

One Stop Guide for Complaints about Healthcare in Northern Ireland

Getting help with your complaint

About the Professional Standards Authority

The Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care promotes the health, safety and wellbeing of patients, service users and the public by raising standards of regulation and voluntary registration of people working in health and care. We are an independent body, accountable to the UK Parliament.

We oversee the work of ten statutory bodies that regulate health professionals in the UK and social workers in England. We review the regulators' performance and audit and scrutinise their decisions about whether people on their registers are fit to practise.

We also set standards for organisations holding voluntary registers for people in unregulated health and care occupations and accredit those organisations that meet our standards.

To encourage improvement we share good practice and knowledge, conduct research and introduce new ideas including our concept of right-touch regulation.¹ We monitor policy developments in the UK and internationally and provide advice to governments and others on matters relating to people working in health and care. We also undertake some international commissions to extend our understanding of regulation and to promote safety in the mobility of the health and care workforce.

Our organisational values are: integrity, transparency, respect, fairness and teamwork. We strive to ensure that our values are at the core of our work. More information about our work and the approach we take is available at www.professionalstandards.org.uk.

¹ *Right-touch regulation revised* (2015). Available at www.professionalstandards.org.uk/policy-and-research/right-touch-regulation



Although we do not investigate complaints about healthcare, people often contact us and ask us to help so we have put this guide together to help you.

We realise making a complaint about your healthcare or about the treatment provided to a relative can sometimes be a difficult decision to make.

Health and Social Care (HSC) services in Northern Ireland are made up from numerous different organisations and it is not always clear when, where and how to raise concerns. Getting an answer to your concerns is not always straightforward and it is important to ensure that you direct your complaint to the correct organisation so that

your complaint can be investigated properly. If you are thinking about making a complaint, there are organisations which can help and guide you through the HSC complaints procedure.

This quick reference guide presents the options you have when making a complaint about the HSC services in Northern Ireland and where complaints about non HSC care should be taken.

Christine Braithwaite
Director, Standards and Policy

Contents

If you want to complain about health and social care	5
If you want to complain about the care you paid for (non NHS)	8
If you want to complain about care provided outside of Northern Ireland in the UK	8
If you want to share your experience about healthcare regulators	9

If you want to complain about health and social care

First steps

If you feel able to do so, the best thing to do first is to raise your concern with the people involved. This could be the doctor or nurse who treated you, their colleague or line manager. Explain what happened, why you are unhappy and what you would like to happen to help put things right (for example, an apology). You can raise the concern yourself or you can give permission for someone to do it on your behalf.

Contacting the relevant Health and Social Care Trust

The [Patient and Client Council provides full information on who you can contact or complain to](#). [Health and Social Care online](#) provides information on which areas each HSC Trust covers.

If you do not want to make a formal complaint

Ask for the name of someone appropriate for you to speak with or write to. For example, the person in charge of the service you have concerns about or someone from the complaints team. If you are not sure who you should talk with, ask the organisation for help.

If you want to make a formal complaint

You should ask for the organisation's complaint procedure before writing down your concerns to help make sure you are making the complaint to the right person or team.

Describe:

- (1) What happened
- (2) Who was involved
- (3) When and where it took place
- (4) How it has affected you
- (5) What you would like to happen as a result of your complaint
- (6) Ask for an acknowledgment of your complaint (you should receive this within three days of making the complaint)
- (7) Agree how often you will be kept updated on the progress of your complaint
- (8) Make sure you give your name and contact details, and how you would like to be contacted.

Please note that complaints should be made within 12 months of the event leading to the complaint taking place and that organisations should provide their full response within six months.

If you want help with making your complaint

You can get free and confidential advice about the complaint process and help with making your complaint from:

- [The Patient and Client Council](#) and they have produced [a complaints guide](#). Telephone: 0800 917 0222 or Email: info.pcc@hscni.net

If you want to escalate your complaint under the HCS complaints procedure: referral to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman

If you have completed the first stage of the HCS complaints procedure and do not think that your concerns have been properly looked at, you can complain to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman. The Ombudsman can be telephoned on: 0800 34 34 24. Follow the link for [information on how the Ombudsman will consider your complaint](#).

If you want to complain about mental health care

You can complain about mental health care [through the HSC complaints process](#).

If you want to complain about the ambulance service

If you want to complain about the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust you can do so at: <http://www.niamb.co.uk/> and by telephone on: 028 9040 0999. The Trust also produces a [leaflet](#) detailing how to make a complaint.

If you want to complain about the regulatory organisations

If you are concerned about the conduct of a health professional or have fitness to practise concerns, you can complain to the relevant regulatory organisations (listed below). You can do this at the same time as complaining to the health organisation or to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

Citizens Advice provide [general guidance on how to complain to the regulators](#).

You can consult the individual regulatory organisations for advice on when and how to bring concerns to their attention, by the following links or telephone numbers:

- [Nursing and Midwifery Council](#) (nurses and midwives) Telephone: 020 7637 7181
- [General Medical Council](#) (GPs, hospital doctors and surgeons) Telephone: 0161 923 6602
- [Health and Care Professions Council](#) (arts therapists, biomedical scientists, chiropodists /podiatrists, clinical scientists, dietitians, hearing aid dispensers, occupational therapists, operating department practitioners, orthoptists, paramedics, physiotherapists, practitioner psychologists, prosthetists /orthotists, radiographers and speech and language therapists) Telephone: 0800 328 4218
- [General Dental Council](#) (dental professionals) Telephone: 020 7167 6000
- [Pharmaceutical Society Northern Ireland](#) (pharmacists) Telephone: 028 9032 6927

- [General Optical Council](#) (optometrists and dispensing opticians) Telephone: 020 7580 3898
- [General Osteopathic Council](#) (osteopaths) Telephone: 020 7357 6655
- [General Chiropractic Council](#) (chiropractors) Telephone: 020 7713 5155.
- [The Northern Ireland Social Care Council](#) (Social workers and social care staff) Telephone 028 9536 2600

[Action against Medical Accidents \(AVMA\)](#) provides advice for people who have referred their complaint to a regulatory organisation. It can be contacted at: Telephone: 0845 123 2352.

If you have concerns about a breach of standards and/or care regulations

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority is the independent body responsible for monitoring and inspecting the availability and quality of health and social care services in Northern Ireland, and encouraging improvements in the quality of those services.

Whilst the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority does not investigate individual complaints, it works to ensure through its regulatory activities, that all regulated services: have an effective complaints procedure; take complaints seriously; and investigate complaints thoroughly, in line with complaints guidelines. If you have concerns about a potential breach of regulations or minimum care standards, you can contact the Regulation and Quality Improvement by email at: info@rqia.org.uk and by telephone: 028 9536 1111 and their website is at: <https://www.rqia.org.uk/>

If you want to complain about a social worker

You can complain about the conduct of a social care worker to the [Northern Ireland Social Care Council](#). They can be contacted on: 028 9536 2600.

If you have a safeguarding concern

If you think that a child or vulnerable adult might have been harmed, or might be at risk of harm, you should contact the relevant HSC trust.

[Belfast Health and Social Care Trust](#) (covering local council areas of Belfast and Castlereagh);

[South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust](#) (covering local council areas of Newtownards, Down, North Down and Lisburn);

[Northern Health and Social Care Trust](#) (covering local council areas of Coleraine, Moyle, Larne, Antrim, Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey, Ballymoney, Ballymena, Magherafelt and Cookstown);

[Southern Health and Social Care Trust](#) (covering local council areas of Dungannon, Armagh, Craigavon, Banbridge and Newry and Mourne);

[Western Health and Social Care Trust](#) (covering local council areas of Derry, Limavady, Strabane, Omagh, and Fermanagh)

The sixth NI HSC Trust is the [Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Trust](#).

If you want to complain about non-HSC care

Not all care is provided by the HSC. Some treatment is privately paid for and is given by organisations which do not belong to the HSC. This is sometimes called private healthcare or independent sector healthcare.

If your complaint is about privately funded healthcare, you should complain to the healthcare provider. It would be helpful to check before you make the complaint whether you can complain under the HSC complaints procedure. If you are not sure, ask the organisation who has given the care.

Once you have a response to your complaint and if you remain unhappy, you may have the option of going to the Independent Sector Complaints Adjudication Service (ISCAS) which represents some independent healthcare providers. You can find out whether the organisation you have a complaint about is a member and access their complaint forms here: www.iscas.org.uk. ISCAS telephone number is: 020 7536 6091.

If you want to make a personal injury claim

If you think you have suffered personal injury and wish to claim compensation, you should consult a solicitor.

- The Law Society gives details of solicitors who are members of its personal injury accreditation scheme at: www.lawsociety.org.uk
- Citizens Advice [provides information on making personal injury claims](#). Its advice functions in Northern Ireland are now run by [Advice NI](#).

If you think that a criminal offence has been committed

If you think that a criminal offence has been committed during your healthcare, you should contact the Police. Details of your local police can be found at: <https://www.psni.police.uk/>

If you want to complain about care provided outside of Northern Ireland in the UK

[For details about how to complain about care in England, Scotland and Wales please click here:](#)

If you want to share your experience about healthcare regulators

The Professional Standards Authority

We promote the health, safety and wellbeing of patients, service users and the public by raising standards of regulation and voluntary registration of people working in health and care. We are an independent organisation, accountable to the UK Parliament. We oversee the work of ten statutory organisations that regulate health professionals in the UK and social workers in England. We review the regulators' performance and audit and scrutinise their decisions about whether people on their registers are fit to practise. We can refer final fitness to practise panel decisions to court where we believe they are unduly lenient and do not protect the public.

You can help us check that the regulators are meeting the [Standards of Good Regulation](#) by sharing your experience about the [regulators](#) or [accredited registers](#).

When we review their performance, as we do each year, we take account of many sorts of information. This includes things the regulators tell us, things we observe or read and things you and others tell us.

We would like to hear about your experiences to help us see what they do well and where they might need to improve. We will use the information you give us to help us build an overall picture of their performance. We publish a report about each regulator's performance every year and we will send you a copy if you would like us to. We may not mention your information in the report, but you can be sure we take it into account.

You can [share your experience here](#)

*If you want to make a complaint about a health or care professional or about the regulator, please contact the regulator direct as we do not have the power to investigate complaints.

Professional Standards Authority

December 2019