

Strengthening People's Voices in Health and Adult Social Care (No Decision about us...Without us)

July 2011

In recent weeks, more attention has been paid to the government's health reforms than ever before. At the forefront of the debate is the principle "no decision about me without me", a phrase that captures the Coalition's commitment to handing power in relation to decision-making to local people alongside professionals.

Local communities will have a greater say in decisions about services. To realise this, local authorities have a key role to play, in relation to the empowerment of local people, as we evolve from Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) to local HealthWatch between now and October 2012. Their new responsibility is to facilitate the development of an effective local HealthWatch which provides fresh opportunities for people to have their say about the quality and development of their local health and adult social care services. In the drive towards more localised public services, it will create new opportunities to influence the commissioning of services and provide additional voices to scrutinise them.

People don't always know who they can tell about their good and bad experiences of health and social care or where to go for information. It is really important that these experiences are captured and listened to so that services can be improved; ensuring that voices are not only heard, but acted upon and that evidence becomes available of resulting improvements to services. HealthWatch will be a constructive and powerful health and social care champion, providing independent local voice and national perspectives.

Many LINKs across the country have found new, creative and dynamic ways of reaching out to the communities they serve. Local HealthWatch will take on all current LINK functions, build upon what is already working well and have a specific focus on the need to be representative of diverse communities.

Local HealthWatch will actively engage communities in a dialogue about their health and social care needs to ensure that services act upon feedback and can demonstrate that they have done so. It will provide a single point of contact, by connecting people to the right NHS and social care advice and advocacy services, and by helping people to find information that will enable them to choose the services they need and require. It will support people to speak out and give those who want it, an opportunity to get more involved in a range of different ways.

To do this effectively local HealthWatch will need to:

- reach out to and connect with a diverse range of local people and communities
- gather the views and experiences of patients and the public for good local intelligence that can inform local commissioning and scrutiny decisions and provide evidence for the prioritisation of their activities
- make people's views known through reports and recommendations to help monitor local health and adult social care services, which will lead to more accessible, safer and higher quality services
- through their access to user feedback and data from services providers, highlight any lapses in the safety of services
- signpost to and/or provide, an advocacy service for people with complaints about NHS services
- provide information and signpost/support access to information and data in ways that local people use to exercise choice
- promote and support the involvement of people to provide an effective user voice that can influence Clinical Commissioning Groups, health and wellbeing boards and providers of local services whilst working effectively with the third sector and developing mutually beneficial partnerships with networks that already exist
- be clear about the roles and responsibilities of both paid staff and volunteers
- develop robust and credible governance and accountability arrangements
- focus on necessary training and development of HealthWatch members and staff so that their impact can be maximised from the outset
- use the leadership, guidance and support provided by HealthWatch England
- make the views and experiences of people known to HealthWatch England and make recommendations about investigations and reviews.

To make this happen, local HealthWatch will need to be accountable in a number of different ways.

1. To the local community it serves and represents
2. To HealthWatch England which will set standards, and with whom it will need to have a mutually beneficial and continuous dialogue
3. To the local authority commissioning HealthWatch services, who will be responsible for ensuring that HealthWatch is effective and represents good value for money.

Local authorities now need to consider:

- what an effective and user-centred local HealthWatch would look like. They are expected to partner with their existing LINKs and other key stakeholders to set this out
- how can they support the development of HealthWatch into a credible and independent local voice for health, social care and public health
- the use of nationally allocated investment required for effective and enduring local HealthWatch arrangements, especially where contracts with host organisations will be ending before October 2012
- how they, together with HealthWatch, will manage a mutually complex set of relationships, bearing in mind that they will be commissioners and funders of local HealthWatch organisations and will also be subject to scrutiny on them in respect of their adult social care services. Additionally, local HealthWatch and local authorities will be partners on health and wellbeing boards
- how to develop local HealthWatch's contribution – as partners with local authorities – on the new health and wellbeing boards.

Further resources:

- The *HealthWatch Transition Plan* can be found at: http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_125582
- The National Association of LINK Members (NALM) have published several reports including "Evolution or Abolition?" and "HealthWatch – First Steps" available at www.nalm2010.org.uk
- Local authorities can keep in touch with HealthWatch developments and other aspects of NHS reform at the modernisation channel hosted by the Department of Health: <http://healthandcare.dh.gov.uk>
- The Centre for Public Scrutiny, support by the Local Government Association and Patient's Association, will shortly publish a review of LINKs progress and good practice guidance
- HealthWatch pilot sites, known as Pathfinders, will be announced in August 2011. There will be opportunities throughout the transition for local authorities to join a pathfinder learning network which will provide mutual support and share best practice and innovation. Details on how to access the network will shortly be available on the DH modernisation channel
- Regular updates on HealthWatch developments can be found on the [CQC website](#) and the [DH website](#)
- People can engage in the development of HealthWatch through its online community, which was launched in July 2011. To join the community, people should email healthwatch@nunwood.com, and they will receive a response asking them to register their details.