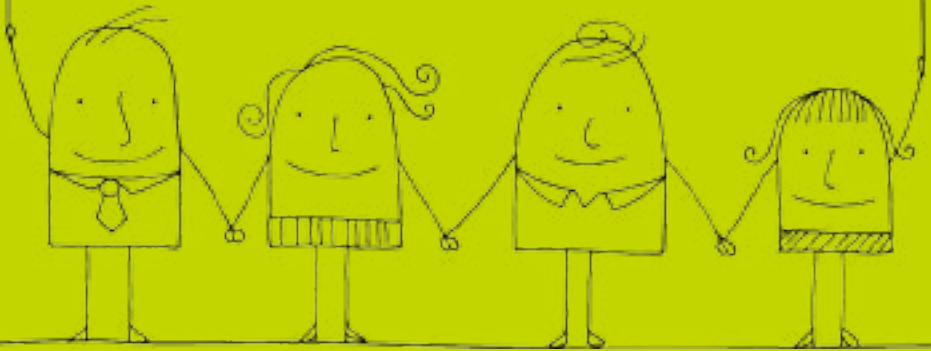


Patient and Client Council

How can we help?



Your guide to making a complaint about
Health and Social Care services

Your voice in health and social care

About Us

The Patient and Client Council is your voice on health and social care issues. We were set up by the Government to help the public have a say in what happens in their local health and social care services.

The Patient and Client Council has four main duties. They are to:

- ▶ Listen and act on people's views;
- ▶ Encourage people to get involved;
- ▶ Promote advice and information; and
- ▶ Help people make a complaint.

This guide

This guide has been developed to help you to make a complaint. It includes the following:

Section 1: Information on complaints procedures

Section 2: How to make a complaint

Section 3: Useful contacts

This guide can help you make a complaint by yourself or you can refer to it as you work through your complaint with support from Patient and Client Council staff.

The Patient and Client Council Complaints Support Service

The Patient and Client Council Complaints Support Service can help you to make a complaint about any health and social care service.

Our team of Complaints Support Officers are there to provide advice, support and assistance at any stage of the complaints procedure. They will take time to listen to your concerns, and discuss and agree with you what help we can offer. Everything you say will be treated sensitively and confidentially.

This is a client-led service, which means you are in charge of your complaint - the Complaints Support Officers can offer guidance and advice but you make the decisions about how to proceed with your complaint.

The Patient and Client Council Complaint Support Service can:

- ✓ Give you information on how to complain and who to complain to
- ✓ Help you to write letters of complaint
- ✓ Make telephone calls for you about your complaint
- ✓ Go with you to meetings about your complaint, and make sure your concerns are heard and responded to
- ✓ Work with health and social care organisations to improve services as a result of your concerns

The Patient and Client Council Complaints Service cannot:

- ✗ Investigate your complaint
- ✗ Give you clinical or medical advice
- ✗ Provide you with legal advice
- ✗ Offer financial support
- ✗ Deal with complaints about private services you have paid for
- ✗ Help with housing, benefits or complaints about anything other than health and social care
- ✗ Accompany you to medical/clinical appointments



The Patient and Client Council Complaints Support Service is **confidential**, **independent** and **free**.

Confidential	Independent	Free
<p>Any information you give us is kept private. =====</p> <p>We do not share information about you with others without your consent. =====</p> <p>You can ask to see the whole of your record with us at any time. =====</p> <p>You can ask us to return any personal information we have at any time.</p>	<p>We are an independent voice for patients established by government. =====</p> <p>We are not part of the Board, Trusts or Family Practitioner Service about which you may wish to make a complaint. =====</p> <p>We have legal powers that require Health and Social Care organisations to work with us.</p>	<p>All of the services we provide are fully funded by government. =====</p> <p>There is no charge of any kind for using our service – we will offer as much help as you need.</p>

The Health and Social Care (HSC) Complaints Process

Who can complain?

If you are unhappy with the care or treatment you receive from the health and social care service in Northern Ireland, you have the right to complain. Your complaint will be taken seriously and will be treated in confidence.

Anyone who uses health and social care services can complain. Health and social care services include hospitals, community services, nursing or residential homes, ambulance services, social services, GPs and health service pharmacists, opticians and dentists.

If you wish to complain on behalf of someone else, you must have their permission to do so or have the right to complain on their behalf. If you are unsure about this, please call us for advice.

Is there a time limit on my complaint?

You should complain as soon as possible, usually within six months of you becoming aware that you have a cause for complaint and normally no longer than twelve months after the event. Sometimes these time limits can be extended. Call us for advice on this.

The complaints procedure

There are two separate stages in making a complaint about health and social care.

- ▶ The Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure
- ▶ The Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is independent of health and social care but has the authority to investigate complaints about many public services, including health and social care. Normally you only go to the Ombudsman if the health and social care complaints procedure has been exhausted and you remain dissatisfied.

Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure

The first stage of the complaints procedure is to try to resolve your complaint 'locally', in other words where the incident occurred:

- ▶ You can speak to any member of staff who is involved in your treatment or care about your complaint, or you can write to the person in charge of complaints where you received your treatment and care
- ▶ All health and social care organisations will have someone who is responsible for dealing with complaints and you can ask to speak to them or you can write to, or email them. A list of contacts are at the end of this booklet
- ▶ If your complaint is about a GP, dentist, pharmacist or optician you can also contact the Health and Social Care Board's Complaints Department – their contact details are at the end of this booklet
- ▶ All organisations have a written complaints

procedure detailing who is responsible for complaints. You should expect any member of staff to be able to give you information on this if you ask for it

If you make a formal complaint:

- ▶ An acknowledgement should be sent to you within 2–3 working days of receipt of your letter
- ▶ A full written reply should be sent to you within:
 - ◆ 20 working days of receipt if your complaint is about a Trust or the Health and Social Care Board
 - ◆ 10 working days of receipt if your complaint is about a GP, dentist, pharmacist or optician
- ▶ Some complaints take longer to resolve than others. You should be told if this is the case and be given an explanation
- ▶ The complaints manager may offer to meet with you to discuss your complaint

In addition to raising your concern about a GP, dentist, pharmacist or optician with staff verbally or in writing you can contact the Health and Social Care Board:

- ▶ The Health and Social Care Board offers an 'Honest Broker' service
- ▶ This means that a Health and Social Care Board Officer will work with you and the person you are complaining about to help you to resolve your complaint together. Contact details for the Health

and Social Care Board appear at the end of this leaflet

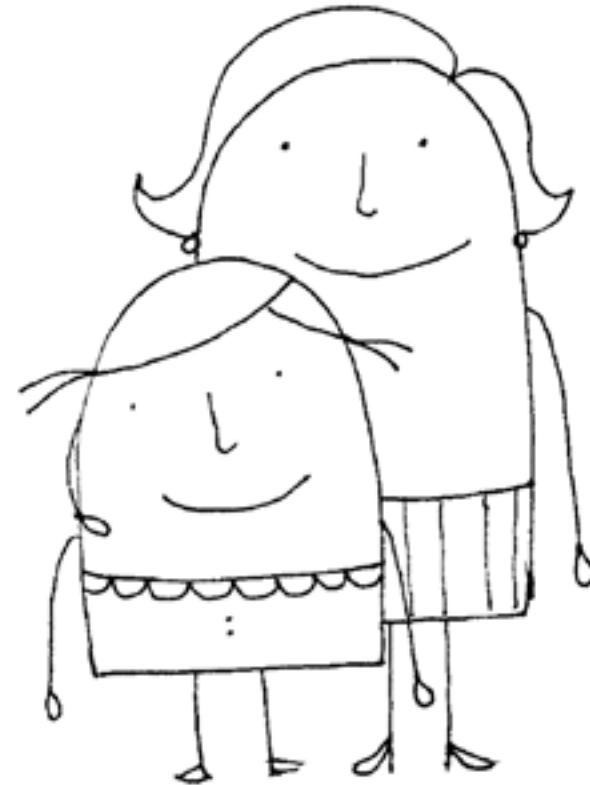
The Ombudsman

If you remain unhappy after the local resolution stage you can refer your complaint to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints (the Ombudsman):

- ▶ The Ombudsman will look at your complaint and decide whether they should investigate it
- ▶ The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about all Health and Social Care Services such as hospital based care, GPs, dentists, pharmacists and opticians
- ▶ They can also investigate complaints about the private sector (e.g. Residential and Nursing Homes) but only where Health and Social Care is paying for the service
- ▶ The Ombudsman cannot investigate complaints about:
 - ◆ private health care
 - ◆ matters that are being taken to court e.g. cases of alleged medical negligence or claims for compensation
 - ◆ access to health and social care information and the application of the Data Protection Act or the Freedom of Information Act
 - ◆ contractual disputes between health and social care organisations and their providers and suppliers

The service provided by the Ombudsman is independent and free of charge.

Remember, you can contact the Patient and Client Council at **any** stage of your complaint, even if you are not sure if you want to make a complaint or not!



A step-by-step guide to making a complaint

Step One

Deciding to make a complaint

Before you complain, ask yourself the following:

1. What am I unhappy about?
2. What do I want to achieve?
3. Who do I raise my concerns with?

Step Two

Making a Complaint

HSC Complaints Procedure

1. Speak to a member of staff directly about your complaint or contact the person responsible for dealing with complaints at the relevant health and social care organisation. You can make your complaint verbally, by e-mail or in writing.
2. You may be offered a meeting to discuss your complaint.

Step Three

Receiving a Response

Once you have received a response ask yourself the following:

1. Does it answer all your questions?
2. Does it explain things in a way you can understand?
3. Does it tell you what has been done to put things right?
4. Have you been given a sincere apology?

Step Four

What to do if you are still not happy

The Ombudsman

(an independent body to scrutinise public sector complaints)

Remember you can contact the Patient and Client Council even if you're not sure if you want to complain but just want to talk things over.

Step One: Deciding to make a complaint

Before you make a complaint ask yourself the following 3 questions:

1. What is your complaint?

Be clear from the start about what it is you are unhappy about. Your concerns could be about any aspect of your care, but might include:

- ▶ Treatment and care
- ▶ Poor communication and information
- ▶ Attitude and behaviour of staff
- ▶ Waiting times and access to services

You might find it useful to write down what you want to complain about as simply and clearly as you can so that you can refer back to it.

2. What do you want to achieve?

Think about what you want to happen as a result of your complaint. Be specific and realistic and remember that there are limits on what can be achieved through the HSC complaints procedure. You may want:

- ▶ An apology
- ▶ An explanation
- ▶ Some form of action
- ▶ To make sure that lessons are learned so that the same thing does not happen again to others

3. Who do I raise my concern with?

Once you are clear about the nature of your complaint and what you would like to achieve, you can think about who you would like to raise your concern with. You may want to:

- ▶ Speak directly to a member of staff involved in your care or treatment. You can make your complaint verbally, in writing or by e-mail
- ▶ Contact the person responsible for dealing with complaints at the health and social care organisation about which you wish to complain; for example each Health and Social Care Trust has a Complaints Manager
- ▶ Contact the Health and Social Care Board if your complaint relates to services provided by a GP, dentist, pharmacist or optician. In nursing/residential homes, the home manager should be able to help you

Usually, the person or organisation who provided you with the service about which you wish to make a complaint is the best place to start.

However, there are times when the health and social care complaints procedure cannot address your complaint – if, for example, you wish to take legal action for compensation. Contact us if you wish to discuss any options other than complaining that may be open to you.

Remember you can contact the Patient and Client Council even if you're not sure if you want to complain but just want to talk things over.

Useful tips: Writing a letter of complaint

Be brief

- Your letter does not have to be long and detailed, but you should include all the points you want to complain about
- If the events are very detailed list the main points in the letter and enclose further background information or a diary of events on separate sheets enclosed with the letter

Be clear

- Begin with your name, address, and any other contact details
- State the key details of your complaint – what happened, where it happened, and when it happened. If relevant include the names and positions of the members of staff involved
- Be clear about why you are unhappy and how the events have affected you, but avoid using aggressive or accusing language
- Use short sentences, bullet points and straightforward language
- Try not to repeat yourself

- Clearly state the questions you would like answered and what you would like to happen as a result of your complaint; an apology, an explanation, an action or reassurance

If you are making a complaint on behalf of someone else you will need their consent to do so. If you are unsure about this, please contact us for advice.



Step Two: Making a complaint

You can complain in the way that best suits you. This can be face to face, on the telephone, in a letter, or by email. Whichever way you choose to complain, remember to include:

- ▶ how to contact you
- ▶ who or what you are complaining about
- ▶ where and when the event that caused your complaint happened
- ▶ what you would like to be done to address your complaint

Step Three: Receiving a response

You should be sent an acknowledgement in 2-3 working days and a response in 20 working days if your complaint is about a Trust or the Health and Social Care Board or 10 working days if your complaint is about a GP, dentist, pharmacist or optician.

Once you receive a response it might be useful to ask yourself the following questions:

- ▶ Does it answer all your questions to your satisfaction?
- ▶ Does it explain things in a way that you can understand?
- ▶ Does it tell you how the investigation was carried out and which members of staff were asked for information?
- ▶ Has it given you a sincere apology, if appropriate?

- ▶ Does it tell you what has been done to put things right?
- ▶ Are there any questions or matters that still need to be addressed?

The person responsible for dealing with your complaint may offer to meet with you to discuss your concerns further.

Step Four: What to do if you are still not happy

If you are not happy with the response to your complaint, let the person who has responded know that you are still not satisfied and explain why.

You can do this either by telephone, letter or face to face.

Tell them the questions you would still like answered and what you would like to happen next.

You may want to:

- ▶ ask for a meeting, if that has not yet been tried
- ▶ ask for more information about what they are doing to put things right to improve the service for other people

If you are still unhappy at the end of the complaints procedure and feel that the issue you raised has not been resolved, you can refer your complaint to the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints (the Ombudsman).

The Ombudsman will look at your complaint and decide whether they will investigate.

Useful tips:

Meeting to discuss your complaint

- Before agreeing to attend a meeting it is a good idea to discuss arrangements with the person responsible for organising the meeting. Give your views on how you would like the meeting to be conducted
- Say who you would like to be there. If there is someone you do or don't want to see, such as the person the complaint is about, let the organiser know
- If you have particular questions you would still like answered, tell the organiser in advance so that they have all the relevant information with them. It is a good idea to bring a copy of your questions to the meeting so you can remember what they are
- Ask that notes be taken at the meeting and that you receive a copy of these
- It can be helpful to take someone with you to the meeting for support. The Patient and Client Council can attend with you, if needed.
- After the meeting, if no further action is proposed, the organisation should send you a full written response to your complaint. The response should also tell you what to do next if you are not happy

This guide is designed to help give you the confidence to make a complaint yourself, however please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Patient and Client Council Complaints Support Service if you would like help or advice with any aspect of your complaint, or if you have any further queries or concerns about the complaints process.

Contacting the Patient and Client Council

If you require assistance to raise your concerns, you can contact the Complaint Support Officers by telephone, email, letter or through our website.

They will take time to listen to your experiences and offer the advice or support that you need.

Freephone: **0800 917 0222**

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Email: **complaints.pcc@hscni.net**

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Web: **www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net**

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Freepost: **FREEPOST
PATIENT AND CLIENT COUNCIL**

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Useful Contact Details

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

Complaints Department
6th Floor, McKinney House
Musgrave Park Hospital
Belfast, BT9 7JB

Tel: 028 95 048000

Email: complaints@belfasttrust.hscni.net

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Complaints Department
Lough House, Ards Hospital
Church Street
Newtownards, BT23 4AS

Tel: 028 90 561427

Email: complaints@setrust.hscni.net

Western Health and Social Care Trust

Complaints Department
Altnagelvin Area Hospital
Londonderry, BT47 6SB

Tel: 028 71 611226

Email: complaints.department@westerntrust.hscni.net

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Complaints/Service User Experience Office
Bretten Hall, Antrim Area Hospital, Bush Road
Antrim, BT41 2RL

Tel: 028 94 42 4655

Email: user.feedback@northerntrust.hscni.net

Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Corporate Complaints Officer
Trust Headquarters, Craigavon Area Hospital
Portadown, BT63 5QQ

Tel: 028 38 614150

Email: complaints@southerntrust.hscni.net

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service

Administrative and Complaints Manager
Site 30, Knockbracken Healthcare Park
Saintfield Road
Belfast, BT8 8SG

Tel: 028 90 400999

Email: complaints@nias.hscni.net

Health and Social Care Board

Complaints Office
12-22 Linenhall Street
Belfast, BT2 8BS

Tel: 028 95 363893

Email: complaints.hscb@hscni.net

Northern Ireland Ombudsman

Freepost BEL 1478
Belfast
BT1 6BR

Tel: 0800 343 424

Email: ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk

www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net

Remember you can contact us by

Telephone

0800 917 0222

Email

complaints.pcc@hscni.net

Post

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