

Service Agreement

Service Introduction

So you can get the most from accessing this service please read this document carefully, as it explains not only what you can expect from this service but also what we expect from you.

As advocates we are here to empower you to help yourself with your complaint and as such it is vital that there is a good relationship between you and your advocate.

We will then need you to sign this agreement as this will confirm to us that you have understood and agree to what this agreement says. If you have any difficulty in reading this we are more than happy to read it for you.

If you have any questions about the agreement then please call 0300 012 0122 to discuss.

Service Information

Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service (IHCAS) is a FREE, NON-JUDGMENTAL and CONFIDENTIAL patient-centred service which provides practical support and assistance to local people in making a complaint about an NHS provided service. We are totally independent of the NHS.

We can only offer advocacy support where the concern is with an NHS funded service or placement. The service delivers a range of support: from the provision of self-help information, through to the assignment of advocates to assist individuals with writing their complaint, form-filling and attendance at meetings.

The service is designed to support and empower you to express your concerns and find your way through what can be a complex complaints system. As advocates we cannot make decisions for you but will give you the information to help you decide.

Our advocates will be guided by you and will support you to do as much for yourself as possible and this will shape the support provided. The advocates will use their expertise to guide you through the complaints process.

The Healthwatch West Sussex helpdesk can offer general support and may refer people to an advocate for extra support or signpost to other services for support.

What we offer:

- self help information and dedicated advocacy
- support with writing a complaint letter
- support to fill in forms
- support in complaint meetings, including resolution meetings
- support you to find a resolution
- support you in deciding which ways to proceed with your complaint
- support to make complaints to the Health Service Ombudsman, if you are not satisfied with how your complaint has been handled or the outcome
- help you understand the Health Service Ombudsman's final decision.

What we cannot do:

- act without your permission or tell you what you should do
- counsel you or offer mediation
- support you with anything other than a complaint about an NHS provided service
- offer medical or legal advice.

Service Contact

You will be assigned an advocate to assist you. You will be given the advocate's direct contact details (both a phone number and an email). You are welcome to call the advocate during the service week, which is Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm (excluding public holidays).

We believe every complaint matters and we will do our best to support you with your complaint. Whilst we will endeavour to be available for you to contact by phone or email. You may have to leave a message and this will be responded to within 72 hours during the service week, unless the message indicates the advocate is away. If this is the case, you will be offered alternative contact details. We expect our customers to respect this contact standard and work with us, so we can continue to offer an appropriate service to all who access it. In practical terms this means avoiding calling repeatedly about the same matter and not copying the advocate or service into emails that are not to do with the complaint.

If you feel that your contact needs are not being met, or if you are unhappy with the service, you will be invited to make a complaint.

Being Person Centred

IHCAS is a person centred service. This means that we will listen to you and what you want.

We will be flexible with what you need for us to work with you.

We will empower you to make the choices that you want.

We will treat you with dignity and respect and we will support you on your NHS complaint journey.

If at any stage you feel that you are being told what you should do, or if you feel that we are not treating you with the dignity and respect you deserve, then you should tell us right away.

Service Limitations

Whilst we will always do our best to support you with your complaint we cannot guarantee that your complaint will be upheld and / or you will get the outcome you want.

As an advocacy service we will, in most cases, support you even if we might not agree with the course of action you may wish to take. However, we do reserve the right to end our support should we feel that we have provided you with the support required for you to continue making the complaint yourself or should we decide that you will no longer benefit from our support.

If you want assistance in making multiple complaints we will decide how many of these we can help you with.

Inappropriate Behaviour

We recognise the distress and feelings that arise when a health concern exists. However, we will not tolerate any rude, insulting or offensive actions or behaviour to any of our staff, at any time. As a service we reserve the right to terminate the service without warning should you behave in an inappropriate manner to any of our staff or volunteers.

Independence

As a service we are completely independent. We have no financial or other ties with any NHS provider. We are not led or influenced by any NHS provider. The support we provide will be based on what you want us to do, nothing else.

Complaints

Whilst we strive to give everyone a high standard and professional service we are aware that sometimes we can always improve. Should you wish to complain then we will treat your complaint seriously and confidentially.

If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service then please feel free to discuss it with the Advocacy Lead, ben.dolley@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk.

If you would prefer to make a formal complaint then this can do so in writing to the Healthwatch Service Manager, Zoey Harries, A49, Aerodrome Studios, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 3TS

If your complaint is upheld you will get a full apology and, where appropriate, be given details of any action the service is taking to put things right.

Compliments and Feedback

We always welcome any compliments or feedback about our service so please don't hesitate in providing it.

Requesting your file

Should you wish to request a copy of the information and or case notes we hold about you then please feel free to contact your advocate who can arrange this for you in line with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Confidentiality

As a service we will not disclose any information about you without your permission. When we do disclose information this will only be to organisations directly relevant to your complaint.

Signing this agreement

By signing this agreement you are confirming your understanding and acceptance of its content.

Name

Signed

Date
