

Functions of Healthwatch

Function One: Gathering views and understanding the experiences of people who use services, carers and the wider community

Local Healthwatch will achieve this function in a number of ways:

- by gathering the information that is already available and working with other local voluntary and community groups to understand local views and experiences of health and care services
- by actively seeking the views of those who don't generally come forward
- by publicising information using good information governance, including confidentially, through a range of channels
- by working in collaboration with the Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- by working in collaboration with other local Healthwatch organisations
- by developing the skills to understand and interpret different kinds of data and information
- by collating information as evidence to support recommendations to HealthwatchEnglandand/or the CQC

Function Two: Making people's views known

In order to do this effectively, Local Healthwatch will:

- identify and use existing arrangements to avoid duplication
- develop systematic methods of gathering views from local and national sources, where there are currently gaps
- be responsive to what it finds out and report back on developments
- publish findings and make them fully accessible
- identify causes for concern and celebration amongst the local community and feedback on these findings to the CQC and to local commissioners as part of an ongoing, regular dialogue
- use people's views to influence the relevant decision-making bodies including local commissioning groups, health and wellbeing boards and, through HealthwatchEnglandand the CQC, the national regulators (including Ofsted) and the Secretary of State

Function Three: Promoting and supporting the involvement of people in the commissioning and provision of local care services and how they are scrutinized

If it is to promote the involvement of local people in decisions about health and care provision, Local Healthwatch will need to be completely independent and able to demonstrate its credibility, knowledge and successes. To this end, it will be a highly visible organisation that ensures it:

- is easy to reach – for example, by having a local contact number
- is inclusive of all groups within its local community
- respects, involves and collaborates with existing networks

- provides adequate reimbursement and suitable indemnity for its members
- offers support and training to its staff and volunteers on, for example, equality and diversity legislation, safeguarding and interviewing
- practices and promotes “enter and view” through support and training
- prioritises the need for continuous dialogue with its members and local community
- develops a strong relationship with the local health and wellbeing board, making full use of its representative on the health and wellbeing board to act as a constructive “critical friend”
- is an essential contributor to the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Function Four: Recommending investigation or special review of services via Healthwatch England or directly to the Care Quality Commission (CQC)

Local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England will work together to create a single system to champion the voice of people who use health and care services, locally and nationally. To ensure the relationship works, they need to:

- agree, establish and ensure timely two-way information flows between Healthwatch England and Local Healthwatch organisations
- use protocols for good information governance
- ensure that urgent concerns are escalated
- enshrine the NHS Constitution as the benchmark of NHS service-users’ rights
- understand CQC’s essential standards of quality and safety
- be aware of the good practice outlined in Think Local Act Personal

Function Five: Providing advice and information about access to services and support for making informed choices

Local Healthwatch will have to meet specific criteria that will be set out in their contracts. To carry out this function effectively, Local Healthwatch will:

- identify what information already exists and how to access it
- identify unmet needs so gaps in information can be plugged
- have its finger on the pulse of the latest information and news and know where to direct people
- fully understand and champion the NHS Constitution and the concept of personalisation
- build people’s knowledge of Local Healthwatch as an information and advice resource, ensuring visibility and ease of access
- develop relationships with commissioners and providers
- make sure people can get information in different formats e.g. electronic, hard copy, Braille, preferred language translations
- make full use of social networking tools to reach communities that are otherwise under-represented
- have the capacity and systems to direct people to services they require
- ensure that it provides feedback to individual members of the public and other partners

Function Six: Making the views and experiences of people known to Healthwatch England and providing a steer to help it carry out its role as national champion

A timely two-way information flow will be established between Healthwatch England (HWE) and Local Healthwatch organisations. The role of local Healthwatch will be to:

- have robust protocols for keeping HWE up to date with issues and concerns
- ensure that contacts are more than 'a conversation'.
- exercise its influence in steering and directing the emphasis of HWE's work
- ensure that accountability is a central principle in all exchange with and from HWE
- inform HWE of local matters relevant to wider public health agendas, Overview and Scrutiny Commissions, National Commissioning Board, Monitor, Foundation Trusts, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, Ministers and the Secretary of State.
- ensure that HWE audits the evidence of Local Healthwatch's contributions to improving health and care outcomes nationally
- foster its own independence by enshrining clear rules of engagement, self-assessment tools etc.

Function 7: NHS Complaints Advocacy

- Local authorities will continue to have responsibility for managing complaints relating to adult social care and to commission advocacy services to support service users including those who may wish to complain. They will take a decision on how best to commission a local NHS Complaints Advocacy service and whether this will be provided directly by local Healthwatch or from a third party. Local Healthwatch will support any complaints function by signposting people to NHS Complaints Advocacy services, in a timely and appropriate manner, if not provided in-house. Local Healthwatch will maintain a relationship with the NHS complaints advocacy service, to share information where appropriate (with suitable safeguards for data protection, to ensure confidentiality).