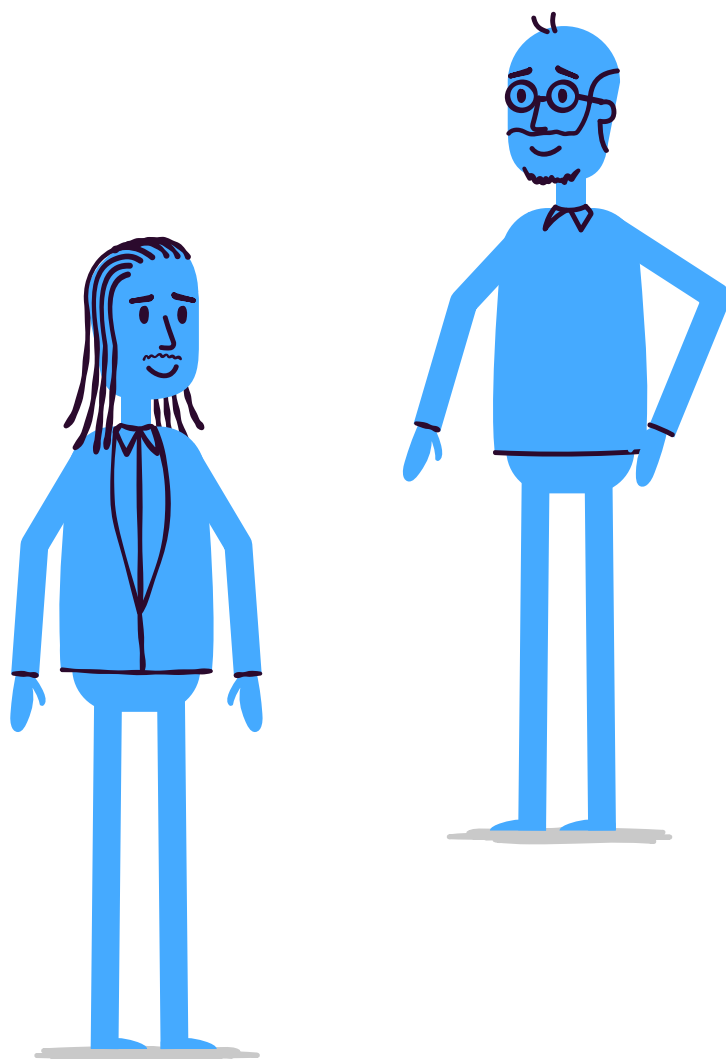
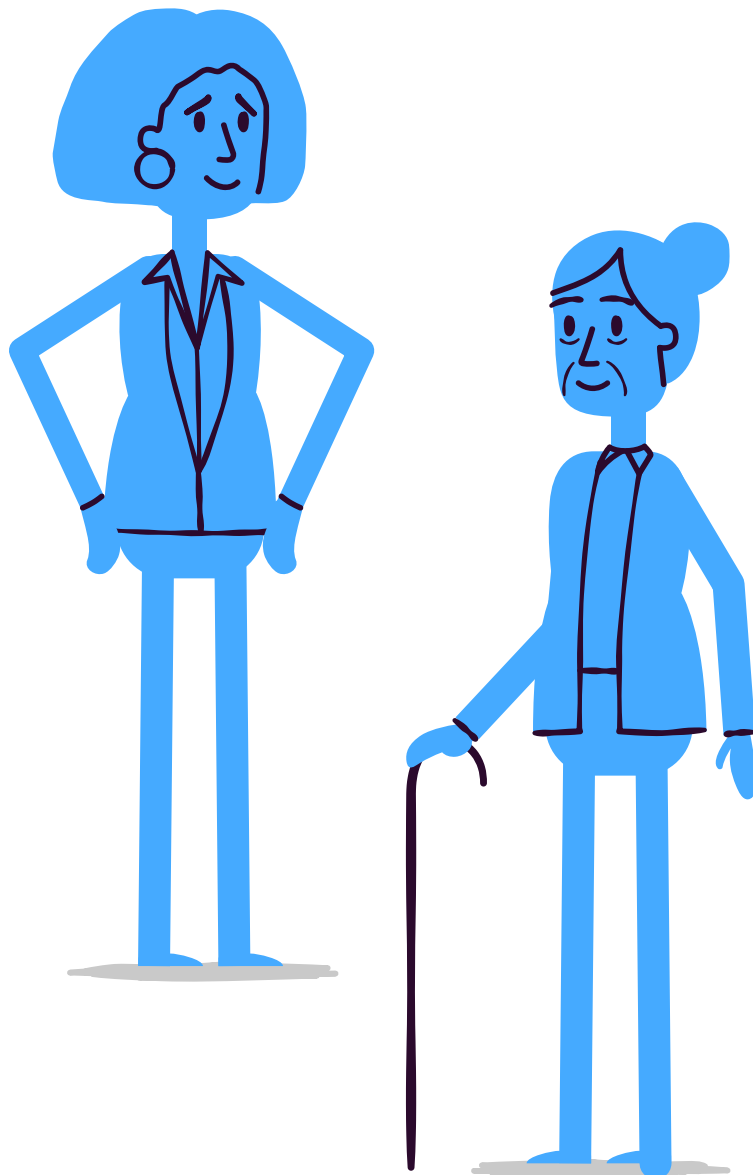


# Making sure people know how to complain and where to get support



# Contents

Welcome to this guide	3
What standards and regulations are relevant to this guide?	4
What you need to do	5



# Welcome to this guide

This guide is one of the Good Complaint Handling series. These are designed to help you meet the [NHS Complaint Standards](#).

This guide explains how you can make sure your service users (and anyone who represents them) know that your organisation welcomes feedback – including complaints – and will use it to improve services for everyone.

It explains how you can make sure people:

- know how to make a complaint
- know about the different ways they can do this
- know where they can get help, advice and support with raising their complaint.

Read this guide alongside the [Model complaint handling procedure](#). You can find guides on related topics on our [website](#).

# What standards and regulations are relevant to this guide?

The way healthcare organisations must communicate about how to complain is governed by a range of rules and regulations, including:

- the Ombudsman’s Complaint Standards
- the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009
- the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014 (the 2009 and 2014 Regulations).

## What the Complaint Standards tell us

### Welcoming complaints in a positive way

- Organisations clearly publicise how people can raise complaints in a range of ways that suits them and meets their specific needs. They make it easy for everybody to understand how the process works. This includes being clear about who can make a complaint and what will happen next.
- Organisations make sure people know how to get advice and support when they make a complaint. This includes giving details of appropriate independent complaints advocacy and advice providers, any Patient Advice and Liaison service (PALs), and other support networks.
- Organisations regularly promote their wish to hear from their service users and show how they use learning from all feedback (including complaints) to improve services.

## What [the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints \(England\) Regulations 2009](#) tells us

**Regulation 3** says that an organisation ‘must make arrangements ... for the handling and consideration of complaints.’ The arrangements must make sure that ‘complainants are treated with respect and courtesy’ and that they receive ‘so far as is reasonably practical – assistance to enable them to understand the procedure ... or advice on where they may obtain such assistance’.

**Regulation 13** says that ‘a complaint may be made orally, in writing or electronically’. This includes in person, by telephone or email, and online. Where someone makes a complaint verbally, you ‘must ... make a written record of the complaint; and provide a copy ... to the complainant.’

## What the [Health and Social Care Act 2008 \(Regulated Activities\) Regulations 2014](#) tells us

**Regulation 16** says that anyone receiving and acting on complaints needs to ‘establish and operate effectively an accessible system for identifying, receiving, recording, handling and responding to complaints by service users and other persons.’

# What you need to do

This section explains what you need to do as an organisation to make sure the people who use your services:

- know how to complain
- have the support they need to do so.

One of the best ways to learn and improve is to listen and act on what people tell us about how we are doing. But research shows that service users, and those who support them, are often reluctant to speak up.

This can be for several reasons. For example:

- They may have had a bad experience of making a complaint in the past.
- They may worry that complaining will have a negative impact on their care.
- They may believe nothing will change because the NHS is too busy to listen and act on what they say.

This guide will help you encourage people to come forward and make the process as easy as possible.

## Build trust







Make it clear to everyone who uses your service, and the people who support them, that you welcome complaints as a way to help improve your service.






Tell people they can raise their concerns with any member of staff and be confident that the matter will be taken seriously.

Make sure all your staff, but particularly those with an outward-facing role, are aware that listening to service users and dealing with complaints is an important part of their work. For your organisation, this means doing the following:

-  Make it one of your performance objectives.
-  Train and support staff in how to deal with complaints as they arise.
-  Make sure staff can confidently explain how to make a complaint and how your organisation will deal with it.
-  Make sure that when someone is making a complaint, your staff can signpost them to any internal or external advice and support.

### **Encourage people to speak up**

One of the main reasons people give for not raising their concerns is that they think the NHS is too busy to listen and do not think their complaint will make a difference.

-  Encourage people to speak up by showing that:
  - you care
  - you have the time to listen and act on what they say
  - taking the time to complain can make a difference.
-  Share the actions you have taken and the changes you have made as a result of someone speaking up or making a complaint – for example, on posters, in a publication, or through digital media. There are many creative ways of doing this.
-  Whatever approach you choose, make sure it tells service users that speaking up has led to positive change for them, your organisation and other service users.



**Tips:**

Making it easy for service users to feed back

- Put a pen and paper by the bedside.
  - Make sure patients know who to speak to about the experience. This might be a nurse, a doctor or a volunteer.
  - Actively encourage volunteers to help support people who want to make a complaint. This is particularly important for people who it difficult to speak up – for example, if they are vulnerable or alone.
- 

**Tell people how they can raise a complaint**

As well as telling people how much you value their complaints, it is important to share clear information about:

- how they can raise a complaint
- where they can get help, advice and support.

**There are lots of ways to do this.**



Think about how people get information about, or interact with, your service. This might happen by looking at your website, day-to-day communications, newsletters, information sheets, national and local charities and advice and support organisations, or by visiting your organisation in person.



Once you have identified these communication channels, use these to target opportunities for sharing information.



**Tip:**

Use our sample as a template for developing your own quick guide to the complaint process

---





## Sample copy 1: Quick guide to the complaint process

We value your feedback and complaints as they help us improve our service. By speaking up, you can help us make a difference.

**Download:** Sample copy 1: [Quick guide to the complaint process](#)

### Communicate in different ways

Once you have worked out how and where people get information about your service, you need to develop information about your complaints process:

-  Different people like accessing information in different ways, so provide the information in a range of formats and make sure it's visible and easy to access.
-  Provide clear contact details, to make sure it clearly explains how people can raise their concerns with your organisation.
-  Include contact details for any other help that is available too. This could include your local independent NHS complaints advocacy provider and other support organisations.
-  Communicate clearly what people can expect when they raise a complaint with you.



#### Tip:

The samples below are gathered from a range of organisations to show the different ways they word this information. Adapt one or combine several, to find the wording that works for your organisation and audience you are communicating to.

---



**Download:** Sample copy: [Letting people know you welcome their complaint](#)

---



### Find out more

Use these examples for help developing your own content.

**Sample complaint leaflet** The Ombudsman

<https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/publications/how-we-can-help-you-leaflet>

**Complaints charter** London Ambulance Service NHS Trust

<https://londonambulance.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Complaints-charter-November-2017.pdf>

**National public information** The NHS Constitution

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-nhs-constitution-for-england/how-do-i-give-feedback-or-make-a-complaint-about-an-nhs-service>

**Leaflets and posters in five South Asian languages** The Ombudsman

<https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/making-complaint/before-you-come-to-us/complain-change/information-south-asian-and-muslim-women/resources-south-asian-and-muslim-women>

**Review of complaints** [NHS hospitals complaints system review](#)

---

## Explain where people can get help, advice and support

Some people are put off from making a complaint because they lack the help, advice or support they need. That's why it's important for all staff to recognise when someone is sharing information that might lead to their making a complaint and signpost them to suitable sources of help.



If your organisation provides internal sources of help, advice and support for service users, make sure these are impartial and independent of service provision.



Make sure the staff who provide this help, advice and support receive training in supporting and advising service users through your complaints process.



As far as possible, signpost people to support from outside organisations independent of your own.



To signpost people effectively, identify and know about all the sources of external and independent help, advice and support relevant to your service. This will usually include:

- your local independent NHS complaints advocacy provider
- national and local organisations (including charities) that specialise in supporting people who want to make a complaint.



### Tip:

Ideally, any helpline for raising concerns (including PALS) should be accessible seven days a week and have evening cover. Where this is not possible, make sure a voicemail message explains when the call will be picked up and actioned. Refer callers to web pages showing up-to-date helpline opening times.



### Find out more

See our guide [Independent NHS complaints advocacy and other specialist advice](#)

## Consult with service users



Once you have identified these sources of support, including up-to-date contact details, you need to find the most effective way to share this information.



When you develop the materials, involve service users and people who support and represent them. They can help you understand what approach will be most effective for the specific audience. This will make sure the materials you produce, and the different options for making a complaint, meet your service users' needs.



### Tip

When you consult with service users, the following are all good sources of advice:

- patient experience groups
- community groups
- local charities
- local Healthwatch
- your independent NHS complaints advocacy provider.

## Measure your success

Regularly ask your service users, and the people who represent them, if they know how to raise a complaint. This is important to help make sure you are providing the information people need in the ways that work best for them.

This will help you measure the success of your complaint service and improve the information you provide over time.

Sharing your outcomes is another way of publicising your approach and encouraging others to provide feedback. One way of doing this is through a 'You said, we did' display.

## See an example

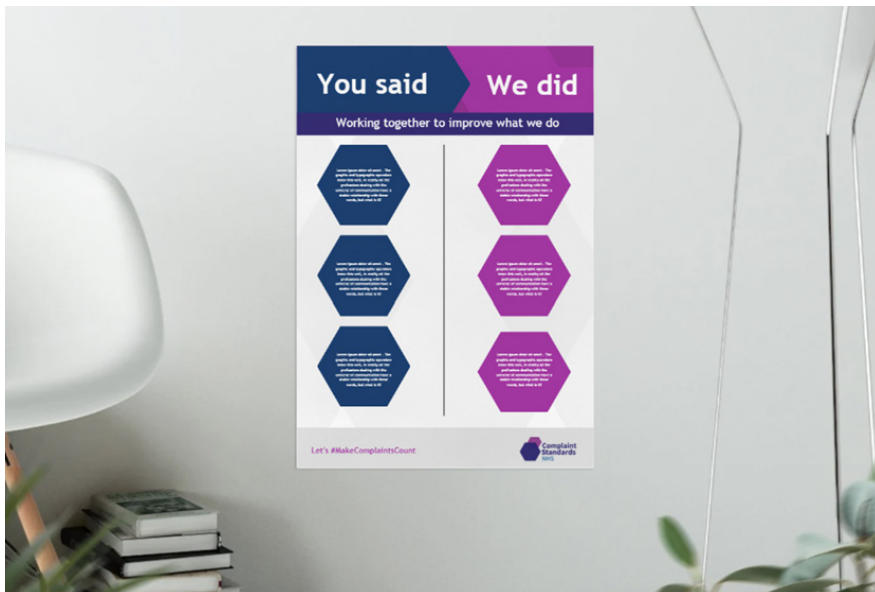


Caption: 'You said, we did' display at Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



**Tip:**

Create your own display using the sample provided here.



**Download:** [Sample 'You said, we did' poster template](#)

---

If you would like this document in a different format, such as Daisy or large print, please [contact us](#).

**Let's make  
complaints  
count!**

