
Making a complaint about health and social services in Wales

A guide for constituents

July 2026



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Senedd Research provides impartial research support to Members of the Senedd. We cannot correspond directly with any other individuals or organisations, nor advise or comment on individual cases.

The information provided in this guide is for general informational purposes only to support the work of Members of the Senedd in assisting their constituents. It is not intended as a substitute to legislation, guidance, policy nor professional advice.

This guide provides an overview of how to make a complaint about health and social services in Wales.

It also signposts other useful sources of information and support.





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1. Background

This guide aims to explain the process of making a complaint about health and social services in Wales, and signpost to useful sources of information and support.

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NHS Wales

From 1 April 2026, the process for raising complaints in NHS Wales is governed by the **Listening to People** process. It replaces the previous **Putting Things Right** process, which had been in place since 2011. Concerns raised on or before 31 March 2026 continue to be handled under Putting Things Right. Concerns raised on or after 1 April 2026 are handled under Listening to People.

Listening to People is underpinned by the **NHS (Concerns, Complaints and Redress Arrangements) (Wales) Regulations 2011**, as amended by the **National Health Service (Concerns, Complaints and Redress Arrangements) (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2023** and **2025**. It applies to all NHS bodies in Wales and is intended to be a single, accessible, and person-centred process for patients to raise concerns about their care.

The Welsh Government has published both **people's guidance** (aimed at patients, service users, families and carers) and **organisational guidance** (aimed at NHS Wales responsible bodies) to support implementation of the new process. The guidance uses the term 'concern' to refer to any complaint, patient safety incident or other issue relating to an NHS organisation's health services.

The **duty of candour** also applies to all NHS bodies in Wales. Introduced by the **Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020**, which came into force in April 2023, the duty of candour is a legal requirement for all NHS bodies to be open and transparent with patients if they experience harm when receiving health care.

Social Services

The **Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014** and the **Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014** set out the framework for how local authorities should handle complaints about social services. The legislation is supported by **complaints guidance**, which local authorities must use alongside these Regulations to ensure a consistent approach for those making a complaint about social services in Wales.

2. Health complaints

Listening to People

Listening to People applies to all NHS Wales 'responsible bodies,' which are those that are legally responsible for a person's care. This includes NHS organisations such as **local health boards and trusts**, special health authorities, and independent providers in Wales providing NHS-funded care.

Each NHS organisation has an internal concerns team to handle complaints and assist with investigations. The contact details of local health boards are provided below:

Local health board concerns teams

Local health board	Email	Phone	Online form
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	ABUHB.ListenToPeople-Complaints@wales.nhs.uk	01633 499040	Online form
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	BCU.PEARS@wales.nhs.uk	03000 851234	Online form
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	Cav.Concerns@wales.nhs.uk	02921 836318	Online form
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	CTM.Concerns@wales.nhs.uk	01443 744915	N/A
Hywel Dda University Health Board	hdhb.patientsupportservices@wales.nhs.uk	0300 0200 159	Online form
Powys Teaching Health Board	Concerns.qualitiesandsafety.POW@wales.nhs.uk	01874 712582	Online form

Swansea Bay University Health Board	SBU.Listening2You@wales.nhs.uk	01639 684440	N/A
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Listening to People also applies to primary care providers, such as GPs, dentists, pharmacists and opticians. Concerns about primary care providers can be raised directly with the practice, or with the relevant local health board concerns team to investigate (links in the above table).

The duty to consider financial redress does not extend to primary care providers or independent providers however, only to NHS bodies (local health boards and trusts and special health authorities).

How to raise a concern

A concern can be raised in **writing, electronically or verbally** (by phone or in person) to the NHS organisation or to any member of staff employed by it. All NHS organisations are required to advertise a single, clear point of access for concerns. If you raise a concern verbally, the organisation must record it and share a written record with you.

Concerns can also be raised directly with **Llais** (the independent citizens' voice body) or with **Healthcare Inspectorate Wales**. You may also choose to contact your local **Member of the Senedd**.

Who can raise a concern?

Concerns can be raised by a patient or service user, or by a representative acting on their behalf. Representatives may act on behalf of a child, someone who lacks capacity, someone who has requested representation, or someone who has died. In some circumstances, it may not be possible to share the full details of an investigation with a representative where doing so would conflict with data protection requirements.

What can be raised as a concern?

Concerns can be raised about any matter connected to the functions of an NHS organisation, including delays in treatment, miscommunication between staff, or the omission of necessary care. This covers all NHS-funded services, including those provided directly by the NHS, by primary care providers, and by independent providers delivering NHS-funded care.

Some concerns are excluded from the Listening to People arrangements. These include concerns that are the subject of civil proceedings; concerns being, or already, investigated by the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**; concerns relating to **Individual Patient Funding Requests**; matters relating to employment or disciplinary proceedings; and failures to comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (which are dealt with by the **Information Commissioner's Office**).

Time limits for raising a concern

A concern should normally be raised **within 12 months** of the date the concern occurred, or within 12 months of the date the person raising the concern became aware of it.

The time limit can be extended where there are good reasons for the delay and the concern can still be investigated thoroughly and fairly.

Acknowledgement of a concern

A concern should be **acknowledged within five working days** of receipt. On acknowledgement, the NHS organisation must offer the person raising the concern an in-person, telephone or video 'Listening Discussion' (see below), provide a named contact, and give information on advocacy and support services.

Listening Discussion

A key feature of the Listening to People process is the mandatory offer of a Listening Discussion at the outset. The offer must be made to everyone who raises a concern. Participation is voluntary, but the offer itself is not optional for NHS organisations.

The Listening Discussion is an opportunity for the person raising the concern to explain what happened, what matters most to them, and what outcome they are seeking. It can take place in person, by phone or via video. The individual may bring a friend, family member or advocate, and may request reasonable adjustments or language support. A Llais representative may also attend.

During the Listening Discussion, the member of staff must:

- listen to the concern and record its details;

- seek to understand the individual's desired outcome;
- explain the options for resolution, including early resolution (Stage 1) or formal investigation (Stage 2) and what each involves;
- give the individual the choice of approach;
- confirm communication preferences, including language choice;
- outline the expected timeframe for handling the concern; and
- ensure the individual is aware of advocacy and support services.

If an individual declines the offer of a Listening Discussion, the organisation must write to them to clarify how they would like their concern to be handled.

Overview of the Listening to People process

The following is an overview of the process of raising a complaint (referred to as a concern) through Listening to People. The [Listening to People guidance](#) provides greater detail as to each step of the process, and additional conditions and exemptions.

Stage 1: Early resolution

Early resolution must always be considered and, where appropriate, offered before a concern progresses to Stage 2. During the Listening Discussion, the person raising the concern will be asked whether they consent to early resolution being attempted.

Early resolution involves checking facts and records to understand what happened, with a focus on implementing practical solutions and addressing the desired outcome expressed during the Listening Discussion. A sincere apology for any distress or harm caused should always be considered as part of this stage.

Early resolution must be completed **within 10 working days** from the date the concern is acknowledged. If the concern is not resolved satisfactorily within this period, or if the individual did not consent to early resolution, the concern progresses to Stage 2.

The organisation must confirm in writing that the concern has been closed, having verified with the individual that resolution has been achieved satisfactorily.

Stage 2: Investigation phase and redress

Stage 2 is reached when early resolution has not been possible or successful, or where early resolution was not appropriate given the seriousness or complexity of the concern. At this stage, the organisation undertakes a more detailed investigation.

The organisation must communicate to the individual an estimated timeframe for the investigation and keep them informed of progress and any changes to expected timescales.

Where the concern relates to personal injury or loss, the organisation must assess whether the standard of care fell below the accepted standard and, if so, whether that breach caused the harm or injury. Where this is established, the organisation must consider whether an offer of redress is appropriate.

Redress may comprise one or more of the following:

- Financial compensation of up to £50,000.
- Further or alternative treatment or care.
- Remedial action.
- An explanation.
- A written apology.
- A report on action taken or to be taken to prevent similar concerns arising.

Where redress is being considered, the organisation must signpost the individual to funded legal support. In some cases, an independent medical expert may be jointly instructed to help assess what happened. Redress cannot be offered if the concern is subject to civil proceedings. The redress arrangements apply only to Welsh NHS bodies; they do not extend to primary care providers or independent providers.

Once the investigation is complete, the organisation must share its findings in a clear written response. The response must use plain language and explain any complex legal or medical terminology. The organisation must also offer a further meeting (an 'outcome meeting') to go through the findings, answer questions and, where appropriate, reiterate the sincerity of any apology. The final response must address each issue raised and set out:

- a sincere apology where things have gone wrong;
- an explanation of how the concern was investigated;
- the outcome of the investigation;
- any actions taken or to be taken to prevent recurrence; and
- contact details for the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, should the individual remain dissatisfied.

Duty of Candour

Since April 2023, the **Duty of Candour** has been a legal requirement for all NHS organisations in Wales, including primary care providers in respect of services provided under contract with local health boards.

The Duty of Candour requires NHS bodies to be open and transparent with patients when they experience harm while receiving health care. They are required to:

- talk to service users about incidents that have caused harm;
- apologise and support them through the process of investigating the incident;
- learn and improve from these incidents; and
- find ways to stop similar incidents from happening again.

The Duty of Candour applies when a patient suffers an adverse outcome and the provision of health care was, or may have been, a factor. An adverse outcome is defined as "any unexpected or unintended harm that is more than minimal." Further detail is provided in the **Duty of Candour Statutory Guidance**, which defines more than minimal harm as moderate harm, severe harm or death.

Under the Listening to People process, NHS organisations are required to record their reasons where they determine that independent medical advice is not needed in relation to a concern involving the death of, or moderate or severe harm to, a patient.

What if I'm unhappy with the response to my concern?

If an individual remains dissatisfied after the organisation has concluded its investigation, there are further steps available:

Contact the organisation again. If anything in the response is unclear, or the individual feels something has been missed, they can contact their named concerns contact to ask questions, request clarification, or discuss whether any additional review is appropriate. If independent medical advice was not obtained during the investigation, the individual can ask the organisation to reconsider this.

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. If the individual remains unhappy after the organisation has completed its investigation, they have the right to ask the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)** to independently review the concern. The organisation is required to provide PSOW contact details in its final response. More detail on the PSOW's role and process is set out in Section 6 below.

Legal advice or a redress claim. Where a concern involves possible harm, injury or financial loss, independent legal advice may be sought at any time. However, if formal civil court proceedings are commenced, the Listening to People investigation must be paused.

3. Frequently Asked Questions – Health

Can patients make a complaint about cross-border healthcare?

Patients from Wales regularly cross the border to receive healthcare from NHS bodies in England.

The Listening to People guidance states that, in general, concerns about care and treatment provided on behalf of the NHS in Wales by organisations outside Wales should be dealt with in accordance with the relevant complaints procedure of the organisation that provided the care or treatment.

NHS England provides information about giving feedback and making complaints about the care, treatments or services they provide.

Patients can also ask Llais for advocacy and support in taking forward a concern about care delivered outside Wales.

What happens when a complaint relates to more than one health board?

The Listening to People guidance sets out the process to be followed when a concern relates to care provided by more than one NHS body. Within two working days of receipt, the organisation receiving the concern must inform the person raising it that another NHS body may be involved, and seek consent to contact and notify the other relevant body. Organisations involved should cooperate to agree a joint response to the concern.

Does Wales have an NHS Constitution?

England has an NHS Constitution which outlines the principles and values of the NHS in England, including information on how to make a complaint about NHS services.

Wales does not have an NHS Constitution. Instead, standards for the care provided by NHS bodies in Wales are set out across a number of pieces of legislation and policy documents. For example:

- A Healthier Wales sets out the Welsh Government's long-term vision for health and social care.

- The **Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020** strengthened the existing **duty of quality** on NHS bodies and extended it to Welsh Ministers.
- The Welsh Government published the **Quality and Safety Framework in 2021**, providing an overview of the quality principles and arrangements that need to be in place across health services.
- The Welsh Government published **Health and Care Quality Standards** in 2023, which set out the standards that patients can expect when accessing health services in Wales.

4. Social Services Complaints

Local authority social services complaints handling

In August 2014, the Welsh Government published **guidance** to improve the experience of people making complaints and representations about local authority social services.

The guidance is intended to support the implementation of two pieces of legislation:

The **Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014**, which introduced a procedure for handling complaints about local authority social services functions.

The **Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014**, which established the procedure for handling representations about specific functions under the Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The **guidance** defines a complaint as:

- an expression of dissatisfaction or concern;
- either written or spoken or made by any other communication method;
- made by one or more members of the public;
- about a public service provider's action or lack of action; or
- about the standard of service provided.

It says that a complaint is not:

- an initial request for a service;
- a formal review or appeal against a decision or determination, the procedure for which is set out in legislation or regulations;
- a means to seek change to legislation or a 'properly made' policy decision; or
- a means for lobbying groups or organisations to seek to promote a cause.

Who can make a complaint and when?

The [guidance](#) states that any member of the public, including a child, who has received or was entitled to receive a service from social services may make a complaint. A representative can make a complaint on behalf of a person where that person is a child, has requested the representative to act, lacks capacity within the meaning of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, or has died.

A complaint or representation can be made **up to 12 months** after the issue occurred or came to the notice of the person making it. The time limit can be extended if there are good reasons for the delay and if the complaint can still be investigated effectively and fairly.

Concurrent investigations

The [guidance](#) sets out that where a matter is subject to “concurrent consideration,” a local authority must not consider a complaint if it would prejudice the conduct of certain other proceedings or investigations.

This could include circumstances where:

- the complainant indicates in writing that they are taking or intend to start legal proceedings;
- the local authority is considering legal proceedings;
- the local authority is taking or proposing to take disciplinary proceedings against a staff member; or
- a prosecuting authority is investigating with a view to a criminal prosecution.

There should be no complaints investigation where there is a risk of compromising any adult or child protection process.

If the local authority decides not to consider the complaint, it must notify the complainant in writing and explain the reason. The complainant may resubmit the complaint no later than six months after the concurrent consideration is discontinued or completed.

An overview of the complaints process

The following is an overview of the process of raising a complaint or representation about local authority social services. The [guidance](#) sets out a

two-stage process and provides greater detail on each step, and additional conditions and exemptions.

Stage one: local resolution

To allow for the quick and successful resolution of most complaints, stage one requires the local authority to offer to discuss the complaint. That discussion must take place **within 10 working days** of receiving the complaint.

If the complaint is resolved, the local authority must **write to the complainant within 5 working days** of the date the complaint or representation was resolved with details of the resolution.

Stage two: formal investigation

If the seriousness of the complaint is too great to deal with at the local resolution stage, or the complainant remains dissatisfied following stage one, the complaint moves to the formal investigation stage.

A complaint or representation must be investigated by an **Independent Investigator**, appointed by the local authority (but not a member or officer of the authority). An Independent Person is also involved for representations.

The local authority must create a written record of the complaint **within 5 working days**. The formal investigation must be completed, with a full written response sent to the complainant, **within 25 working days**. If there are exceptional circumstances, the complainant must be informed, and the response must be issued **no later than six months** from the date the complaint was received.

Once the investigation has concluded, the local authority is responsible for deciding whether the complaint is upheld and any action it will take. This decision should be made by a member of the senior management team. The response must be signed by the Director of Social Services and must include:

- a description of the investigation undertaken;
- whether the complaint or representation is upheld or not upheld;
- an explanation of what action will be taken, if any;
- where appropriate, an apology;

- the Independent Investigator's report (unless there is a specific reason why it should not be included); and
- an offer of an opportunity to discuss the response with an appropriate officer.

5. Advocacy and support relating to social services

Local authorities, when exercising their social services functions, must act in accordance with the requirements contained in the **Code of Practice on Advocacy** (issued under the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**) and must have regard to any guidelines set in it. The Code sets out the requirements for local authorities to:

- ensure that access to advocacy services and support is available to enable individuals to engage and participate when local authorities are exercising statutory duties in relation to them; and
- arrange an Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) to facilitate the involvement of individuals in certain circumstances.

The code includes:

- people's choice to have someone to act as an advocate for them;
- the key points when people's need for advocacy must be assessed; and
- when independent advocacy must be provided.

Age Cymru has a **directory of available advocacy providers** in each area. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales also has a **search tool** to find advice and advocacy bodies across Wales.

The active offer of advocacy for children and young people

The **Code of Practice on Advocacy** sets out that a local authority must make arrangements for the provision of advocacy for 'entitled children,' including:

- A looked after child, or a child who is not being looked after but may have needs for care and support.
- A child in respect of which a Special Guardianship Order is in force.
- An adopted child or a child who may be adopted.

- A young person who is a former looked after child as defined under section 176 and 104 of the **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014**.

Arrangements for advocacy must be made when entitled children make representations (including complaints) under section 174 or 176 of the **Social Services and Well-being Wales Act 2014**, about the discharge of certain local authorities functions, as set out in the Code of Practice.

Children and young people are entitled to an **active offer of advocacy** from a statutory Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) when they become looked after or become subject of child protection enquiries leading to an Initial Child Protection Conference.

An 'active offer' is the sharing of information about the statutory right and entitlement of a child or young person in certain circumstances to have access to an independent professional advocacy service.

The allocated social worker should:

- inform the child or young person of this entitlement;
- provide information about the service;
- ensure the child or young person is aware that the advocacy service will be provided with sufficient information to be able to make contact with them, unless they opt out;
- make a record of any decision by the child or young person to opt out of this service and why; and
- provide contact details for the child and young person to the advocacy service.

The **Young Person's Summary** explains more.

There are different advocacy providers in different areas. The **National Youth Advocacy Service** provides a **search tool** to find the advocacy provider in each area.

6. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

If someone is dissatisfied with the way their health or social services complaint has been dealt with, they can contact the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)**. The PSOW has legal powers to look into concerns and complaints about public services in Wales. They are independent of all government bodies, and their role is to provide an impartial service that is free of charge.

The PSOW has published factsheets on **NHS complaints** and **social services complaints**.

There are some complaints that the PSOW cannot look into. For example, the PSOW can't investigate a complaint if the complainant has a **legal remedy available** through the Courts. If the PSOW is unable to look at a complaint, they will inform the complainant.

When can you complain and what can you complain about?

The PSOW normally expects someone to have **brought their concern to the attention** of the relevant health or social service in the first instance.

They also expect that the concern **happened less than a year ago, or that the complainant became aware of it less than a year ago**, although they have discretion if there is a good reason why the complaint was not made sooner.

The PSOW provides information on what they can and can't look at in relation to:

- **NHS complaints** (including some aspects of privately paid care)
- **Social services complaints**
- Complaints against **dentists, opticians and pharmacists**
- Complaints against **GPs**

How to contact the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

A complaint can be **submitted**:

Online: by completing an [online complaint form](#)

Email: ask@ombudsman.wales

Phone: 0300 790 0203

Post: Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, 1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed CF35 5LJ

An overview of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales complaints process

The PSOW's factsheets, [What we do when we get your complaint about a public service provider in Wales](#) and [Decision Review Process](#) set out the complaints process. The following is an overview of the process of raising a complaint with the PSOW.

Initial Assessment: an initial assessment will be made of the complaint and the PSOW will decide whether to:

- **Investigate:** the PSOW only investigate about 1 in 10 of the complaints they receive, usually when the issue is very complicated or if it may affect other people. An investigation takes around 12 months, although it can take longer. The PSOW will keep the complainant informed throughout the process.
- **Early resolution:** the PSOW may arrange early action for things to be put right. They will write to you to explain what has been arranged and follow up to make sure that the organisation did what it agreed to do.

Decision and Follow Up: At the end of an investigation, the PSOW will explain what was found and whether they uphold the complaint. If the PSOW uphold a complaint, they will recommend what the organisation should do to put things right.

Review Process: If the complainant is not satisfied with the PSOW's decision to not investigate their complaint, discontinue an investigation or believe that a decision following an investigation is flawed, they can [request a review](#).

7. Llais

Llais is an independent statutory body established in April 2023 to give the people of Wales a greater say in the planning and delivery of their health and social care services. The **Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020** created Llais to replace community health councils.

Llais provide a free, independent, and confidential **advocacy service** for those raising a complaint about health and social care services. They support people making a complaint and help explain the process and options available.

How to contact Llais

Find and contact your **local Llais team**.

Online: use the **online form**

Email: **enquiries@llaiscymru.org**

Phone: 02920 235 558

Post: Llais, Crown Buildings, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ

8. Other sources of information and support

- In Wales, some patients receiving mental health services have a right to an Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA) to help understand and have a say in their treatment, and to offer support with making a complaint.
 - Mind provide further information about **Independent Mental Health Advocates**.
 - **Advocacy Support Cymru** (ASC) provide an **IMHA service** in several local health board areas in Wales, and also provide **contact details for providers** in other areas.
- **The Older People's Commissioner for Wales** has an advice and assistance team who can help connect with support and services throughout Wales.
- The **Children's Commissioner for Wales** has a **Children's Rights Advice and Assistance Team** who offer a free and confidential helpline to advise and assist children and young people or those who care for them if they feel that a child has been treated unfairly.
- **Age Cymru** provides confidential and impartial **advice** to older people, their families, friends, carers and professionals throughout Wales and publishes **guides** that provide overviews of particular topics and factsheets that provide more detailed, in-depth information.
- **Citizens Advice Wales** offers free confidential advice online, over the phone and in person.
- **Advicelink Cymru** is a Welsh Government funded Citizens Advice service.
- **Meic** is an information, advice and support helpline for children and young people under 25.

- The **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales** has a **list of advice and advocacy bodies** that may be able to help when making a complaint.