

Factsheet 44

NHS services

September 2024

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 and other healthcare professionals

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.

The information in this factsheet is correct for the period September 2024 to August 2025.

Age UK produces other factsheets on NHS services – these include 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 advice. Contact details can be found at the back of this factsheet.

Contact details for any organisation mentioned in this factsheet can be

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7.6 Shingles vacSof

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,

5 Non-GP services to help if you are unwell

5.1 Getting help when feeling unwell

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

NHS 111 – including urgent dental care

urgent treatment centre, NHS walk-in centre or minor injuries unit

local pharmacist

NHS 111

NHS 111 is a confidential, free 24-hour telephone line and online service operating in England. It provides a single point of access if you are worried about an urgent medical concern, a dental problem, are seeking advice in a non-life-threatening situation or have run out of prescribed medicine. Ask for a translator if you need one.

For more information, see <https://111.nhs.uk/>

Depending on your symptoms, NHS 111 staff may tell you how to look after yourself at home or recommend another service to help you such as a community pharmacy. They can book a GP appointment or in some areas, book an appointment with other local NHS services.

If the problem is more serious, they may advise you go to your nearest minor injuries unit, urgent care centre, or emergency department. If very serious, staff can send an ambulance directly.

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Local pharmacist

Pharmacies can offer help and health related advice for conditions such as 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. They may be able to help with requests for urgent repeat medicines.

From January 2024, a new '*pharmacy first*' service means your local pharmacist can provide treatment including prescription only medication for common conditions without you needing to see a GP. See section 9.

5.2 Serious or life-threatening illness or injury

If your illness or injury is serious or life-threatening, call 999 or go to your

nearest (506646934515) BT0741201494100404 RG -0.0178 Tc[of]TJET 1 5322 634 57

If you have difficulties getting to the practice due to disability or caring responsibilities, discuss these 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

Seeking a second opinion

If you have doubts about a diagnosis or 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 believe it is unnecessary. This may be to another GP in your practice or a consultant.

Online services

Ask your practice receptionist to explain how to register for online services and about apps you can download to a smartphone or tablet, such as **NHS App** or **myGP App**.

Online tools let you:

book or cancel appointments with a GP, nurse or other health professional

order repeat prescriptions (see section 9)

view your GP record (which contains your clinical information)

link to register as an organ donor (NHS App).

For general information, see the NHS website at:

www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/gps/gp-online-services/

6.3 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 happens 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. This does not apply if you were violent, threatened staff or other patients, and the police were informed; or if the practice believed issuing a warning was not reasonable or practical1 0 595.32 841.92 reW*nBT/F1 12

6.4 Help with hearing difficulties

You may be able to self-refer to your local audiology service if you are concerned about your hearing. It is important to see your GP first if you have any other symptoms such as earache, discharge or if hearing loss is sudden. If there is no medical reason, such as an ear infection or build-up of wax, your GP can refer you

Waiting times

The NHS Constitution sets out maximum waiting times for certain services. You should start your NHS consultant-led treatment within a maximum of 18 weeks from referral for non-

The Royal Osteoporosis Society offers an online risk checker, to help identify your level of risk and provides information and advice about the condition and how you can reduce the risk of developing it.

For further advice,

6.11 Support to maintain 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

7 NHS services for older people

7.1 Over-60s free prescriptions

NHS prescriptions are free for people aged 60 and over.

7.2 Over-60s free NHS sight tests

Anyone aged 60 and

8 Help with health costs

Most NHS services are free but some people, including those aged 60 and over, must pay for NHS dental treatment and 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 and meet the eligibility criteria, you may be eligible for help with NHS costs. Go to the NHS website for information www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/help-with-health-costs/help-with-health-costs-for-people-getting-universal-credit/

If you receive Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, or 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 by a GP or dentist to see a consultant on NHS premises. 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: www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/help-with-health-costs/

9 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 can advise on using an inhaler and treating minor illnesses such as coughs, colds, stomach upsets, and aches and pains. In addition, the *pharmacy first* service enables pharmacists to treat sore throats, sinusitis, impetigo, shingles, infected insect bites, earache (under the age of 18) and uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women aged 16-64, without the need to see a GP first.

Speak to your community pharmacist if you are having any difficulties managing your prescribed medications, such as finding medicine labels difficult to read, the usual packaging hard to open,

Electronic Prescription Service (EPS)

Most prescriptions are now signed, sent, and processed electronically. This aims to improve efficiency and safety when dispensing medicines. You nominate a pharmacy to dispense your repeat prescriptions on a regular basis. When you contact your practice or go online to order a repeat prescription, it sends it to that pharmacy, via the practice IT system. This eliminates paper prescriptions and errors due to handwriting.

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.

Many pharmacies offer a **home delivery service**. This is a helpful service but can limit 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.

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Choice about end of life care

Whilst you may think you would prefer to die at home, you may wish to fully consider your options. If making such a decision, talk it over with your healthcare professional 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 about 24-hour support.

Professionals caring for you should offer, or you can ask for, the opportunity to discuss your future care. This is often called **advance care planning**. You can ask your family or nominate someone else to participate and at one or over several meetings may wish to:

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 for 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. You must consent to share it with professionals involved in your care. As a '*live*' document, you can amend and add to it 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*.

Electronic Palliative Care Co-ordination System

In some areas, there is an Electronic Palliative Care Co-ordination System. 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

11 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, investigations such as blood tests, hospital referrals and discharge letters. You may have paper and electronic records.

Staff in your GP practice add to your GP record at each appointment. Hospitals you visit hold their own records about your care, as do dental practices and opticians. This means various places hold personal and health related information about you and

Hospital records

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

Time scales

Organisations are required to respond to your request within one calendar month, starting from the day they received it.

11.1 Access to medical records of a deceased person

The *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 (as a relative or another person).

Ask the deceased person's last registered GP practice for access. GP records are generally kept for ten years after someone dies. For hospital records, contact the records office at the hospital they attended. For more information, see the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/nhs-services-and-treatments/can-i-access-the-medical-records-health-records-of-someone-who-has-died/

12 Resolving problems and making a complaint

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 hospital complaints manager.

For more information, see factsheet 66, *Resolving problems and making complaints about the NHS* and factsheet 5, *Dental Care: NHS and private treatment*.

13 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 the communication support you need, when engaging with NHS or social care staff.

They may 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.

Any reasonable adjustments you require, such as the need for additional support or an interpreter should be recorded and accessible to all health and social care professionals involved in your treatment and care.

For more information, contact your GP practice, The Royal National Institute for Deaf People, or The Royal National Institute of Blind People.

14 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 any medicine or herbal remedy a therapist recommends 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

Useful organisations

Bowel screening programme

Telephone 0800 707 6060 (free call)

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

Carers UK

www.carersuk.org

Telephone 0808 808 7777 (Monday to Friday 9am – 6pm)

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

Care Quality Commission (CQC)

www.cqc.org.uk/contact-us

Telephone 03000 616161

Independent regulator of health and social care services in England. It does not investigate individual complaints.

Continence Product Advisor

www.continenceproductadvisor.org

Evidence based online information to help choose continence products.

Dying Matters

www.dyingmatters.org

Hospice UK's campaign aims to help people talk more openly about dying, death and bereavement and make plans for the end of life.

Provides online information for professionals and the public.

Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), NHS England and UK Health Security Agency publications

www.healthpublications.gov.uk/Home.html

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

Email helpdesk@hearinglink.org

For people with hearing loss and their families. Aims to give knowledge, skills and confidence to manage practical and emotional challenges.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

www.rnid.org.uk/

Telephone 0808 808 0123 weekdays 8.30am-5pm

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

Royal Osteoporosis Society

<https://theros.org.uk>

Telephone helpline 0808 800 0035

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

Yellow Card Scheme

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

Telephone 0800 731 6789 Mon-Fri 9am and 5pm

Allows you to report unwanted side effects or reactions to medicines or problems with medical devices.

Health professional organisations

General Chiropractic Council (GCC)

www.gcc-uk.org/about-us/what-we-do

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.hcpc-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

