

A guide to making a complaint about Health or Social Care in East Sussex



Making a complaint about health or social care in East Sussex

What is included in this guide?

This [Healthwatch East Sussex](#) (HWES) guide provides you with information about how to leave feedback following NHS treatment and things to consider if you feel you would like to make a complaint and how to complain about different health and care services in East Sussex.

Who are Healthwatch East Sussex?

HWES is your independent health and social care champion, which has [statutory functions](#), to help people get the best out of local services. We gather people's views of health and social care and make sure these are heard by those in charge of planning and delivering services, to help improve services for today and in the future.

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1. Why leave feedback?

Feedback can help to improve the quality of your care.

Most NHS care and treatment goes well, but sometimes things can go wrong. If you are unhappy with your care or the service you have received, it is important to share your experience so that services can be improved. There are two ways to tell the NHS what you think, either by providing feedback, whether good, bad or indifferent, by telling the NHS organisation or service about it, or by making a formal complaint.

If you are unhappy with an NHS service, it is worthwhile discussing your concerns early on with the service, as they may be able to sort the issue out quickly. Most problems can be dealt with at this stage but, in some cases, you may feel more comfortable speaking to someone independent and not directly involved in your care.

2. How can I leave feedback?

There are several ways you can leave feedback regarding your experience of accessing NHS services.

You can do this directly by speaking to a member of staff from the organisation you received the treatment from. Alternatively, you can leave feedback through the following methods:

Leave feedback on the NHS website

You can leave a rating and review of any NHS service on their profile page on the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/give-feedback-about-the-nhs-website/find-out-how-to-review-an-nhs-service/>

Healthwatch East Sussex

Our Feedback Centre, allows you to leave a review of any health or care service, each time you use it. This allows Healthwatch, as the public watchdog for local health and care services, to understand how services are performing, what has been good and where improvement is needed. Healthwatch East Sussex will also use this information to inform discussions with local commissioners and providers of health services to improve care: [Healthwatch East Sussex](#).

The Care Quality Commission (CQC)

The Care Quality Commission is the independent regulator of Health and Social Care in England. The CQC use what people tell them to understand the quality of care provided by services like hospitals, GPs, care homes and care agencies. Providing feedback (good or bad) on an experience of care can help make health and care services better for everybody: [The Care Quality Commission](#).

3. Try to find a local resolution to any issues

When issues arise, it's always best to mention your concern to the member of staff you are dealing with or their manager as they may be able to sort things out for you.

Some healthcare providers, including most hospitals, run a Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), which can help you to resolve issues informally. PALS provide a point of contact for you, your family or your carers, offering advice, support and information. A concern raised through PALS will not usually be considered as a 'formal complaint'.

Contacting PALS can be particularly helpful if your issue is urgent and you need action immediately, such as a problem with the treatment or care you receive while in hospital. As well as helping people raise concerns, PALS teams also:

- offer information and advice about local health services
- feedback patients' views to senior managers

If liaising with PALS, keep a note of:

- the dates and times when you speak to someone about your concern
- the names of the people you speak to
- what was discussed
- the response you were given to your concern
- what you have been told will happen next

If you are still not happy after trying informal resolution directly with the service, you might like to consider making a formal complaint.

Details of local PALS services:

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust:

Email: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Telephone: Eastbourne: 0300 131 4784 or Hastings: 0300 131 5309

Website: <https://www.esht.nhs.uk/service/patient-advice-and-liaison-service/>

Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust:

Email: sc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Telephone: 01273 242292

Website: <https://www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/contact-us>

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust:

Email: spft.pals@nhs.net

Telephone: 0300 304 2198

Website: <https://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/about-us/contact-us/feedback-advice-and-complaints>

University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust:

Email: uhsussex.pals@nhs.net

Telephone: Royal Sussex County Hospital: 01273 664511/01273 664973

Princess Royal Hospital: 01444 448678

Website: <https://www.uhsussex.nhs.uk/resources/pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service/>

South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust:

Email: pet@secamb.nhs.net

Telephone: 0300 1239 242

Website: <https://www.secamb.nhs.uk/contact-us/patient-advice-liaison-pals/>

4. Should I make a complaint?

What can I achieve through making a complaint?

If you are unhappy with the treatment or care you, a family member, or someone you care for has received, you can make a complaint.

Complaints can help providers and commissioners to learn and improve services.

You may decide not to make a complaint because you are worried that it might make your situation worse.

However, care should not be affected by your decision to raise a complaint, and it is important that where things aren't working as planned, NHS and social care services learn from experiences and make changes where appropriate.

Before you make a complaint, it is helpful to think about what you want to achieve by making a complaint. This may include:

- Getting access to the care you need
- To improve the service, so other people don't have the same experience you've had
- To get an explanation of what went wrong and an apology
- To hold an organisation or relevant staff to account
- To seek compensation (check provider complaints policies regarding what can or can't be pursued)

Safeguarding concerns – if you or a loved one is currently at immediate risk

If your complaint is regarding an immediate or high-risk situation, such as you or your loved one not receiving enough care, there is a risk to your safety, or you have suffered from abuse or neglect, you should report the issue immediately to ESCC Adult Social Care and Health (details below):

Website: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/social-care/worried>

Phone: 0345 60 80 191

8am to 8pm, 7 days a week (including bank holidays). Calls are charged at a local rate.

Out of hours emergencies: phone 0345 60 80 191 and select option 2 to connect to Emergency Duty Service.

Email: hsc@eastsussex.gov.uk

Text: 07537 418236

Minicom via type talk: 18001 0345 60 80 191

5. Who should I complain to?

i. For services provided or funded by the NHS

The NHS is there to provide care to everyone. If you have concerns over any aspect of your care or the actions or decisions of any NHS organisation, you have the right to make a complaint.

If you have been affected by the actions or decisions of an organisation which provides or commissions a service paid for by the NHS, you can make a complaint. The rules about making a complaint allow you to complain either directly to the organisation providing the service (the Service Provider) or to the organisation that buys the service (the Commissioner).

For example, if you're unhappy with the treatment you are getting from your General Practitioner (GP), you could formally complain to either the GP surgery (the service provider) or NHS Sussex (the commissioner of the service). You cannot complain to both the provider and commissioner, although the choice about who to complain to sits with you as the user.

Your local services such as GP surgeries, dentists, pharmacies and opticians should all have their own complaints policy, which you can request to see, so you can follow the correct procedure for making a complaint. It is important you follow the procedures set out in complaints policies. These also clarify how services should respond to a complaint.

Sometimes it is hard to know who provides or commissions a service. Below are the main NHS Service Providers and Commissioners for East Sussex.

East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust provides services at:

- Bexhill Hospital
- The Conquest Hospital
- Eastbourne District General Hospital
- Uckfield Hospital
- Rye, Winchelsea and District Memorial Hospitals

They also provide services and clinics at: The Arthur Blackman Clinic; Bexhill Health Centre; Ian Gow Memorial Health Centre and Station Plaza Health Centre (Hastings), as well as Community Nursing in Bexhill, Eastbourne, Hastings and Rural Rother.

Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust – provides community NHS health and care across Brighton and Hove and parts of East Sussex, including Lewes and Uckfield Urgent Treatment Centres and other services based at the Community Hospitals in Uckfield, Crowborough and Lewes as well as providing Community Nursing in Crowborough, Havens, Lewes and Uckfield.

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust – provides mental health, learning disability and neurodevelopmental services to people (children and adults) living in South East England, including East Sussex.

South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust – provides emergency response to 999 calls from the public and urgent calls from healthcare providers in addition to the NHS 111 telephone service in East Sussex

EMED Group – deliver the Non Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS) in Sussex.

If you are not comfortable complaining directly to your healthcare provider, or if you feel this is not appropriate, complaining to the commissioner of the service may be the right option for you but note that, if you have already complained to your healthcare provider, the commissioner will not be able to re-investigate the same concerns.

- Contact the **Sussex Integrated Care Board** (NHS Sussex) if your complaint is about services such as GPs, dentists, pharmacy services, hospital care, mental health services, out of hours services and community services such as district nursing:

Email: sxicb.complaints@nhs.net

Phone: 0300 140 9854

Website: <https://www.sussex.ics.nhs.uk/>

ii. For services provided or funded by East Sussex County Council

If you are unhappy with a service provided by Adult Social Care and Health, contact the person you have been dealing with or their manager. Often things can be put right quickly.

If you have raised your issue with the service or would rather talk to someone else, please contact East Sussex County Council Adult Social Care.

The complaints team are available for support and advice, as well as dealing with formal complaints.

Email: asccomplaintsfeedback@eastsussex.gov.uk

Telephone: 01273 481 242

Website: <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/social-care/getting-help-from-us/asc-complaints-feedback>

6. How do I make a Complaint?

Everyone who provides an NHS service in England must have their own complaints procedure.

You should follow the complaints procedure for the service that you are seeking to complain to. You should be able to find information on making a complaint on the website of the relevant organisation (e.g. dentist, GP, pharmacy etc.) or by asking a member of staff for a copy.

You can complain in writing, by email or by speaking to someone in the organisation. You should make your complaint within 12 months of the incident or within 12 months of the matter coming to your attention. This time limit can sometimes be extended if it is still possible to investigate your complaint.

Anyone can complain, including young people, a family member, carer, friend or your local MP can complain on your behalf with your permission.

If you're complaining on behalf of someone else, include their written consent with your letter (if you're making your complaint in writing) as this will speed up the process.

If the person cannot give their consent, for example, if they have died or lack mental capacity, or are a child who cannot complain for themselves, you may still be able to complain for them. It is valuable to clarify if you are complaining on behalf of someone else at the outset of the process.

It's important to list all your concerns right at the beginning of your complaint, as simply and clearly as you can. Writing a timeline of events will help you to focus and not leave anything out. If you tried to resolve your issues with the service first, please include details of this with your complaint.

You can also consider taking the following action(s):

- Report the problem to another regulatory body, such as the Care Quality Commission (CQC). The CQC are not responsible for dealing with individual complaints, but if concerns are raised about the service, it may wish to investigate further. Contact CQC
- You can complain about an individual doctor, nurse, midwife, pharmacist, dentist, social worker or other professional. Under the law, each health and social care professional that looks after you must provide a good standard of care.

There are different regulators for the different professions, and they have their own complaints procedures. They include:

- [Doctors](#)
- [Dentists](#)
- [Nurses and Midwives](#)
- [Opticians](#)
- [Pharmacists](#)
- [Social Workers](#)
- [Other Health and care professionals](#)

7. Can I get help to make my complaint?

- i. Free and confidential advocacy support is available if you would like help to make an NHS complaint.

In East Sussex, if you need help making a complaint about an NHS service you can get independent advice and support from The Advocacy People.

The Advocacy People can help if you are unhappy with the service you, or someone else, has received from the NHS. This is called Independent Health Complaints Advocacy (or IHCA).

Advocates will:

- take time to understand your situation
- help you decide what you want to achieve by making a complaint
- help you understand the complaints' process
- explore your options at every stage of the complaint
- help you decide what you want to do and how you want to do it
- act on your direction if you don't feel able to take action yourself
- help you write letters to the right people
- go with you to a Local Resolution Meeting with medical professionals

Advocates won't:

- investigate your complaint
- make any decisions for or about you
- tell you what to do or give advice

Contact The Advocacy People via:

Telephone: 0330 440 9000

Email: info@theadvocacypeople.org.uk

Website: www.theadvocacypeople.org.uk/services/nhs-complaints-advocacy

Mailing address: The Advocacy People, PO Box 375, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 9HU

Please note that Independent Health Complaints Advocates are unable to help with taking legal action, NHS employee disciplinary procedures or complaints about private health services.

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ii. Advocacy Services for people eligible for Adult Social Care provision

In East Sussex, South West Advocacy Service (SWAN) provides several independent advocacy services, which can help people to be involved in decisions being made about their care. An independent advocate can support and empower you to speak up for yourself, or to speak up on someone's behalf.

If you want to make a complaint about Adult Social Care, you might want to use an independent advocate to help you understand the complaints process and put your views across effectively.

To check eligibility or to access independent advocacy services contact SWAN via:

Email: reception@swanadvocacy.org.uk

Telephone: 0333 447 928

Website: <https://swanadvocacy.org.uk/services-near-you/east-sussex/>

iii. Help to resolve private dental complaints.

The Dental Complaint Service provide a free and impartial service to help patients make a complaint about a private (non-NHS) dental service or treatment in the UK.

They may be able to assist you in seeking:

- An explanation and/or apology for what has happened
- A full or partial refund for failed treatment
- Remedial treatment from your dentist
- A contribution towards remedial treatment.

Contact the Dental Complaint Service via:

Telephone: 0208 253 0800 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

Website form: <https://contactus.gdc-uk.org/dcs/Complaint/PrivatePatients>

Mailing address: Dental Complaints Service, 37 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 8DQ

8. What happens after I have made a complaint?

The service you have complained to should always acknowledge your complaint and respond with how they intend to investigate.

The organisation should then investigate your complaint and resolve the problem quickly and efficiently. They should also keep you fully informed about how the investigation is going.

You may be invited to a meeting to discuss your complaint or offer mediation or other help to resolve the complaint. It's good practice to allow you to be accompanied to any meeting – so don't feel like you need to go alone.

Once they have investigated your complaint, they must then respond to you. Their response should:

- Explain how the complaint has been investigated
- Explain the conclusions they have reached, including any action they intend to take to resolve the situation
- Give details of how to escalate your complaint if you are not satisfied with the response.

If you do not receive a timely response to your complaint within the timeframe set out in a complaints policy, or are struggling to get an update on the status of your complaint, please share your experience with Healthwatch so we hear how effectively complaints are being responded to.

9. What if I am unhappy with the outcome of my complaint?

If you have followed the complaints procedure but do not think your issue has been resolved or are unhappy with the outcome, you can ask the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) for an independent review of NHS complaints, or the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO) for an independent review of adult social care complaints.

The PHSO makes final decisions on unresolved complaints about the NHS in England. It is an independent service which is free for everyone to use.

Write to: Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman,
Millbank Tower,
Millbank,
London,
SW1P 4QP

Telephone: 0345 015 4033

Website: www.ombudsman.org.uk

For Adult Social Care complaints, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:

The LGSO look at all adult social care complaints, including privately funded with no council involvement.

Write to: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman,
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Telephone: 0345 015 4033

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

10. The NHS Constitution

The [NHS Constitution](#) sets out your rights as a patient, and explains the commitments the NHS has made to providing you with a high quality service.

Organisations providing NHS care must take account of the NHS Constitution when treating you, so you may find it helpful to refer to it if you are thinking about making a complaint.

11. Contact Healthwatch East Sussex

Address: (Freepost)

RUGY-JESR-EEBG

Unit 31

The Old Printworks

1 Commercial Road

Eastbourne

BN21 3XQ

Email: enquiries@healthwatcheastssussex.co.uk

Phone: 0333 101 4007

Website: www.healthwatcheastssussex.co.uk

Disclaimer

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Acknowledgements: content from Healthwatch England, NHS England and local NHS and Healthwatch organisations have contributed towards this guide.

If you require this report in an alternative format, please contact us at the address above.

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