



**How do I get involved in  
primary care  
commissioning?  
Information for patients  
and the public**

# **How do I get involved in primary care commissioning?**

## **Information for patients and the public**

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## Introduction

NHS England is committed to putting people at the heart of everything we do and strengthening participation in our work, as set out in our [Patient and Public Participation Policy](#). This includes the commissioning of primary care - the planning, buying and monitoring of services to make sure that they are high quality and meet people's needs. We know that by involving those who need, use and care about health services in our work, we can together improve health and care services, and support people to lead healthier lives. We target resources to those who need them most, reduce inequalities and can save the taxpayer money.

Primary care services include general practice (GP), dental, optician (eye health) and pharmacy services. They provide the first point of contact with the NHS and account for a large proportion of overall NHS work, for example, over five million GP appointments take place each week.

In many parts of the country, NHS England shares its responsibility for commissioning GP services with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs – the local commissioners). This is called 'co-commissioning'.

This document outlines the main opportunities for people to get involved and influence primary care services, and the way that they work with other health and care services, including hospitals.

People can give us their views and work with us in a range of ways, for example, attending events and completing surveys. The [NHS England website](#) provides a hub of information for patients and the public who want to find out more about participating in the work of NHS England. The website also provides resources and links to a range of training opportunities for patients and the public. By providing a 'one stop shop' of involvement information we hope to enable more people to have their say on the health and care issues that matter to them.

## How do I get involved in primary care commissioning in my local area?

### Giving feedback and making comments and complaints

You can give feedback on primary care services in a number of ways. Providing feedback can help to influence commissioning of services. Some of the opportunities to provide feedback include:

- Responding to surveys such as the [GP Patient Survey](#).
- Completing the [Friends and Family test](#).
- Posting feedback on websites like [NHS Choices](#) and [Patient Opinion](#).
- Making comments and complaints.

When making a complaint, you can choose to complain to either of the following:

The healthcare provider. This is the organisation where you received the NHS service, for example your hospital, GP surgery or dental surgery.

The commissioner. This is the organisation that pays for the service or care you received. If your complaint is about primary care services such as GPs, dentists, opticians or pharmacy services, [contact NHS England](#).

Complaining to NHS England may be the right option if you are not comfortable complaining directly to your healthcare provider, or if you feel this is not appropriate. Please note: if you have already complained to your healthcare provider, the commissioner will not be able to re-investigate the same concerns. If you are unhappy with the outcome of your complaint, you may wish to go to the next stage of the NHS complaints procedure. You can find more information about our [complaints process on the NHS England website](#).

### **Patient Participation Groups**

All GP practices must have a Patient Participation Group (PPG) made up of patients from the practice. PPGs meet regularly with staff and talk about how to improve services and promote health for people who use the practice. Many PPGs get involved in broader discussions about health services for a wider local area, and work together in networks. If you would like to join the PPG at your GP practice you should contact them to find out more. The [National Association of Patient Participation](#) also provides information about the role of PPGs and how to get involved.

### **Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs)**

CCGs are NHS organisations led by a group of GPs with involvement from other healthcare professionals, such as nurses and hospital consultants. They organise the commissioning of most local health services, including hospital care. CCGs also have a duty to improve the quality of primary care services in their area. In some areas they are fully or partially responsible for planning, buying and monitoring GP services for people in their area. CCGs involve local people in their commissioning work in a number of ways. You can contact [your CCG](#) for information about local opportunities to make your voice heard.

### **Planning**

NHS England and CCGs are required by law to provide information or involve patients and the public when changes to local primary care services are being planned. This might be a dental practice closing or moving; providing new GP services, or doing a review of what pharmacy services are needed locally. The way that you are informed or invited to get involved will vary depending on what changes are being considered. For example, you may get a letter about proposed changes, or you might get involved by becoming a member of a working group.

## Getting involved in buying and checking the quality of services

As a member of the public you can participate in a range of activities that support better primary care services at local level. You can find out about these through your local CCG, [Healthwatch](#), PPG or voluntary sector groups. Examples of opportunities include:

- Going to a public meeting to listen and ask questions, for example a CCG governing body meeting.
- Becoming a member of a group which makes decisions on new providers of services or funding priorities.
- Becoming part of a group that quality checks primary care services, such as health champions.
- Becoming a member of a CCG patient reference group, a regional PPG forum, or local engagement board. Names vary but all these groups will get involved in looking at primary care locally and how it can be improved.
- Participating in discussions on social media or responding to a local survey about primary care.

Many CCGs, charities and other local organisations provide training and support for members of the public to support their involvement in what can feel like a complicated system.

## Dental, pharmacy and optometry (eye health) services Local Professional Networks

Patients and the public can be members of local professional networks (LPNs). These bring together partners to improve local dental, community pharmacy and optometry (eye health) services and ensure that they are well connected with other services. You can find out more about your [local LPN on the NHS England website](#).

If you want to contact NHS England about getting involved in local primary care services, you can do so by contacting the [relevant regional office](#).

## Healthwatch

Local Healthwatch organisations represent the views of the public and give communities a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are provided in their area.

Primary care is a priority for local Healthwatch with groups contributing to national reports and working with NHS England and CCGs to improve primary care and influence local priorities. You can [find contact details for your local Healthwatch](#) and get in touch with them about local involvement opportunities.

## Local Health and Wellbeing Boards

These boards review current and future health and social care needs of local people and recommend health and care priorities for action on this basis. Membership includes local CCGs, the local authority (council) and local Healthwatch. Charity and community groups may also work with Health and Wellbeing boards to represent the views of people in the area.

Your local authority will be able to provide you with details about the work of your Health and Wellbeing board.

## How do I get involved in primary care commissioning at national level?

At a national level NHS England's work on primary care commissioning includes:

- Planning for primary care services and producing policy and guidance to support commissioners;
- Influencing the development of national contracts, for example for GP and dental services;
- Developing national investment programmes, for example to improve GP premises, IT systems, and availability of appointments;
- Agreeing priorities to ensure the best use of available budgets and resources;
- Monitoring services to make sure that they are high quality and met people's needs.

Primary care commissioning at a national level takes account of feedback from patients. This comes from the national [GP Patient Survey](#), the [NHS England Customer Contact Centre](#), and information from partners such as [Healthwatch](#).

### Patient and Public Voice formal advisory roles

Members of the public are included on national committees and boards which support NHS England's primary care commissioning and programmes. These roles are advertised for application using our 'In Touch' newsletter and networks such as Healthwatch and voluntary sector partners.

You can [sign up to receive In Touch](#) and get regular updates about national public participation opportunities.

## Developing patient and public participation in primary care commissioning

Whilst there are already a number of ways that people can get involved and influence primary care services, we are always looking at how we can further strengthen this area of work.

Some of the issues we are working on are:

- Ways to ensure that patient and public voice is taken into account in decision-making and support quality improvement in primary care commissioning.
- How to make the best use of patient and public feedback, gathered at a more local level, to inform national commissioning.
- Making sure that we hear the voices of groups of people who are under-represented and may experience worse health than others.
- Ways to support local and national commissioners and help them involve the public in a meaningful way.
- Changes to the primary care commissioning environment including co-commissioning, [new models of care](#) and [devolution](#), which provide more local control of local services.

## OFFICIAL

NHS England has developed a new [Framework for Patient and Public Participation in Primary care](#). The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to those responsible for commissioning primary care services on how they should involve patients and the public.

There will be an opportunity for people to [give feedback](#) on how the framework is working in practice up until 31 December 2016. If you have any questions or want to find out more about how you can get involved, particularly at the national level, please email [england.nhs.participation@nhs.net](mailto:england.nhs.participation@nhs.net)