



**Independent
Age**



Factsheet

Complaints about health services

If you're unhappy with a health service you've received, this factsheet can help you to make a complaint. It also covers other options, such as reporting your concerns to an authority or taking legal action.



Call free on **0800 319 6789**
Visit **independentage.org**

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About Independent Age

No one should face financial hardship in later life.

Independent Age is a national charity providing support for older people facing financial hardship. We offer free impartial advice and information on what matters most: money, housing and care.

We financially support local community organisations across the UK through our grants programme. We campaign for change for older people struggling with their finances.

You can call us on freephone **0800 319 6789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm) or email helpline@independentage.org to arrange to speak to one of our advisers.

To donate or help support our work, please visit independentage.org/support-us.

In this factsheet, you'll find reference to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789** or by visiting independentage.org/publications.

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1. When things go wrong

Many of us are happy with the help we get from the NHS or our healthcare provider. However, sometimes things can go wrong and you may be unhappy about an ongoing situation or a particular incident.

If this happens, don't be afraid to speak out. Organisations need to know if there is a problem and usually prefer to be told so that they can fix it.

Why you might want to complain

You can complain about your GP, dentist, optician, hospital medical team, district nurse, occupational therapist or other healthcare professional. The kinds of things that can go wrong with your health services include:

- being refused the healthcare you think you need
- feeling unhappy with the quality or amount of healthcare given
- waiting longer than the NHS maximum waiting time:
 - in England, visit [nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/guide-to-nhs-waiting-times-in-england](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/guide-to-nhs-waiting-times-in-england)
 - in Scotland, visit [gov.scot/policies/healthcare-standards/waiting-times](https://www.gov.scot/policies/healthcare-standards/waiting-times)
 - in Wales, visit 111.wales.nhs.uk/Waitingtimes
- having appointments or procedures cancelled without a good reason
- poor communication – for example, if information is not correctly passed between the different health professionals treating you
- receiving misleading information about your treatment or your right to services
- not having a proper assessment of your health and care needs before being discharged from hospital
- neglectful or harmful treatment
- the behaviour of staff – for example, if they've been unhelpful, rude or discriminatory.



Good to know

If you're injured as a result of treatment that is below an acceptable standard, this is known as clinical negligence. You may be able to claim financial compensation (see [chapter 10](#)).

Solving things informally

If you're unhappy with a healthcare service, it's a good idea to discuss things informally with the people providing the service first. By letting them know about problems early on, they may be able to put things right quickly. In most cases, having an informal conversation is enough to resolve any issues.

You can speak with the individual concerned, another member of staff or the manager. You may feel more comfortable speaking to someone not directly involved in your care. Or you could ask someone else to do this for you, such as a friend or relative.

You can also give feedback, which can help the service improve its quality of care.

In England, you can give good or bad feedback for an NHS service anonymously through the Friends and Family Test ([nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/friends-and-family-test-fft](https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/friends-and-family-test-fft)).

It's a simple set of questions to see how likely you would be to recommend the service you've used to your friends and family. In Scotland, give feedback and share your experiences on Care Opinion ([careopinion.org.uk](https://www.careopinion.org.uk)). In Wales, give feedback through Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (hiw.org.uk/provide-feedback-about-healthcare-service).

However, if the problem continues, or you're not happy with the response, you may want to go further and make an official, or formal, complaint. You can get support to make a complaint if you need it.

2. How to make a complaint

All health services must have a complaints procedure. Ask the service you want to complain to for a copy. It should be available in different formats, such as on the service's website or in a leaflet. The procedure will tell you who to contact and how your complaint will be handled.

You can usually make your complaint by telephone, email or letter, or by completing an online form. You must receive written or verbal acknowledgement of your complaint within three working days.

You must be told:

- what will happen next
- how long the initial investigation will take
- who will contact you with the outcome.

You should also be given the opportunity to discuss how the complaint will be handled and what you want to happen as a result.

Make sure you know who to complain to. For example, if your complaint is about a primary healthcare service – such as a GP, dentist or pharmacy – you can complain directly to the service or to the relevant health authority:

- England – the local Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Scotland – the Local Health Board (LHB). You can only do this in exceptional circumstances – you usually need to complain directly to the service
- Wales – the LHB.

For complaints about secondary healthcare services – for example, if you've been referred to hospital services or a specialist health professional – you can complain to the local ICB in England, or the LHB in Scotland or Wales (see [chapter 4](#)). You can do this instead of contacting the service directly, but you cannot contact both the service and the LHB – you must contact one or the other.

If you need help making a complaint

You can make a complaint yourself or ask a friend or a relative to do it for you. If you don't have anyone to help and you feel it would be difficult for you to make a complaint by yourself, you could get support from an independent advocate or an advice organisation (see [chapter 3](#)).

If you no longer have mental capacity to make some or all decisions yourself, someone may need to make a complaint for you.

Timescales for making a complaint

Make your complaint as soon as you can. If you live in England or Wales, the time limit for making a complaint is usually within 12 months of the problem arising (or you becoming aware of it, if this is later). In Scotland, you should make a complaint within six months of the reason for the complaint (or of you becoming aware of the reason for the complaint).

However, in all three countries, you might still be able to complain after 12 months if:

- you have a good reason for the delay (for example, if you have been ill or in hospital), and
- it's still possible to investigate the complaint.



Good to know

If you're considering legal action rather than a complaint, you may need to act more quickly. For example, judicial review action (when your case is looked at by a judge) must be taken within three months, unless a court gives you permission to make a late application.

It's important to get specialist advice as soon as possible. See [chapter 10](#) for information about when you might want to take legal action instead of making a complaint.

Top tips for making a complaint

- Make it clear from the start of a conversation, letter or email that you're making a formal complaint.
- Give a clear and concise account of what happened or what went wrong.
- Include all the relevant facts (for example, dates, times and names) but try to keep the description as brief as possible.
- Explain what you would like to happen as a result of your complaint – for example, if you would like to receive an apology, or if you want steps to be taken to prevent the problem from happening again.
- If you're making your complaint in writing, attach copies of any relevant letters and documents, and list all the attachments in your letter or email.
- Keep your tone polite and professional, even if you feel angry or upset.
- Keep copies of all the letters and documents that you have sent and any responses you receive.
- Ask for the name and job title of anyone you speak to about your complaint. Take note of what was said and who was involved in your complaint in case you need to refer to the conversation in the future.
- Ask for written confirmation of any verbal decisions or promises to take action.
- If something isn't done within the time it should be, contact them as soon as possible.

3. Getting support with making a complaint

If you want to talk to someone about the process of making a complaint and what your options are, contact us to arrange to speak to an adviser (**0800 319 6789**, helpline@independentage.org).

If you'd prefer to speak to someone face to face about your concerns, you could contact Citizens Advice (citizensadvice.org.uk):

- England – **0800 144 8848**
- Scotland – **0800 028 1456**
- Wales – **0800 702 2020**.

Advocacy support

If you would find it difficult to make a complaint and get your voice heard, you could speak to an independent advocate.

An advocate can help you understand information about the service that has let you down, and help you communicate your views, wishes and concerns. For example, they can support you by writing letters or attending meetings with you. They may be able to help you solve problems and make communication easier between you and the organisation you're complaining about.

In England, contact your local Healthwatch for help with finding advocacy support (**03000 683 000**, healthwatch.co.uk). Some Age UK branches also offer advocacy services – ask your local branch or contact the national helpline (**0800 169 6565**, ageuk.org.uk) to find out what is available in your area.

In Scotland, contact the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (**0131 510 9410**, siao.org.uk) for help finding an independent advocate.

In Wales, LLAIS (**02920 235 558**, LLAISwales.org) may be able to help.

Additionally, the Age Cymru HOPE project (ageuk.org.uk/cymru/our-work/advocacy/hope---helping-others-participate-and-engage) offers independent advocacy services to people over the age of 50. If you would prefer, you can write to the project – direct your letter to Age Cymru, HOPE, St Andrews Park, Queens Lane, Flintshire CH7 1XB.

For more information about advocacy, see our factsheet [Helping you get your voice heard: Independent advocacy](#).

Support from organisations

You can get help from your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) in England and Wales. If you live in Scotland, your local Patient Advice & Support Service (PASS) can help. These services can record and discuss your complaint, direct your complaint to the correct department and support you throughout. They can also arrange an independent advocate for you.

You can find the details of your local PALS from your local library, GP surgery, dentist surgery or hospital and on the NHS website (nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/patient-advice-and-liaison-services-pals). To contact PASS, visit your local Citizens Advice or call **0800 917 2127**.

In England, Healthwatch provides information and resources on how to make a complaint. You can get in touch with your local Healthwatch for help with making a complaint (**03000 683 000**, healthwatch.co.uk). It will also be able to tell you if there's an independent NHS complaints advocacy service in your area.

In England and Wales, the Patients Association (**0800 345 7115**, patients-association.org.uk) may also be able to provide information and support.

In Wales, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales (**03442 640 670**, olderpeople.wales/advice-and-assistance-team) may be able to offer support and advice if you have had problems with health or social care services.

4. Complaints about care in hospital or another NHS setting

If you're unhappy with the care you receive in hospital, or from a doctor, dentist, optician, pharmacist or physiotherapist, you should raise this with staff at the time. This can give them a chance to put things right or to make a note of the problem so it doesn't happen again. This may be enough for you to resolve the issue and feel better about the situation.

If the problem can't be resolved in this way, you can make a complaint using the NHS complaints procedure. You can ask the organisation you would like to complain to – for example, a GP surgery, dentist practice or hospital – for a copy of the procedure and the name of the person you should direct your complaint to.

If you don't feel comfortable complaining directly to the service you are unhappy with, there are a few things you can do.

If you live in England and your complaint is about primary or secondary healthcare services, direct your complaint to your local Integrated Care Board (ICB). This is the body that is responsible for organising your health services. The ICB responsible for your particular services is the one that your GP belongs to. You can find your ICB by visiting [nhs.uk/nhs-services/find-your-local-integrated-care-board](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/find-your-local-integrated-care-board).

In Scotland, you should follow the same complaints procedure for any NHS services. In exceptional circumstances, you can contact the Local Health Board (LHB) – find yours by visiting [nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/feedback-and-complaints/making-a-complaint-about-your-nhs-care-or-treatment](https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/feedback-and-complaints/making-a-complaint-about-your-nhs-care-or-treatment).

In Wales, you should contact the complaints team at the LHB – find yours at gov.wales/nhs-wales-health-boards-and-trusts.

Complaining about both NHS services and social services

You may need to make a complaint about both an NHS health service and your local council. For example, you may want to complain about your discharge from hospital being delayed, which was partly caused by the local council's adult social services team not having home care services ready in time for you to return home.

If your complaint is about both the NHS and adult social services, you only need to complain to one organisation. That organisation must contact the other service to decide who will be responsible for dealing with your complaint.

They should then coordinate the investigation into your complaint and act as your main point of contact, so you receive a single response that addresses all your concerns. Both organisations may need to attend any meetings that are held as part of the complaints process.

For more information on complaining about social care services, read our factsheet [Complaints about social care services](#).



To do

To find out more about making a complaint about NHS services, visit:

- England – [nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/how-to-complain-to-the-nhs](https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/about-the-nhs/how-to-complain-to-the-nhs)
- Scotland – [nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/feedback-and-complaints/making-a-complaint-about-your-nhs-care-or-treatment](https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/feedback-and-complaints/making-a-complaint-about-your-nhs-care-or-treatment)
- Wales – [gov.wales/nhs-wales-complaints-and-concerns-putting-things-right](https://www.gov.wales/nhs-wales-complaints-and-concerns-putting-things-right).

5. Complaints about private healthcare

If your complaint is about private healthcare that you're paying for yourself, you'll need to complain directly to the healthcare provider. Each private healthcare provider should have its own formal complaints procedure.

If you live in England and you're unhappy with the response, you can contact the Independent Healthcare Sector Complaints Adjudication Service (ISCAS) if your provider is a member (**020 7536 6091**, [iscas.cedr.com](https://www.iscas.cedr.com)).

In Scotland, contact Healthcare Improvement Scotland, a regulatory body for private healthcare services (**0131 623 4319**, [healthcareimprovementscotland.org/about_us/contact_us/complaints.aspx](https://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/about_us/contact_us/complaints.aspx)).

If you live in Wales, you can share your concerns with the Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (**0300 062 8163**, [hiw.org.uk/provide-feedback-about-healthcare-service](https://www.hiw.org.uk/provide-feedback-about-healthcare-service)) although they will not investigate your complaint. Instead, they will make sure that the healthcare service is meeting set standards.

If you're receiving treatment from a private healthcare provider but it's funded by the NHS, you should go through the NHS complaints procedure – see [chapter 4](#).

If you live in England or Wales, you can contact the Patients Association (**0800 345 7115**, [patients-association.org.uk](https://www.patients-association.org.uk)) for more information and support.

6. Complaints about an individual healthcare professional

As well as following the complaints procedures in the previous chapters, you may also want to complain about an individual's behaviour as a professional.

You can do this by contacting the relevant organisation that regulates the practice of healthcare professionals. That organisation may only investigate in certain circumstances.

Complaints about a doctor

Contact the General Medical Council (GMC) (**0161 923 6602**, [gmc-uk.org](https://www.gmc-uk.org)). The GMC complaints department can investigate all doctors working in the UK, whether they work for the NHS or a private practice.

Complaints about a dentist

Contact the General Dental Council (GDC) (**020 7167 6000**, [gdc-uk.org](https://www.gdc-uk.org)). The GDC can investigate all concerns from dental patients, whether they are NHS or private patients.

Complaints about a nurse

Contact the Nursing and Midwifery Council (**020 7637 7181**, [nmc.org.uk](https://www.nmc.org.uk)). If necessary, they can remove a nurse's professional registration permanently or for a set period of time.

Complaints about another health professional

If you have a complaint about another health professional – for example, an occupational therapist, speech and language therapist or physiotherapist – contact the HCPC's (Health and Care Professions Council) Fitness to Practise Department (**0800 328 4218**, [hcpc-uk.org](https://www.hcpc-uk.org)). It has a register of certain health professionals and can investigate complaints if it's about a profession it regulates.

7. If the complaint is about abuse

Abuse can happen anywhere, including in hospital. Abuse or harm can be physical, sexual, psychological or financial, or neglect. Whatever form the abuse takes, this can be reported to your local council's adult social services team and/or the police.

Who to complain to

If you are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, abuse or neglect, contact adult social services. They must respond if your care and support needs mean you're unable to protect yourself against the abuse.

The council will work with you to find ways to resolve the situation. They may need to start a safeguarding enquiry. This could be a conversation or a more formal course of action involving other agencies. If this happens, you may want to get support from an independent advocate (see [chapter 3](#)).

If you live in England, you will need to contact your local council to get in touch with the adult social services department ([gov.uk/find-local-council](https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council)).

If you live in Scotland, you can look up your local authority's adult social services department at mygov.scot/social-services.

In Wales, visit 111.wales.nhs.uk/localservices and select 'Social Care and Social Services' to find contact details for your local council's social services department.

Read our free guide [Staying in control](#) to find out more about abuse, how to prevent it and how to report it.



Good to know

If you want to speak to someone about suspected abuse, you can contact Hourglass ([0808 808 8141](tel:08088088141), [wearehourglass.org](https://www.wearehourglass.org)) or our Helpline ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789)).

8. Other ways to raise concerns about a health service

If you live in England, you can report your concerns to your local Healthwatch. It will make sure your views and experiences of health and social care services in your area are taken seriously, and represented locally and nationally. To find your local Healthwatch, contact Healthwatch England (**03000 683 000**, [healthwatch.co.uk](https://www.healthwatch.co.uk)).

You can also report your concerns about health services to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) (**03000 616161**, [cqc.org.uk](https://www.cqc.org.uk)), an independent body that regulates many different types of health services in England. Visit [cqc.org.uk/what-we-do/services-we-regulate/services-we-regulate](https://www.cqc.org.uk/what-we-do/services-we-regulate/services-we-regulate) to find out more.

Healthwatch and the CQC don't investigate individual cases, but by reporting your concerns you will help them identify and address quality issues in care and health services.

In Scotland, you can contact the Local Health Board (LHB) if you are unable to resolve the issue with the service directly, but this is only in exceptional circumstances. Find your LHB at [nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/feedback-and-complaints/feedback-complaints-and-your-rights](https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/health-rights/feedback-and-complaints/feedback-complaints-and-your-rights).

In Wales, you can contact the independent healthcare regulator, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (**0300 062 8163**, [hiw.org.uk/contact-us](https://www.hiw.org.uk/contact-us)). It looks into NHS services to ensure that they are meeting standards.

Getting others interested

You may want to try to get support from a local voluntary organisation, your local councillor or your MP. You can find the contact details for your local MP on the They Work For You website ([theyworkforyou.com](https://www.theyworkforyou.com)) or at your local library.

You can also write to the government minister responsible for the NHS. Find out which minister is responsible by visiting [gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health).

9. Taking your complaint further

If you've made your complaint to the NHS or a healthcare provider but you're not happy with the outcome, there are other steps you can take.

To escalate a complaint about NHS services, contact the Ombudsman:

- England – Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) – **0345 015 4033**, ombudsman.org.uk
- Scotland – Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) – **0800 377 7330**, spsso.org.uk/spsso
- Wales – Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSO) – **0300 790 0203**, ombudsman.wales.

The Ombudsman is independent of the NHS and can investigate complaints about NHS services. It cannot deal with complaints about private healthcare unless it was funded by the NHS.

When to contact the Ombudsman

You must use the NHS complaints procedure first. But if this is taking longer than 12 weeks, you may want to contact the Ombudsman about the delay. They may step in to help sort this out. They can't investigate a complaint if you're taking other legal action relating to the issue.

You'll have to persuade the Ombudsman that, even though the NHS has looked into your complaint, they should also do so. They will only investigate where the issue has resulted in an injustice or harm to you. It's useful to include any evidence you have to show this.

You usually need to make your complaint within 12 months of the initial problem, unless there are special reasons for not doing so.

If the Ombudsman finds your complaint is valid, they will write a report recommending what the NHS should do to put things right.

If you need advice or help with taking your complaint further, see [chapter 3](#) for information about organisations that can provide support throughout the complaints process.

10. Taking legal action

When you might want to consider legal action

You might want to consider taking legal action if:

- you're unhappy with the way a decision about your care has been made – you may want to consider starting a judicial review (see [page 19](#)). You need to do this as soon as possible
- you've been injured as a result of a mistake made in your care or treatment – you may want to consider legal action to claim compensation (known as 'damages') for harm caused by negligence. See [page 21](#) about clinical negligence
- you've been discriminated against – for example, if you've been treated differently or unfairly because of your age, ethnicity or sexuality. Contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service for advice ([0808 800 0082](tel:08088000082), equalityhumanrights.com/contact-us)
- your human rights have been breached – for example, if you've experienced poor treatment in a hospital or if your family hasn't been allowed to visit you, you may need to get legal advice.

You do not need to have made a complaint before taking legal action.



To do

If you want to explore the options available to you, contact our free Helpline ([0800 319 6789](tel:08003196789), helpline@independentage.org) to arrange to speak to an adviser.

Getting legal advice

If you live in England or Wales, you may be able to get free legal advice under the legal aid scheme. This is means-tested, which means whether or not you qualify depends on your finances. The rules around who qualifies are complicated, so speak to a legal adviser who specialises in this area, or contact Civil Legal Advice (**0345 345 4345**, [gov.uk/civil-legal-advice](https://www.gov.uk/civil-legal-advice)).

In Scotland, you may be eligible for some legal aid, depending on your circumstances. You will need to find a solicitor that does legal aid work – search through the Scottish Legal Aid Board (**0131 226 7061**, slab.org.uk/new-to-legal-aid/find-a-solicitor).



Good to know

If you don't qualify for legal aid, you might be able to get free initial legal advice through a Law Works legal advice clinic ([lawworks.org.uk](https://www.lawworks.org.uk)) or from the Disability Law Service (**020 7791 9800**, [dls.org.uk](https://www.dls.org.uk)). In Scotland, the Legal Services Agency (**0800 316 8450**, [lsa.org.uk](https://www.lsa.org.uk)) may be able to help.

Judicial review

A judicial review is a type of court proceeding where a judge looks at whether a public body, such as a hospital trust, has applied the law correctly and followed the right procedures when making its decision. In other words, you can apply for a judicial review if you want to challenge the way a decision was made about your care, rather than what happened as a result of the decision.

A judicial review can be an effective way to get a public body like a hospital trust to reconsider a decision or take action. However, it's not appropriate in every case and it's expensive. You should get legal advice first to see if you have a good case.



Good to know

If you're considering judicial review, you need to act quickly. If court proceedings are necessary, they must be started within three months of the decision or action you want to challenge. The court will sometimes give you permission to bring a later claim.

Getting started with a judicial review

If you have grounds to start a judicial review claim, the first stage is to send a 'letter before action'. This sets out the details of the decision or action that you want to challenge and the reason why you think it is unlawful. The relevant NHS organisation should respond within a set time limit. In some cases, a letter before action is enough to sort it out.

If your case is urgent, you can apply to the court to fast-track it. You can also ask the court to order the NHS to act – for example, to put services in place – while you're waiting for the case to go through the court process.



To do

The Public Law Project has produced an Introduction to Judicial Review, which explains how the process works (publiclawproject.org.uk/resources/an-introduction-to-judicial-review-2).

Negligence claims

Clinical negligence can occur when someone involved in your healthcare provides you with treatment that is below an acceptable standard, resulting in you suffering an injury. Examples of negligence could include:

- having your condition diagnosed incorrectly
- a delay or failing to treat your condition
- a mistake being made during an operation or treatment
- not getting your consent for a particular type of treatment.

It can be tricky to work out whether or not clinical negligence has happened. If it appears that negligence happened in your case, you may be able to claim financial compensation. It's also possible to make a claim for someone who doesn't have the mental capacity to do so themselves, or when someone has died.

Timescales for making a claim for clinical negligence

Generally, you must take legal action within three years of the injury taking place or when you first realised you had an injury. But the sooner you can get specialist advice, the better. The time limits vary in different circumstances – for example, when the claim is being made on behalf of someone who does not have the mental capacity to make a claim on their own.



To do

For advice about whether clinical negligence has taken place and what to do next, contact Action against Medical Accidents (AvMA) (**0345 123 2352**, [avma.org.uk](https://www.avma.org.uk)).

Getting specialist help

If you do decide to take legal action and need to find a solicitor specialising in clinical negligence, AvMA can help.

If you live in England or Wales, you can also search for a specialist legal adviser at the Law Society (**020 7320 5650**, solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk) or find-legal-advice.justice.gov.uk – put in your postcode and select ‘clinical negligence’ as the category of law.

In Scotland, search for a solicitor at slab.org.uk/new-to-legal-aid/find-a-solicitor.

11. Step-by-step summary to make a complaint

Step one: Check who to make your complaint to

All health services need to have a complaints process, so you can complain directly to them. But you can usually choose to complain to someone independent of them instead if you want to. If your complaint is about:

- a primary healthcare service, such as your GP or dentist, or a secondary healthcare service, such as hospital services, you can complain to your local Integrated Care Board (ICB). In Wales, you can complain to your Local Health Board (LHB) (see [chapter 4](#)). In Scotland, you should complain directly to the service provider – you can only complain to your LHB in exceptional circumstances
- a secondary healthcare service, such as hospital services, you can send your complaint to your ICB in England, or to your LHB in Wales or Scotland (see [chapter 4](#))
- private healthcare you're paying for yourself, you should complain to the provider (see [chapter 5](#))
- an individual healthcare professional, you can complain to their relevant regulatory body (see [chapter 6](#)).

Step two: Ask the service you're complaining to for a copy of their complaints procedure

This will tell you how to make your complaint and how it will be handled.

Step three: Get help to make your complaint if you need it

If you need help at any stage of the complaints process, you can:

- call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser
- speak to an independent advocate, who may be able to provide practical help
- get in touch with organisations that offer information and resources – for example, your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (in England and Wales) or Patient Advice & Support Service (in Scotland).

For more information about where you can get support, see [chapter 3](#).

Step four: Make your complaint as soon as possible

When making a complaint, you should:

- give a clear account of what happened
- include all the relevant facts (for example, dates, times and names) but try to keep it to the point
- explain what you'd like to happen as a result of your complaint.

For more tips on what to do when making a complaint, see [chapter 2](#).

Step five: If you need to take your complaint further

If you're unhappy with the response you get, or you feel the problem hasn't been solved, you can take it further. To escalate a complaint, contact the Ombudsman for your area – see [chapter 9](#) for more information.

You can also give feedback about a health service. You can:

- give anonymous feedback about an NHS service (see [page 5](#))
- report any concerns to a regulatory body (or the LHB in Scotland) – see [chapter 8](#) for more information.

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