

People's experiences of accessing
complaints through the GP
Surgery/NHS Integrated Care Board
websites

Autumn/Winter 2024



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Introduction

Background

Healthwatch Coventry is the independent champion for NHS and social care.

The Healthwatch Coventry mission is to hear experiences of NHS and social care services.

Being able to make a complaint is one of the essential rights for people who are using health and social care. To help improve services, and to make services accountable for their actions and behaviours.

As services and processes are becoming more digital it is important that people can use these pathways or to have information in a way for them to be able to make a complaint.

Good practice guidelines about complaints have informed this piece of work, as shown below:

- 2022, NHS Complaint Standards Summary of expectations when making a complaint
- Complaints should be seen as a positive experience for service and the person making the complaint
- supporting a thorough and fair approach that accurately reflects the experiences of everyone involved
- encouraging fair and accountable responses that provide open and honest answers as soon as possible

In **2024** the Complaints Standards NHS and Parliamentary Services Ombudsmen says complaints should be used to:

- promoting a learning culture by supporting organisations to see complaints as opportunities to improve services"¹
- Integrated Care Boards (ICB) w now have responsibility for overseeing complaints about primary care services.

Welcoming complaints in a positive way and recognising them as a valuable insight

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https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/sites/default/files/NHS_Complaint_Standards_Summary_of_expectations_December_2022_Final.pdf 25/10/24

How we did the research

We wanted to hear the views of our Clear Information Volunteers about how easy or hard it is to find information about making a complaint

We briefed seven Clear Information Volunteers about the project, looking at ICB/GP websites

ICB Integrated Care Board
Voiceability support for people who want to make a complaint
GP General Practitioner

We looked over all of the GP and ICB websites to look at their style, what information they contained about Healthwatch Coventry, Voiceability and the ICB

Our Clear Information Volunteers compared two complaints information sheets, Coventry and Warwickshire ICB and Dorset ICB to see which one we preferred

Our Volunteers looked at six GP websites to see what information they contain and how easy it is to find the complaints process on them

Our volunteers considered whether they felt reassured that their complaint would be dealt with fairly

We looked at whether people would know about the support available to help them to make a complaint

We suggested some ideas that would help to improve the information on the websites to encourage people to make a complaint about the service they received.

What our volunteers and staff said.

[websites and wording] May not work for people whose first language is not English

"It is not clear what the sentence 'If you have a complaint relating to the way an NHS service has been commissioned by CWICB,' means. I would expect to be complaining about care I have received but this doesn't seem to fit here.

I doesn't distinguish between feedback and complaint on the link on the website (not clear)

"Blocks with links have been added but these are right at the bottom of a long page of information"

"Graphics would help and better design as information is there but not easily accessible."

"I liked the format -very patient friendly with all the information needed explained. Short /easy to read... Liked the Advocacy information Included information about the process"

50% found searching for the complaints process not so easy or not at all easy



45% did not feel that they were confident they would be able to make a complaint.



60% said that it felt good to be on the website, indicating that the websites were clear and welcoming.



40% said it didn't feel good to be on the website, indicating that they might feel unclear or anxious.

100% of volunteers said they preferred the Dorset ICB complaints information to the Coventry and Warwickshire ICB



What works for some websites

“Very comprehensive and detailed description of how, what happens next and online form.”

The initial reaction to the website is that it is user friendly and welcoming. The first thing you see is the welcoming message

There is a complaint policy stating that patients can call or write to the office manager if there are complaints

Learning for improvement.

It would be better to make the forms online or more accessible to everyone

There was a lot of information – too much

Have clear links to the complaints process on the website

Making the process clearer – what happens next when you make a complaint?

Make the website engaging and easy to access for all

Add information about ICB offer of support for people who want to complain, alongside information about Healthwatch Coventry

Welcoming

Responsive

Accurate
Information

Accessible

Process

Supported

Other services

What we learnt: it's a WRAP

Our volunteers liked websites that felt welcoming and clear. Where there was clear information about the services, Where there is positive message about making a complaint and a clear link to the complaints process, they liked websites which linked the website into the community they served .

The website should be responsive to people's needs, gives timelines, and information in a clear and easy to follow way. So, people can access it easily and in good time.

To makes sure that **all information is up to date** on the website/ system and any forms, and numbers, including contacts for Voiceability, Healthwatch Coventry and Healthwatch Warwickshire, number for Practice manager to ask for a complaint form is accurate.

The information should be written in a way that everyone understands, **uses simple language** and explains jargon.

It should be easy to find the links and information on the website without having to dig through lots of links and sections of information. Make links clear on the front page of the website.

The Process could be clearly outlined, in terms of stages and escalations. It would detail the support available to people wanting to make a complaint, but most of all to keep things simple and straightforward.

A clear process that explains how to make a complaint and **the support** you can get to be able to write one and to go through the process.

Information about what will happen when you make a complaint, but most of all to keep things simple and straightforward.

Information about other **services** IHCA Independent health Care Advocacy, Healthwatch Coventry and how the complaint can be escalated should be provided.



Next Steps

This report will be sent to the ICB Complaints and communications department for consideration.

Healthwatch Coventry thanks its Clear Information Volunteers for giving their time, and the ICB for asking us to look at complaints and communication within the ICB and GP surgeries.