This guide will tell you what to expect if you decide to work with POhWER to make a complaint about the NHS.

We have advocates who can sign, use communications toolkits and have access to interpreters.

We can provide information in a way that suits you. We can provide information in different languages, braille, large print, easy read and audio format.

The different ways to contact us are on the back page. Please let us know what you need and we will do our best to help.
Your Right to Complaints Advocacy

By law, people who wish to complain about the care and/or treatment they receive from the NHS in England are entitled to free, independent and confidential advocacy services to help them make their complaint.

Please contact POhWER and we will be happy to advise you as to who is your local NHS Complaints provider.

Call us on 0300 456 2370 (charged at local rate).

POhWER is completely independent of the NHS. POhWER is governed by a Board of Trustees and members who are users of the NHS and other public services.

About our Staff and our Service

Welcome to the NHS Complaints Advocacy Service

We hope that this information will help you understand how NHS Complaints Advocacy works so that you can decide if this is a service that would meet your needs.

Our Staff

All our information and advice staff are fully trained. All our advocates have the National Advocacy Qualification. POhWER also holds the Quality Performance Mark which means that we meet high standards of advocacy.
What the NHS Complaints Advocacy Service Can and Can’t Do

NHS Complaints Advocacy Service can:

- Support you to make a complaint about a service, care or treatment provided to you or commissioned by the NHS
- Support you with a combined complaint that is about both health and social care
- Support you to make a complaint on someone else’s behalf, including if someone has died
- Listen to your concerns
- Signpost you to other organisations if we think that someone else can also be of help
- Answer questions about the NHS complaints procedure and explain your options
- Provide a step by step guide to the NHS complaints procedure and offer some tips
- Provide you with a POhWER NHS Complaint advocate, an experienced worker who can help you make your complaint and support you through the process
- Support a young person under 16 if they have capacity to make their own decisions

NHS Complaints Advocacy Service can’t:

- Get NHS staff disciplined
- Work on complaints that fall outside the time periods set in the NHS complaints regulations unless there are special reasons
- Help with complaints about services not covered by NHS Complaints Regulations, such as privately funded treatment or complaints solely about council services, including social care
- Give legal advice
- Help with legal action
- Investigate complaints
- Give medical advice
- Provide counselling
- Provide a secretarial service

Even if we are not able to help with an issue, we may be able to signpost you to someone else who can help. Please do ask us.
How the Process Works

When you first contact us, one of our information and advice staff will talk to you about your concern, what sort of help you think you require and if you have any particular needs such as large print materials or access to someone who can sign. If they think we can help you they will explain our service to you. If POhWER are unable to help you we will signpost you to an organisation that can.

If it is established that you need further support, an advocate will contact you within 5 working days and agree an initial plan with you. Once this is complete they will begin work with you, in line with your plan.

When can the NHS Complaints Advocacy Service help?

The NHS complaints procedure is designed to help people to get their concerns and complaints heard and where possible, resolved. It encourages people to talk to their healthcare professional and/or to contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who may be able to get something put right there and then. Your care provider should be able to give you information about local PALS. If not, you can contact us and we will try to help.

The NHS Complaints Advocacy Service can help you at any stage in the NHS complaints process. The key stages are:

Making a complaint to the service provider

If you cannot resolve your concern informally, or you would prefer to make a complaint to the service provider, POhWER can help you. Normally you must complain within 12 months of the events that you want to complain about. However, there may be occasions where the individual NHS body will consider your complaint outside of those timescales.

Making a complaint to the Health Service Ombudsman

If you are dissatisfied with the final response provided by the NHS you can take your complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO).
What Sort of Support Can We Offer?

Depending on your needs we can support you with any or all of the following:

• **Find information relevant to your complaint**
  You may feel that you need a bit of help to find information. We may be able to direct you to helpful sources. For example, we can advise you how to obtain a copy of your medical records.

• **Think through your concerns, the complaints process and what you might realistically achieve**
  Complaints are sometimes about matters that are very distressing and the process of complaining can seem very daunting. Sometimes people find it helps to talk through their concerns and how the process works with someone knowledgeable, empathetic and independent.

• **Write letters**
  A complaint is more likely to be resolved quickly and successfully if it is expressed clearly. We can help you work out what you want to say and to help you draft letters.

• **Attend NHS complaints meetings**
  Sometimes it is necessary to meet with NHS staff as part of the complaints process. This can feel daunting and sometimes upsetting. We can support you to prepare for and attend meetings with NHS staff so that you can make the most of the opportunity to discuss your complaint.

We will provide the type and level of support that you need, based on our discussions with you. For example you may feel that, because of a disability, ill health, communication or language barriers, grief or other reasons, you need more support from a POhWER NHS Complaint advocate throughout the complaints process. Alternatively, once you have talked the complaint through with an advocate you may feel happy to continue without support.
We work with everyone, no matter what their needs

Including but not exclusively, people who have:

- Mental health issues
- Learning difficulties
- Challenging behaviours
- Sensory disabilities
- Little or no English and different cultural backgrounds
- Suffered a bereavement

Or anyone else who needs help with their NHS complaint.

Our staff have access to:

- Secure case management and reporting systems
- Letter templates
- Interpreting facilities
- Assistive technologies
- Specialist advocates – e.g. signers, deaf advocates and visually impaired advocates
- Communications kits and other resources
Giving Consent

Before we work with you we will ask you to fill in a form giving your consent. If you are acting on someone else’s behalf, we will ask you and the patient to fill in a consent form.

This form is included in our ‘Step by Step’ guide and is also on our website. We can help you to complete it. POhWER works with clients using verbal and written consent.

How will we treat information you give us?

All our staff are trained in data protection and treat information as confidential.

We will not tell anyone what you tell us unless you want us to. However, there may be times when we need to tell other people things about you if we think that you or someone else may be at risk of harm.

We will keep a copy of your information on our secure computer system for 6 years after our last contact with you. If we do not hear from you for 6 years we will remove your information and destroy any paper records we are holding.

If at any time you would like to know more about the information we hold about you, please do contact us.
Working Together

With the help of our clients, we have drawn up some ground rules to help ensure that the NHS Complaints Advocacy Service works as well as possible for everyone.

Ground rules for working together

• Please contact POhWER NHS Complaints Advocacy Service and your advocate through the main contact centre. This helps us make sure that messages are forwarded and helps us to respond to emergencies if your advocate is not available.

• We ask that you understand that advocates must work within the rules of the NHS complaints system and the POhWER NHS Complaints Advocacy Service. They will let you know if you ask them to do something that they cannot do.

• Your advocate will listen to your concerns respectfully and explain your options. We ask that you also treat your advocate with respect.

• Your advocate will agree with you the level of support and contact to be provided to you. If you feel you need to change this, please discuss this with your advocate and a new plan can be made if necessary.

• We ask that you understand that an advocate cannot give you a personal opinion on your complaint.

• Please don’t use unpleasant language or make personal comments based on race, gender, sexual orientation or disability at any point in your discussions with our staff.

• If you are dissatisfied with our service, please do use our complaints system and we will do our best to put things right.

• Any comments about your experience of POhWER NHS Complaints Advocacy Service are very welcome and can be made by telephone, by post, by email, or through our website (www.pohwer.net).

We may not be able to continue to support you if you do not work within these rules.
Service Standards

We want our clients to feel confident that we offer a good quality service and we ask external bodies to assess us.

POhWER holds the industry standard award for providing high quality advocacy services – the QPM, including for our IMCA service. We also hold the Community Legal Services Information and Advice Award, Advice Quality Standard and are members of Advice UK and the Telephone Helplines Association. POhWER has achieved the silver award from Investors in People. We have the disabilities Two Ticks award and are recognised by many organisations supporting people who might otherwise be vulnerable to discrimination. You can find out more by looking at our website.

We have set out the key standards that apply to delivery of services to clients as the POhWER Promises which can be found on the next page.

What if you are not satisfied?

You can comment or complain about our service by contacting us using the details on the back of this booklet.

If you make a complaint we aim to resolve the issue quickly, fully and at a local level. We will acknowledge your complaint within two working days and try to resolve the issue satisfactorily. If necessary, we will carry out a formal investigation and keep you updated throughout the process.

If you have used POhWER’s internal complaints process and you are not satisfied, you can appeal to the Charity Commission or the Local Service Commissioner. For more information and contact details for these organisations, visit our website: www.pohwer.net
POhWER Promises

When you contact POhWER, we will:
• Give you accurate information about our services and your options within 48 hours
• Let you know if we are not the best people to help you and tell you who else might be able to help and how
• Help you to contact other organisations if you would like us to
• Give you information in a way that meets your needs – for example, Easy Read, large print or in another language
• Use plain language and no jargon
• Treat you politely and with respect at all times
• Make sure we have your consent if you need advocacy

When you phone POhWER, we will:
• Answer your call within four rings if we can, and reply to voicemail messages within one working day
• Give you the name of the person you are speaking to, listen to you and talk through your options
• Ring you back within two working days if we cannot give you the help you need at once

When you email or write a letter to POhWER, we will:
• Let you know we have received your letter within two working days, either by writing back to you or by calling you on the telephone if you ask us to
• Explain your options and agree what the next step might be
• Tell you who your contact is

When you are helping someone else get support from POhWER, we will:
• Tell you about how we can work with you and the person you are helping
• Explain to you about consent and agree with you who we should contact, how and when

If you or your representative needs an advocate to help you, POhWER will:
• Get back to you within five working days,
• Listen to what you have to say and respect your views, experience and privacy
• Give you all the options open to you and the information you may need to help you decide what you want to do
• Keep in touch with you at least once a month
• Tell you when we are going to close your case and why we are doing that
• Delete any records we hold about you 14 months after we last hear from you (unless the law says otherwise)

If your advocate needs to meet you they will:
• Get in touch with you to agree a date, time and place that suits us both
• Wear a POhWER badge so you can easily see who we are
Feedback

We are always keen to improve our services and after we close your case, we would like to receive feedback about our service.

Your can leave your feedback by visiting our website


or by calling 0300 456 2370 and requesting a feedback form.

After your Case is Closed

We will offer you the opportunity to stay in touch with POhWER by becoming a member in your local area.

Sometimes people also feel that they would still like a bit of support, but don’t need advocacy. If so, we may be able to link you up with our volunteer service if we have one in your area.
For more information about this or any of our other services please contact us:

**Telephone:** 0300 456 2370 (Monday to Friday - 8am to 6pm)

**Minicom:** 0300 456 2364

**Text:** send the word pohwer with your name and number to 81025

**Email:** pohwer@pohwer.net

**Skype:** pohwer.advocacy (8am-6pm)

**Fax:** 0300 456 2365

**Post:** POhWER, PO Box 14043, Birmingham, B6 9BL

For more information visit our website at [www.pohwer.net](http://www.pohwer.net)

**Follow us on Twitter** @POhWERadvocacy

**Like us on Facebook** @pohwer.net

**Access to information**

- We provide leaflets and information in a variety of languages and formats, Easy Read, audio and DVDs
- We have access to translation and interpreting services
- We use communication toolkits, Makaton and other signing techniques