complaints advocacy staff and our service

All our complaints advocacy staff are trained. Our complaints advocates have the National Advocacy Qualification. We deliver our complaints advocacy service in line with national standards set by the Board of CHCs in Wales.

What our complaints advocacy service can and can't do

Our complaints advocacy service can:

- Support you to make a complaint about a service, care or treatment provided or paid for by the NHS
- Support you to make a complaint on someone else's behalf, including if someone has died
- Listen to your concerns
- Signpost you to other organisations if we think that someone else can also help
- Answer questions about the NHS concerns process and explain your options

- Provide a step by step guide to the NHS concerns process and offer some tips
- Provide you with a trained complaints advocate, an experienced worker who can help you raise your concern and support you through the process.

Our complaints advocacy service can't:

- Make decisions on your behalf
- Offer an opinion on the validity of a concern
- Offer clinical opinions or give medical advice
- Offer advice about on-going care and treatment
- Investigate concerns

- Provide support with Continuing Healthcare or Individuals Patient Funding Request Panels
- Provide support at inquests
- Offer additional support such as bereavement and counselling.
Contact details for such professionals can be provided if required
- Help you to raise a concern yourself if you are under 18 years old
- Usually work on concerns that are over 12 months old unless you have only just found out that you have cause for complaint, or have some other good reason for not raising your concerns sooner
- Give legal advice or help with legal action

- Help with issues not covered by NHS complaints regulations. This includes things like privately funded treatment
- Get NHS staff disciplined
- Help you if you don't live in Wales.

Even if we are not able to help with an issue, we may be able to signpost you to someone else who can help. Please do ask us.

When can our Complaints Advocacy Service help?

The NHS Wales concerns process “Putting things right” is designed to help people to get their concerns heard and where possible, resolved.

It encourages people to talk to their healthcare provider who may be able to get something put right there and then. If you’re not sure, you can contact us and we will help you find the right person to talk to.

Our complaints advocacy service can help you at any stage in the NHS Wales concerns process. The key stages are:

Raise your concern with the service provider

If you cannot resolve your concern informally, or you would prefer to raise your concern formally our complaints advocacy service can help you. Usually you need to raise your concern within 12 months of the events that you want to complain about. However, there may be occasions where the NHS body will consider your concern outside of these timescales.

Making a complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

If you are dissatisfied with the final response provided by the NHS you can take your complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).

The Ombudsman is able to consider complaints made to him within one year of the matters complained about (or within one year of the complainant becoming aware of the issue). If your complaint is about something that happened more than a year ago but you complained to the Health Board (or Trust) within one year, you should complain to the

Ombudsman within twelve weeks of the Health Board's (or Trust's) response.

What sort of support can we offer?

Depending on your needs we can support you with any or all of the following:

- Find information relevant to your concern.

You may feel that you need a bit of help to find information, for example asking for a copy of any relevant medical records.

- Think through your concerns, the concerns process and what you might realistically achieve.

Concerns are sometimes about things that are very distressing and the process of raising a concern can seem very daunting. Sometimes people find it helps to talk through

their concerns and how the process works with someone who is knowledgeable, empathetic and independent.

- Write letters.

A concern is more likely to be resolved quickly and successfully if it is expressed clearly. We can help you work out what you want to say and help you draft letters.

- Attend NHS concerns meetings.

Sometimes it is necessary to meet with NHS staff as part of the concerns process. This can feel daunting and sometimes upsetting. We can support you to prepare for and attend meetings with NHS staff so that you can make the most of the opportunity to discuss your concerns.

We will provide the type and level of support that you need, based on our discussions with you. For example you may feel that, because of disability, ill health, communication or language barriers, grief or other reasons, you need more support from a complaints advocate throughout the process.

Alternatively, once you have talked your concerns through with an advocate you may feel happy to continue without support.

We work with anyone who lives in Wales and is over 18 years old, no matter what their needs, including but not exclusively, people who have:

- Mental health issues
- Learning difficulties
- Sensory disabilities
- Little or no English and different cultural backgrounds
- Suffered a bereavement.

Or anyone else who needs help with their NHS concern.

Our complaints advocacy staff have access to:

- Secure case management and reporting systems
- Letter templates
- Interpreting facilities
- Communications kits and other resources

How the process works

When you first contact us, one of our staff will talk to you about your concern, what sort of help you think you require and if you have any particular needs such as large print materials or access to someone who can sign.

If they think we can help you they will explain our service to you. If we are unable to help you we will try to signpost you to someone who can.

If you need a complaints advocate, one will aim to contact you within seven days and agree an initial plan with you. This plan sets out what

we have agreed we will do on your behalf and how we will keep in touch with you through the process.

If you would like this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us. You can download it from our website or ask for a copy by contacting our office (contact details below).

www.communityhealthcouncils.org.uk

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