

Coming out of hospital



It is helpful to know what to consider if you're looking to care for someone who is coming out of hospital, especially if their needs have changed. This factsheet explains what to expect, the steps that should be followed, your rights as a carer, and what to do if things go wrong. This information applies to people living in England.

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If the person you care for is in hospital

If the person you care for is in hospital, you may be faced with important decisions. You may be considering taking on this caring role for the first time and don't know what to expect. Or you may have already been caring for the person, but their needs have now increased or changed.

One important thing to remember is that it is your choice whether or not to take on a caring role. Think about the type and amount of support you are able to provide and what help you might need. For example, you may be able to help with shopping and meals but feel that you would both like someone else to help with personal care. It is important for you to consider how your caring role is likely to affect your life and wellbeing.

An outline of the discharge procedure

Each hospital will have its own discharge policy based on guidance from the [guidance from the government](#). You can request a copy of the hospital's discharge policy from the ward manager or from the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) department of the hospital. Read more: [nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service/](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service/).

Discharge planning starts as soon as the person you care for is admitted to [hospital](#). It is important to let the hospital staff know as early as possible if you are a carer or thinking of taking on the role. A discharge coordinator (or ward care coordinator) should be available to coordinate the planning process. They will act as a key person for you to contact to find out what the discharge plans are.

Should I, as a carer, be involved in the discharge procedure?

The hospital discharge policy should emphasise the importance of involving you and the person you care for at all stages of discharge planning, so long as the person you care for consents to this. Hospital wards can sometimes seem like busy places and you may feel pressure from the hospital to get the person you care for home as soon as possible.

The person you care for may be anxious to come home. However, it is important that you feel your views have been taken into consideration and

that the person you care for is not being discharged before necessary support has been put in place. In situations where the person you care for does not want you to be involved or be given information about their care, you should be informed of this.

If the person you care for is unable to make their own decisions (lacks mental capacity), you may be able to make certain decisions about health and welfare matters if you have a [Lasting Power of Attorney \(LPA\)](#). If there is no LPA, the law requires professionals to act in the 'best interests' of the person you care for and you should be involved in this decision-making process.

►► **Note:** For more information about mental capacity, you can visit [carersuk.org/mental-capacity](https://www.carersuk.org/mental-capacity) and scroll down to find the link for the country where you live or email advice@carersuk.org

What should happen before the person I care for is discharged?

When the person you care for is nearing their expected date of discharge the following steps should be taken:

- An assessment should be carried out to see if they are medically fit to be discharged.
- A discharge assessment should be carried out to see if they need support once discharged (see page 4).
- A carer's assessment should be carried out (or at least arranged), to see whether you as a carer need support once the person you care for is discharged (see page 7).
- A written care and support plan should be given to the person you care for (and a support plan for yourself if you have had your own carer's assessment), which outlines the support required and how this will be provided.
- Support should be put in place, as outlined in the care and support plan (for the person being cared for) and the support plan (for you).

What should happen on the day the person I care for is discharged?

On the day of discharge, you and the person you care for should expect to be given both verbal and written information, with details of any services involved and information about future treatment and care. The information should be available in a language and format that's suitable for you. It is common that people do not remember or understand all the information they are given so don't be afraid to ask for it to be repeated or explained in a different way.

You and the person you care for should expect certain arrangements to be made for the day of discharge:

- Appropriate transport should be organised if it is required.
- You should both be given copies of the care and support plan (for the person being cared for) and the support plan (for you).
- The person you are for (or you) will also be given a letter for their GP. This provides information about their treatment and future care needs and will need to be given to their GP as soon as possible.
- Medication and any equipment needed at home should be given to the person you care for, as well as instructions and information about its use. The person you care for should have seven days' worth of any medication. You should be able to arrange a repeat prescription if needed with the GP.
- Any necessary support should be put in place to start on the day of discharge.

There should be somewhere appropriate for you to wait in the hospital for transport, medication etc.

What is a discharge assessment?

This is a review to see if the person you care for needs support for when they leave hospital (when discharged). This might be carried out by a multidisciplinary team of health or social care professionals (to avoid multiple assessments being carried out). You may hear the terms '**minimal discharge**' where they will be assessed as needing very little support after

leaving hospital, and '**complex discharge**', which means they would need more specialised care support, as detailed in their care plan.

This discharge assessment should investigate whether the person you care for is eligible for any intermediate or reablement care, NHS continuing healthcare or NHS funded nursing care, other NHS services and/or community care services from the local authority.

Intermediate or reablement care

Intermediate care is a short-term package of care that aims to help someone live independently at home. Government guidance states that intermediate care should be available to all adults over the age of 18 who might need it and certain young disabled people while managing their transition to adulthood.

Intermediate care could include any of the following:

- crisis response services providing short-term care
- home-based care services provided by health professionals such as nurses and therapists
- bed-based care away from home such as in a community hospital
- reablement.

Reablement is a particular type of intermediate care which has a stronger focus on helping someone to live independently. It is generally provided by local authorities.

Before the intermediate care or reablement ends, there should be another assessment to determine whether someone has ongoing needs for care and support (if this has not already been decided).

Intermediate and reablement care should be provided free of charge for up to six weeks (although this can be longer in some circumstances). After the six weeks, any ongoing support needs that are being met by the NHS, should be free of charge. If there are ongoing support needs being met by the local authority, they can charge for such services.

NHS Continuing Healthcare

NHS Continuing Healthcare is a package of care for those who are 18 or over who have a 'primary health need' that is arranged and funded by the

NHS. This package of care can be provided in the home of the person you care for, in a care home, or through a personal budget. This page on the NHS website has some more details: [nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/money-work-and-benefits/nhs-continuing-healthcare/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/money-work-and-benefits/nhs-continuing-healthcare/).

If it seems like the person you care for might be eligible for NHS continuing healthcare, an assessment should be carried out for this. Generally, there is an initial checklist assessment to see whether the person you care for might be eligible. Be aware that the eligibility criteria are very tight and most people with ongoing care needs won't qualify. To find out more, see our online [NHS Continuing Healthcare guide](#).

NHS funded nursing care

Perhaps the person you care for is not eligible for NHS continuing healthcare, but they are assessed as requiring nursing care in a care home that's registered to provide such care. In this case, they may be eligible for NHS funded nursing care if they are over 18. This means that the NHS will pay a contribution towards the cost of their registered nursing care. For more information, see: [nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/money-work-and-benefits/nhs-funded-nursing-care/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/money-work-and-benefits/nhs-funded-nursing-care/).

►► **Note:** NHS continuing care is the alternative for children under 18. It is different from adult NHS continuing healthcare as the whole package of care is not normally arranged and funded by the NHS. Usually, it involves a holistic approach for assessing children including social services and education departments in addition to the NHS. This can sometimes lead to joint funding arrangements, depending on the child's assessed needs. Read more: [gov.uk/government/publications/children-and-young-peoples-continuing-care-national-framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-and-young-peoples-continuing-care-national-framework).

Other NHS services

Palliative care can be provided free on the NHS and is for people who have a health condition that is not expected to be cured by medical treatment. Palliative care may consist of pain relief and other appropriate medical care, as well as emotional and practical support. It can take place in a

hospice, residential care or the person's own home. Medical equipment and incontinence products may be provided free on the NHS if the person you care for is assessed as needing such items.

Community care services from the local authority

Most people being discharged from hospital won't need or be eligible for NHS continuing healthcare. Instead, they can have an assessment from the local authority, to determine whether they are eligible for any support. Support could range from equipment or adaptations to the home, to a care worker providing personal care help.

The hospital should give an assessment notice to the local authority so that they can carry this out as part of the discharge assessment. For those who are 18 or over this will be called a needs assessment and for a child (under 18) this will be called a Children Act assessment.

If the person you care for is assessed as needing support from the local authority, they will carry out a financial assessment to determine whether the person will need to contribute towards the cost of any support provided.

The carer's assessment

As a carer you can have an assessment from the local authority, to determine whether you are eligible for any support. Support could include services provided directly to you, or services provided to the person you care for, which in turn would help you in your caring role.

There are various different types of assessments depending on whether you are an adult yourself, and whether the person you are caring for is an adult.

►► Note: For more information on the different types of assessments available visit, carersuk.org/assessments and carersuk.org/needs-assessment or contact our Helpline (contact details on final page).

If you are assessed as needing support from the local authority, the local authority might carry out a financial assessment to determine whether, and

if so how much, you will need to contribute towards the cost of any support provided. However, it is hoped that a lot of local authorities will not charge carers for support provided to them. If the support is provided to the person you are caring for, you as a carer cannot be charged.

Discharge from a mental health facility

If the person you care for is in a mental health facility, they may be there as a voluntary in-patient (which means they can choose to leave if they want), or they may be there because they are detained under the Mental Health Act. There are special rules that apply to discharge from hospital following a section under the Mental Health Act – see page 9.

Before the person you care for is discharged from a mental health facility, there should be a meeting to assess what support or care services may be needed once they are back in a community setting. In addition to having a needs assessment for community care services (see page 6), the person you care for may receive some of the mental health specific support outlined below. As a carer you should be involved in this process if the person you care for consents to this.

Community Mental Health Teams

If someone is being discharged from a mental health facility, they may be referred to a Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) which is made up of different mental health professionals from both health and social care. There are also specialist CMHTs that the person you care for may be referred to, depending on their assessed mental health needs at the point of discharge.

If the person you care for is under 18, then they may be referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). If they are over 65, they may be referred to an Older People's CMHT.

The Care Programme Approach

If the person you care for is assessed as having complex needs requiring long-term support at the point of discharge, they may be placed under the Care Programme Approach (CPA). The CPA is a national framework that CMHTs work within to coordinate the care and support services received by patients with complex mental health needs. If the person you care for

qualifies for the CPA, some of the things they should expect to receive include:

- a full assessment of their health and social care needs
- a care plan that is regularly reviewed
- a Care Coordinator who is responsible for making sure the care plan gets implemented and meets assessed needs.

▶▶ **Note:** As a carer you should be involved in the Care Programme Approach (CPA) meetings if the person you care for consents to this.

Discharge from the Mental Health Act

If the person you care for is detained under a section of the Mental Health Act, there are certain restrictions on how they can be discharged from section. The different ways this can be done can include where:

- the section runs out and is not renewed
- the professional in charge of the person you care for (the Responsible Clinician) discharges them
- the nearest relative of the person you care for (as defined in the Mental Health Act) discharges them (although the Responsible Clinician can override this)
- the Mental Health Act Managers discharge them
- a tribunal discharges them.

Mental Health Act guidance suggests that the person you care for should not be discharged by their Responsible Clinician until adequate care and support in the community has been arranged for them. In terms of what type of care this might include, in most cases the person you care for will receive specialist support from an appropriate Community Mental Health Team under the Care Programme Approach.

If the person you care for has been detained in hospital under section 3, 37, 45A, 47 or 48 of the Mental Health Act, they are entitled to free aftercare services [under section 117 of the Act](#).

The free aftercare is funded by the NHS and local authority in the area where the person you cared for lived before they were admitted to hospital. Aftercare services will be based on the health and social care needs identified in the care plan of the person you care for. As a carer you should be involved in the care plan if the person you care for consents to this. To find out more about your legal rights, see mind.org.uk/information-support/legal-rights/leaving-hospital/overview/.

►► **Note:** Discharge from the Mental Health Act is a complicated area and therefore if this applies to the person you care for, you may need to seek further advice from a specialist mental health charity (see contacts section on pages 14-15).

What is a Community Treatment Order?

If the person you care for has been treated in hospital under the Mental Health Act, they may be provided with a Community Treatment Order (CTO) if they are allowed to leave hospital on short-term leave. If you think this applies to your situation, this is explained in detail on this page of the NHS website: nhs.uk/mental-health/social-care-and-your-rights/mental-health-and-the-law/mental-health-act/.

Other important things to think about if the person you care for is in hospital

Benefit claims

It is important to notify the relevant benefit office that the person you care for is going or has gone into hospital, as this may affect their benefits as well as your own.

If the person you care for was 18 or over when they went into hospital, some benefits such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Attendance Allowance will stop if they have been in hospital for more than 28 days. If the person you care for was under 18 when they went into hospital, their DLA or PIP will continue to be paid for the whole time they are there.

Stays in hospital or a care home, that are separated by 28 days or less are added together when the assessor decides whether certain disability benefits should stop (this may be referred to as the 'linking rules').

If the Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance of the person you care for stops, your Carer's Allowance will also stop.

When the person you care for is ready to be discharged, inform the office dealing with the particular benefit to make sure that payments restart. The person you care for may also be eligible for benefits at an increased rate if their care needs have changed.

 **Note:** The rules relating to benefits can seem complex. For further advice and information contact the Carers UK Helpline – see final page for contact details.

Help at work

The Carer's Leave Act became law on 6 April 2024. This gives unpaid carers balancing unpaid care with paid employment the legal right to five days of unpaid carer's leave. For detailed information about how the Carers Leave Act works, please look at our guide here: carersuk.org/help-and-advice/work-and-career/the-carer-s-leave-act-2023/.

If you are in paid work, you may need to make some adjustments when the person you care for goes into hospital and possibly also when they come out. This could be anything from needing to make regular phone calls to check on them, through to taking off an extended period of leave. Most working carers have the following rights:

- the right to request flexible working
(To find out more about the Flexible Working Act, see the link below.)
- the right to time off in emergencies
- the right to not be discriminated against or harassed under the Equality Act.

▶▶ **Note:** For more information about your rights in work, see carersuk.org/work and carersuk.org/help-and-advice/work-and-career/the-flexible-working-act-2023/.

Complaints

Unfortunately, there may be times when you need to make a complaint. When making a complaint, it is important to explain as clearly as possible what went wrong, and what you would like to happen instead. It's also helpful to keep copies of who you spoke to and key dates in writing.

Complaints about the NHS

If you, or the person you are looking after, are unhappy with the discharge procedure, with the way you have been treated by the NHS or with an NHS service, you may wish to make a complaint about this. To start with, you may want to make an informal complaint by speaking to the person responsible for the issue, which may be enough to resolve the matter.

If the informal complaint does not resolve the matter, you can use the two stage formal complaints procedure outlined below. You will need to make your complaint as soon as possible, and generally within 12 months of the event you are complaining about. The NHS website has a useful guide: england.nhs.uk/contact-us/feedback-and-complaints/complaint/.

First stage complaint – local resolution

Local resolution: You can raise your concern with the NHS service provider (eg, GP, dentist surgery or hospital) or to the commissioner of the services (the body that pays for the NHS services you use), but you cannot

complain to both. You can ask for a copy of their complaints procedure which will give further information. Your complaint can be in writing or you can complain verbally.

We understand that making a complaint can be a daunting prospect. For information and support with making a complaint, you may find it helpful to contact the following services:

- **The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):** they provide a confidential service to help patients get the most from the NHS – visit [nhs.uk/common-health-questions/nhs-services-and-treatments/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service](https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/nhs-services-and-treatments/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service).
- **Healthwatch:** they can provide guidance on making a complaint – visit [healthwatch.co.uk](https://www.healthwatch.co.uk) or call 03000 683 000.

Second stage complaint – Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

If you are still not happy and have exhausted all options for local resolution of the complaint, you can take the matter to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, who is independent of the NHS. Visit [ombudsman.org.uk](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk) or telephone 0345 015 4033.

Note: If you want to make a complaint about NHS continuing healthcare, the process can differ. For some guidance, see – [beaconchc.co.uk/what-is-nhs-continuing-healthcare/dispute-resolution](https://www.beaconchc.co.uk/what-is-nhs-continuing-healthcare/dispute-resolution).

Complaints about the local authority

If you, or the person you are looking after, are unhappy with the way an assessment was carried out, with the way you have been treated by the local authority or with a local authority service, you can make a complaint about this. It is a good idea to keep a record of this in writing.

To start with, you may prefer to make an informal complaint by speaking to the person responsible for the issue, which may be enough to resolve the matter.

If the informal complaint does not resolve the matter, you can use the two stage formal complaints procedure outlined below. You should make your

complaint as soon as possible, and generally within 12 months of the event you are complaining about.

First stage complaint – local resolution

Raise your concern with the local authority. You can ask for a copy of their complaints procedure which will give further information. Your complaint can be in writing or you can complain verbally.

Second stage complaint – Local Government Ombudsman

If you are still not happy, you can take the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman, who is independent of the local authority. Visit lgo.org.uk or call **0300 061 0614**. You may be able to get help with making a complaint to the local authority from a local advice centre – visit advice.local.uk.

Judicial review

You may be able to take legal action to ask a court to review a decision made by the NHS or a local authority. This is called judicial review. An application for judicial review must be made without delay, and within a maximum period of three months. You will need specialist legal advice if you want to apply for judicial review – visit find-legal-advice.justice.gov.uk. The Law Society can help you find a solicitor. Visit solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk or call **020 7320 5650**.

►► **Note:** For more information on making a complaint visit carersuk.org/making-complaints.

Further help

Our website contains a wealth of useful information on the financial and practical matters related to caring – visit, carersuk.org/help-and-advice. We also have a support services directory where you can search for support services for carers around your area: carersuk.org/local-support.

For information and guidance, contact the Carers UK Helpline on **0808 808 7777** (Monday-Friday, 9am- 6pm) or email advice@carersuk.org.

Other organisations

Advocacy and advice services

Citizens Advice - Get advice from your local Citizens Advice.

w: citizensadvice.org.uk

POWHER - A charity that provides information, advocacy and advice services across England

w: pohwer.net | t: 0300 456 2370

Beacon – Free information and advice about NHS Continuing Healthcare

w: beaconchc.co.uk | t: 0345 548 0300

Autism

The National Autistic Society

w: autism.org.uk

Dementia

Alzheimer's Society

w: alzheimers.org.uk | t: 0333 150 3456

Direct payments and independent living

Disability Rights UK - personal budget helpline

w: disabilityrightsuk.org | t: 0330 995 0400

Learning disabilities

Mencap

w: mencap.org.uk | t: 0808 808 1111

Mental health

Mind

w: mind.org.uk | t: 0300 102 1234

Rethink

w: rethink.org | t: 0808 801 0525

Young Minds

w: youngminds.org.uk | t: Parents helpline: 0808 802 5544

Older people, residential care, charging and NHS Continuing Healthcare

Age UK

w: ageuk.org.uk | t: 0800 678 1602

This factsheet is designed to provide helpful information and advice. It is not an authoritative statement of the law. We work to ensure that our factsheets are accurate and up to date, but information about benefits and community care is subject to change over time. We would recommend contacting the Carers UK Helpline or visiting our website for the latest information.

Give us your feedback on this factsheet by emailing your comments to info@carersuk.org

This factsheet was updated in April 2025. Next review due April 2026.

Carers UK Helpline

For expert information and advice about caring.



0808 808 7777

(Monday – Friday 9am-6pm)



@ advice@carersuk.org

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20 Great Dover Street

London SE1 4LX

020 7378 4999

info@carersuk.org

Carers Wales

029 2081 1370

info@carerswales.org

Carers Scotland

info@carerscotland.org

Carers Northern Ireland

028 9043 9843

info@carersni.org

However caring affects you, we're here

Caring will affect us all at some point in our lives.

With your help, we can be there for the 6,000 people who start looking after someone each day.

We're the UK's only national membership charity for carers: join us for free at carersuk.org/join

We're both a support network and a movement for change.

Visit us at our website to join us, help us or access more

This information can be requested in large print or as a text file.