



***NHS Direct
Commissioning Framework
April 2006–March 2007***

Guidance for Primary Care Trusts on
Commissioning NHS Direct Services
from April 2006

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For Recipient's Use

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Introduction

This latest commissioning framework gives further guidance to Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in their role as commissioners of NHS Direct services. It covers the period 2006/07 only and replaces the second version of the framework which was published in March 2005.

Given the changes facing the NHS over the coming year from the implementation of *Commissioning a patient-led NHS*, it has been decided to maintain the broad direction of travel set out in earlier commissioning frameworks. However, a more fundamental review of commissioning of NHS Direct services is under way for 2007/08 and beyond. Further guidance on the longer-term position will be issued over the next few months.

Throughout the commissioning framework, NHS Direct services are again described under two headings:

- 1 Nationally Directed Services – covering the national core 0845 4647 service and NHS Direct Online and Digital TV services which must be commissioned
- 2 Enhanced Services – covering both national and local service developments that PCTs may choose to commission for their local populations

Thirty-four commissioning consortia groups of PCTs have been established across England to co-ordinate commissioning activity and to promote partnership working with NHS Direct at a local level. Some have been more active than others. Each of these groups has also been invited to join the PCT Commissioning Reference Group. This is a national group set up by NHS Direct to facilitate an exchange of ideas, information and problem solving. It also offers an opportunity for PCTs to influence the development of new or existing services. Commissioning consortia are encouraged to support the work of this group.

Action Points

- 1 **PCTs are asked to ensure that meaningful and effective commissioning consortia are in place, offering strong links between individual PCT members and NHS Direct. Consortia need to review their links with local Emergency Care Networks and strengthen these if needed.**
- 2 **The leadership and work of the consortia may need to be reviewed in the light of the likely reconfiguration of PCTs and Strategic Health Authorities (SHAs).**

Nationally Directed Services

People accessing the services provided by NHS Direct should receive timely, high quality support and advice wherever they are in England. This consistency remains a cornerstone of the Nationally Directed Services.

The Nationally Directed Services are:

- NHS Direct 0845 4647 telephone service
- NHS Direct Online website (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)
- NHS Direct Interactive on digital TV

NHS Direct is therefore responsible for ensuring that anyone calling the 0845 4647 number, accessing their website or digital TV services, or using any other medium receives a consistent, safe and appropriate service no matter where they are. This includes access to 24-hour interpreting support and a textphone service.

NHS Direct's multi-channel approach to service delivery is reflected in their communications strategy. Where appropriate, the public are encouraged to try the NHS Direct 'self-service' channels first (ie website and digital TV service), but can of course still contact the telephone service if they want to speak to a health professional. PCTs can support NHS Direct by ensuring they promote the multi-channel nature of the service in their own public-facing communications activity. This includes using the new NHS Direct branding which highlights the availability of the website and digital TV service, as well as the telephone service.

PCTs and others can also help NHS Direct to meet its responsibilities by supporting local reviews of activity and performance, whether through joint audits or the more simple feedback of concerns about the outcome of individual cases, or both. There is also an ongoing need to ensure that NHS Direct has access to up-to-date information about local NHS services and how to access them. PCTs should therefore ensure that the latest information about local services is available at www.nhs.uk, and that it is then updated on a regular basis. They should also work collaboratively with NHS Direct to collect and maintain any additional service information that would be of value to local people. PCTs could either do this themselves or instruct their shared services organisations accordingly.

Through the 0845 4647 telephone service NHS Direct has a key role in responding to major health scares and other incidents of national importance. Part of the funding for the Nationally Directed Services reflects this responsibility. As a national service provider NHS Direct is able to cascade briefing materials and information packs rapidly across its contact centres, thus ensuring that callers from all parts of the country have access to essential information at the earliest possible time.

NHS Direct will offer this support as part of the Nationally Directed Services when:

- 1 The event could not have been foreseen and it could have a major impact on public health
- 2 There is likely to be widespread public concern
- 3 Information needs to be available to the public either during or immediately following the event
- 4 The NHS Direct 0845 4647 number is used

NHS Direct may also be able to help PCTs and others in more local emergency situations, for example where people need to have urgent access to telephone advice, or in the provision of helplines for specific groups of patients. This support can be commissioned as a Locally Enhanced Service.

The value of involving NHS Direct in local emergency planning fora and training simulations cannot therefore be overstated.

Action Points

- 1 **PCTs or their shared services organisations should ensure that up-to-date NHS service information is always available to NHS Direct, whether via www.nhs.uk or otherwise.**
- 2 **PCTs and SHAs should consider involving NHS Direct in their emergency planning fora and relevant training simulations.**
- 3 **NHS Direct should look to identify local managers who can liaise with the wider NHS about health information issues.**
- 4 **PCTs and SHAs should work with NHS Direct to ensure that the whole range of NHS Direct's services is promoted to the public.**

Enhanced Services

These services fall into two categories: Nationally Enhanced Services and Locally Enhanced Services. As all of these services are contestable, it is open to PCTs to commission them from NHS Direct although there is no obligation to do so. The services can be broken down as follows:

Nationally Enhanced Services

These are the services where there are national policy directives to support the involvement of NHS Direct, as follows:

1 Call handling and/or clinical assessment for out-of-hours care

PCTs can commission NHS Direct to provide call handling and/or clinical assessment services for out-of-hours care – for more details about models, quality and service expectations see *Telephone access to out-of-hours care: Models and Performance Management* and *Telephone access to out-of-hours care: Practical Guidance*, both of which are on the Department of Health website (see appendix).

2 Choose and Book Appointments Line (centrally funded for 2006/07)

PCTs can commission NHS Direct to provide a Choose and Book Appointments Line. This is one of the preferred national options, with a relevant service specification and model Service Level Agreement (SLA) available on the Choose and Book website (see appendix).

3 Urgent/unscheduled care

PCTs can commission NHS Direct to work with local providers of urgent care to strengthen the integration of service provision alongside the development of effective, locally focused telephone access to advice, care and support.

Locally Enhanced Services

PCTs and NHS Direct can work together to develop and implement a range of Enhanced Services to meet specific local needs. Examples of these services are:

- Call handling and/or dental nurse assessment to support out-of-hours or other urgent dental services
- Outbound calling or other support for patients with long-term conditions
- Support for self-care
- Pre-hospital screening
- Health Alerts

The cost of Enhanced Services will need to be negotiated locally unless this is already set out in the service prospectus from NHS Direct.

It will not be open to PCTs to use the 0845 number for access to dedicated local dental out-of-hours or urgent care schemes.

Action Point

- **PCTs should determine which, if any, Enhanced Services they intend to commission for 2006/07 and enter into discussions with NHS Direct as soon as possible.**

Quality Standards and Performance Management

The *National Standards, Local Action* document published by the Department of Health in July 2004 (see appendix) incorporates the Standards for Better Health that now apply to all organisations providing services to NHS patients, including NHS Direct. Performance against these standards is monitored by the Healthcare Commission.

Since 1 January 2005, along with other out-of-hours providers, NHS Direct has been expected to meet the National Quality Requirements in the Delivery of Out-of-Hours Services. PCT commissioning consortia should therefore regularly review performance at a local level and agree remedial action where this falls short of the required standard. These quality requirements apply equally to the Nationally Directed Services and the Department of Health will continue to monitor performance nationally through monthly meetings with NHS Direct. Specific action plans to improve performance will be agreed as required. NHS Direct's increased focus on performance has latterly brought about marked service improvements and the expectation is that these will be sustained.

In the case of Locally Enhanced Services, individual PCT commissioners (or consortia where appropriate) should set relevant performance standards and agree reporting arrangements with NHS Direct locally.

NHS Direct is required to have robust clinical and corporate governance processes in place across all aspects of its service, and develop joint arrangements with partner organisations where appropriate.

Action Points

- **PCTs/consortia should monitor the performance of NHS Direct, ensuring that both national and local standards are met.**
- **NHS Direct is expected to meet all the national quality requirements on a consistent basis. Achievement against this expectation will be monitored closely by the Department of Health and PCTs/consortia, and NHS Direct is required to produce relevant performance reports on a regular basis.**
- **PCTs/consortia should work with NHS Direct to ensure that robust clinical governance processes are in place, and support the establishment of joint arrangements where needed.**

Financial Arrangements

PCTs have been responsible for commissioning services from NHS Direct since April 2004. This will continue for 2006/07 in partnership with the Department of Health. The arrangements for 2007/08 and beyond will be the subject of further review in the light of the White Paper on community health and care services and the implementation of *Commissioning a patient-led NHS*. This includes the expansion of practice-based commissioning.

During 2005/06, funding for the Nationally Directed Services was allocated to PCTs on a straightforward pound per head of population basis and this was then simply paid over by them to NHS Direct. To overcome this relatively cumbersome approach, the Department is adopting an alternative route of 'grant in aid' funding for the coming year. Therefore, for 2006/07, money for the Nationally Directed Services will be paid to NHS Direct by the Department of Health.

The funding designed to support the provision of Nationally Enhanced Services will continue to be distributed to PCTs using a weighted capitation approach. PCTs are free to spend this money with NHS Direct or with other providers. The transitional financial protection for the former exemplar schemes has ended, with this sum now forming part of the weighted allocations to all PCTs.

Funding for any Locally Enhanced Services needs to be found from within PCT baselines.

A capital allocation of £10 million is available for use by NHS Direct, subject to the approval of relevant business cases by the Department of Health.

The tariff for Enhanced Services will be set by NHS Direct and published in their service prospectus for 2006/07.

Appendix: References

Telephone access to out-of-hours care: Models and Performance Management

Telephone access to out-of-hours care: Practical Guidance

National Quality Requirements in the Delivery of Out-of-Hours Services

www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/OrganisationPolicy/PrimaryCare/ImplementingOutOfHours/fs/en

Choose and Book

www.chooseandbook.nhs.uk/staff/implementation/toolkit/deployment/appointmentsline

National Standards, Local Action

www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4086057&chk=ypFWoL



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