

# You and Your Health Service



**What you can expect from your health  
service and what your health service  
can expect from you**





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## GLOSSARY

The terms referred to in this document are defined as follows:

### Service User

We use the term 'service user' to include:

- people who use health and social care services as patients;
- carers, parents and guardians;
- organisations and communities that represent the interests of people who use health and social care services;
- members of the public and communities who are potential users of health services and social care interventions.

The term service user also takes account of the rich diversity of people in our society, whether defined by age, colour, race, ethnicity or nationality, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation, who may have different needs and concerns. We use the term service user in general, but occasionally use the term patient where appropriate.

**Health** – a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization).

**Charter** – a Statement of Commitment on expectations and responsibilities.

**Expectations** – the standards of service that health and social care services are aiming to achieve.

**Health responsibilities** – The duty of people to do their best to maintain and improve their health, to respect the health of others and to support the Irish health and social care services to run efficiently.

**Predictable** – knowing what to expect from health care services, a procedure or treatment.

**Health services** – all health and social care services delivered within acute hospital and community care settings.



## FOREWORD

In the *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service 2008-2013* the Department of Health and Children together with the Health Service Executive committed to the development of a patient charter. This charter, which is titled *You and Your Health Service*, has been developed with input from many interested parties, including patient advocacy groups and individual advocates, who also assisted in the development of the *National Strategy for Service User Involvement*.

### ***You and Your Health Service* what is it?**

*You and Your Health Service*, a health service charter, is a Statement of Commitment on healthcare expectations and responsibilities. It describes what you can expect when using health and social care services in Ireland, and what your responsibilities are.

**Aim:** It aims to inform and empower individuals, families and communities to actively look after their own health and to influence the quality of healthcare in Ireland.

### ***You and Your Health Service* what does it do?**

- it outlines supporting arrangements for a partnership of care between everyone involved in healthcare – patients/service users, families, carers and healthcare providers;

- it supports a healthcare culture that delivers health and social care services in a predictable, preventative, personal and participatory way;
- it is based on the understanding that there are different roles and responsibilities for both service users and healthcare providers;
- it promotes the importance of service users as individuals with diverse needs not just a medical condition to be treated;
- it applies to all public health and social care services including community care services and acute hospital services.

The Statement of Commitment is based on eight principles which underpin high quality, people-centred care. These principles have been identified through a review of national and international patient charters and other similar instruments and through wide consultation with the Irish public.



It is important to acknowledge that not all service users will have the capacity to participate fully in their own care. Therefore we see that there is a very clear role for families, carers or advocates to ensure that service users receive care that meets the expectations outlined in this document.

This document has been widely consulted on. Detailed and valuable feedback has been received and welcomed from the Oversight Group for Implementation of the National Strategy, from service users, staff, the voluntary and statutory sector, the management team of the HSE, the Management Advisory Committee of the Department of Health and Children, the Health Services National Partnership Forum and regulatory bodies.

*You and Your Health Service* will be used as a performance indicator in the *HSE Integrated Quality, Safety and Risk Framework*. This will enable the HSE to monitor how this initiative is being promoted and implemented across all health and social care services nationally.

Introductory training workshops have been delivered nationally to acute hospital and community care services throughout 2010. This has provided the HSE with an opportunity to seek feedback from services on this document and to support its implementation in the future.

A programme of awareness raising, promotional materials and communications for service users will be developed nationally and for all HSE services at a local level.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who gave their time so generously in developing this document and especially all of those who submitted very detailed feedback during the consultation period. We look forward to working in partnership with all stakeholders to ensure that *You and Your Health Service* makes a real difference to the service user's experience of Ireland's health and social care services.



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## BACKGROUND

There have been many good examples of patient involvement in health and social care services in Ireland, but approaches differed across organisations and little recognition was given to the value of listening to patients and their families appropriately and systematically.

To address this, the Health Service Executive identified the development and implementation of a strategy for service users' participation in health care, as a key priority.

The resulting *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service 2008-2013* was developed jointly by the Department of Health and Children and the Health Service Executive together with interested parties including patient advocacy groups. The strategy was launched by the Minister for Health and Children and the Chief Executive Officer of the HSE in May 2008 and was subsequently endorsed by the Patient Safety

Commission. It has been widely welcomed by the public and by interested individuals and groups. The principles of true engagement are set out together with an action plan. One of the goals is to develop a patients' charter (Goal 4), which would set out what service users should expect from the health services.

The strategy recommends that health and social care services be organised in the future to maximise the role of patients/service users, their families and representative organisations in:

- assessing needs and designing, delivering and evaluating health and social care services;
- promoting patient-centred care; and
- improving the quality of health and social care services.



## WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THE HSE

In this section, we set out eight principles that are considered fundamental to both health service employees and to people who use the services. The principles include the commitments as stated by the health service and therefore what you can expect wherever and whenever you receive care. They are designed to promote care that is compassionate, more predictable, personal to service users, preventative and participatory.

1. **Access:** Our services are organised to ensure equity of access to public health and social care services.
2. **Dignity and respect:** We treat people with dignity, respect and compassion. We respect diversity of culture, beliefs and values in line with clinical decision making.
3. **Safe and Effective Services:** We provide services in a safe environment, delivered by competent, skilled and trusted professionals.
4. **Communication and information:** We listen carefully and provide clear, comprehensive and understandable health information and advice.
5. **Participation:** We involve people and their families and carers in shared decision making about their health care.
6. **Privacy:** We ensure adequate personal space to ensure privacy in providing care and personal social services. We maintain strict confidentiality of personal information.
7. **Improving Health:** Our services promote health, prevent disease and support and empower those with chronic illness to self-care.
8. **Accountability:** We welcome your complaints and feedback about care and services, investigate your complaints and work to address your concerns.



1. **Access:** Our services are organised to ensure equity of access to public health and social care services.

**You can expect to:**

- receive care that is appropriate, timely and based on need, not the ability to pay;
- be registered with a general practitioner (GP) and be able to change GP easily if necessary;
- receive emergency medical treatment from your GP and/or your emergency department should you need it;
- be referred to a consultant, when your GP thinks it necessary, and be referred for a second opinion if it is required or requested;
- be admitted to a public hospital as a public or a private patient;
- have reasonable access to the most appropriate public health services regardless of physical, sensory or intellectual ability;
- that when a recommended medical treatment is not available at the service or hospital that you have attended, your doctor or consultant will ensure that you are transferred to where that public service is available.

2. **Dignity and respect:** We treat people with dignity, respect and compassion.

**You can expect:**

- care that respects your culture, beliefs, values and other characteristics such as your age and gender, sexual orientation, faith, political beliefs or disability and in line with clinical decision making;
- care that is provided in a sensitive, kind and compassionate way;
- end of life care that is dignified, comforting and supporting relief from suffering.



**3. Safe and Effective Services: We provide services in a safe environment, delivered by competent, skilled and trusted professionals.**

**You can expect:**

- services that are provided with professional care, skill and competence;
- informed and clinically appropriate care;
- continuity of care and smooth transitions between services;
  - when you are referred from one part of the health service to another service or team then all relevant details of your health and care plan should be forwarded as appropriate;
- an environment where systems and structures work effectively to ensure patient safety and to ensure that your care is well co-ordinated<sup>1</sup>;
- healthcare employees to do everything that they can to control your pain.

**4. Communication and information: We listen carefully and provide clear, comprehensive health information and advice.**

**You can expect:**

- open and appropriate communication throughout your care, especially when plans change or if something goes wrong;
- the opportunity to ask questions and to receive answers that you can understand;
- information in a language that you can understand;
- access to interpretative services where possible;
- advice on how to ask questions and obtain information about diagnosis, treatment and care from members of the healthcare team;
- staff to introduce themselves, wear name badges or have name plates on their desks and/or tell you the name and role of everyone who cares for you.



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<sup>1</sup> including the environment, facilities and work practices within the organisation i.e. example hygiene practices, food safety systems, facilities management, maintenance care practices, health and safety requirements etc.

### **You can expect healthcare information about:**

- what is wrong and what the treatment or care aims to do;
- how to make the most of consultations;
- how to look after yourself and prevent further illness;
- what services and sources of help (such as further information and self-help groups) are available;
- support in managing a chronic (long-term) disease.

### **This information should make clear:**

- the estimated waiting times for a health provider's services and, where known, information about alternative service providers;
- the results of any proposed treatment and medication, including the possible risks and alternatives;
- the name of the person providing care and the name of the consultant in charge of your care;

- the type of continuing healthcare you may need, including medication, continuing care in hospital, timely and appropriate referrals, convalescence or rehabilitation;
- how your care is being planned, what discharge arrangements are in place and, when appropriate, what end-of-life care you will receive;
- if you are booked for any intervention (such as a CT scan or ultrasound) you should be given an explanatory note of what you can expect to happen to you on the day;
- the estimated cost of a health provider's services before you receive the treatment, where relevant and possible.



**5. Participation: We involve people and their families and carers in shared decision making about their health care.**

**You can expect to:**

- be involved in making informed decisions about treatment and care to the degree and extent that you choose;
- involve your family, carers or other nominated support people in your healthcare treatment;
- give informed consent before any procedure following discussion of the options available to you, especially their expected results, success rates and possible side effects;
- seek a second opinion at any time during your care (your GP can assist you in seeking a second opinion if required);
- be informed if student healthcare workers are involved in delivering your care and have these students seek your permission before any medical examination or interview.

**6. Privacy: We ensure adequate personal space to ensure privacy in providing care and personal social services. We maintain strict confidentiality of personal information.**

**You can expect to:**

- to inspect and obtain a copy of your health information;
- to know the source(s) of that information, why the hospital is holding it and with whom it will be shared; and
- to be facilitated to complain if you are unhappy with how health services have used or protected your health information;
- that your healthcare records may be accessed for audit purposes to provide assurance to the HSE.

### **Exceptions**

Health services will not give you access to your information if doing so:

- would pose a serious threat to your life or health or that of another person; or
- would invade the privacy of other individuals.

The HSE may need to share your information with other organisations if this is required or authorised by law.

You should be given enough personal space when being examined, receiving treatment and when discussing your condition and treatment.



**7. Improving Health:** Our services promote health, prevent disease and support and empower those with chronic illness to self care.

**You can expect to:**

- information and advice on how to stay as healthy as possible, and support and encouragement to do so;
- information and advice on how to best self-manage an existing health problem;
- the opportunity to take part in screening and immunisation programmes to prevent illness where available and appropriate;
- the prevention of healthcare infection to be a priority for all healthcare services.

**8. Accountability:** We welcome your complaints and feedback about care and services, and work to address your concerns<sup>2</sup>.

**You can expect:**

- comment on the care you have received;
- receive information about how to make a complaint;
- have your concerns dealt with properly and promptly;
- receive feedback in relation to what changes/improvements have been made in response to your complaint.

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<sup>2</sup> Part 9, Health Act 2004



## YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOUR HEALTH SERVICE – WAYS THAT YOU CAN HELP US

This section describes things that you can do to help the health service deliver more effective and safe services. It applies to service users, their families, the public and representative groups. It is important to acknowledge that not all service users will have the capacity to participate fully in their own care. Therefore we see that there is a very clear role for health services, families, carers or advocates to ensure that service users receive care that meets the expectations and responsibilities outlined in this Statement of Commitment.

Eight key responsibilities are described in this section. These are ways that you can help us:

1. promote the importance of service users as partners in their own care, who have the knowledge and expertise that is essential to their care;
2. help service users and health service staff understand each others expectations and responsibilities;
3. contribute to the efficient running of health services.

### Your Responsibilities – ways that you can help us

1. **Access:** keep appointments and use services appropriately.

2. **Dignity and Respect:** treat staff and other patients with respect, dignity and consideration.

3. **Safe and Effective Services:** support the delivery of safe and effective services.

4. **Communication and Information:** promote clear communication and to provide information about your health care condition or illness.

5. **Participation:** become more involved in shared decision making about your care.

6. **Privacy:** supporting health services to safeguard patient confidentiality.

7. **Improving Health:** take care of yourself, maintain and protect your health and prevent the spread of infection.

8. **Accountability:** comment on care and have your concerns addressed.

## 1. Access: keep appointments and use services appropriately.

We will try to make any waiting period for an appointment, a test or a treatment as short as possible. Ask your healthcare professional how quickly you should be able to get certain kinds of appointment, test or treatment.

### Using health services appropriately:

- Only use emergency services in a real emergency.

### Appointments:

- Be on time for all appointments. If late, please phone ahead to let staff know;
- If a member of staff (such as a public health nurse) is due to visit your home, make sure you are there at the agreed time;
- If a hospital phones you to arrange an appointment, please keep it unless the hospital contacts you again to change it;
- If you cannot keep an appointment, inform your healthcare provider in plenty of time so that your appointment can be given to someone else;
- If you have booked HSE transport and no longer need it, please tell the healthcare provider so that it can be cancelled;
- Let health care services know in advance of visits where possible if you have any special needs such as alternative methods of communication.

### Contact details:

- Make sure that your GP surgery, dental surgery or any hospital or clinic you attend has up-to-date information about how to contact you;
- If you change address or phone number, please inform all relevant healthcare providers.



## 2. Dignity and Respect: treat staff and other patients with respect, dignity and consideration.

- Treat healthcare staff politely and with respect and consideration. Physical, racial, sexual or other kinds of harassment or abuse are unacceptable for anyone. Staff providing care should not be subjected to such harassment or abuse;
- Please show consideration for patients in hospitals who may need time to rest and recover by adhering to hospital visiting hours. Find out about hospital visiting hours before planning to visit patients.

## 3. Safe and Effective Services: support the delivery of safe and effective services.

Patients and family members who are more informed and involved in their healthcare often experience safer and better care and have improved quality of life afterwards. To ensure that you or your family member receive the best care possible you should always:

- ask questions;
- talk to your health care team;
- listen and note down the information they give.

### Medication Safety

- Try to follow any advice or treatment that has been agreed with you;
- If you are worried about doing this, or do not fully understand what is required, discuss it with the person giving the advice or treatment, or contact your GP;
- Take care with medicines. Take any medicine given to you in line with instructions and finish the course of treatment;



## Medication Safety *(continued)*

- Before you decide to change or stop your medication, if your prescription says that you should continue to take it, discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist;
- Never take medicine that is out of date or prescribed for someone else;
- Give any out-of-date or unused medicine to your pharmacist to get rid of safely;
- Try to order repeat prescriptions in plenty of time;
- Store medicines safely and out of children's reach;
- If you go into hospital, let the staff know about any medicines you are already taking, for example by bringing a list of all the medicines and giving this to a member of staff, and tell staff about any allergies that you may have;
- If you feel that your condition has got worse, you should consult your GP, who can, if necessary, take up the matter with the hospital or relevant service.

## 4. Communication and Information: promote clear communication and to provide information about your health care condition or illness.

- If there is something that you don't understand about a condition or treatment, let us know and we will explain it better;
- If you are able, you should provide information about your history, current treatment, medication and alternative therapies directly. Otherwise, your family, carer or other nominated support person should give us this information. It may be helpful for you to carry the information with you;
- As a patient, you should follow plans that have been agreed with your healthcare provider and report any changes in your condition.



## 5. Participation: become more involved in decision making about your care.

Prepare a list of questions, concerns and symptoms to discuss with your doctor or health care professional, here are a few suggested questions to get you started,

- Can you please tell me more about my condition?
- Do you have any information that I can take away with me?
- Can you tell me where I can find out more?
- Why do I need to have this particular test?
- What are the different treatments for this condition?
- How will this treatment help me?
- What does the treatment involve?
- What are the risks of this treatment?
- What is likely to happen if I don't have this treatment?
- Ask what the treatment plan is before discharge and for it to be explained;
- What should I look out for?
- What can I do to help myself?
- When should I come back to see you?

Make sure you get the results of any tests or procedures.

If having surgery, clarify with your doctor that everyone is clear about exactly what is going to be done.

## 6. Privacy: support the health service in safeguarding patient confidentiality.

Support the health service in safeguarding patient confidentiality by respecting to privacy of fellow service users.

## 7. Improving Health: take care of yourself, maintain and protect your health and prevent the spread of infection.

Look after your own health and have a healthy lifestyle. This could mean:

- taking more exercise;
- eating a balanced diet;
- stopping smoking;
- not drinking too much alcohol, not using drugs;
- seeking information and advice from a healthcare professional or other sources such as [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) on how to prevent disease, including immunisation, and on how to protect your health;
- monitoring your health and report any changes to your healthcare team;
- seeking assistance from support groups and people living with similar conditions;
- talking to your healthcare team about self-management when living with a long-term illness.

All HSE provided services aim to be smoke free by 2015—many are currently smoke free. Please support your services to achieve this goal by not smoking on health service premises.

## Help stop the spread of infection

- Wash and dry your hands before preparing and or eating food;
- Wash and dry your hands before visiting a hospital ward, particularly after going to the toilet. Use any alcohol hand gel that may be provided at the ward door or bedside;
- Understand that taking antibiotics will not help if you are diagnosed with a virus.

## Visiting a patient

- Do not sit on their bed and keep the number of visitors as low as possible at any time;
- Ask ward staff for advice before you bring the patient food or drink;
- Never touch dressings, drips or other equipment around the bed;



- Do not visit another patient in hospital if you have been sick recently, for example sore throat, high temperature, diarrhoea, vomiting, or if you have a cold or flu like illness;
- Do not take a child to visit someone in hospital if they have been sick recently for example sore throat, high temperature, diarrhoea, vomiting, or if they have a cold or flu like illness;
- If you think HSE premises are not as clean as they should be, let a member of staff know.
- If you think a staff member has forgotten to hand wash before examining you, give a reminder;
- Hygiene inspection reports for your hospital are also available on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).

## 8. Accountability: comment on care and have concerns addressed.

- Help us to improve our services by giving us your views, including your comments, complaints and suggestions. You can do this by talking to staff or filling in surveys. You can also give feedback under Your Service, Your Say, the HSE's comments and complaints policy, by:
  - e-mailing [yoursay@hse.ie](mailto:yoursay@hse.ie);
  - sending a letter or fax to any HSE location;
  - ringing us on **1850 24 1850**; or
  - going to 'Your comments' on the home page of [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie).



## OTHER THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO

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### Finding out about health services:

- Contact the HSE infoline from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Saturday, Callsave **1850 24 1850**;
- Contact your local health office for information about local HSE services. You can find the contact details in the phone book under 'health services' or on the internet at [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie);
- Contact your local Citizens Information Service for free, confidential and independent advice on a wide range of issues including services and schemes provided by the HSE and the Department of Social Protection that you may be entitled to. You can contact the Citizens Information Phone Service on lo-call **1890 777 121** or on **+353 (0) 21 452 1600** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm) or you can visit your local Citizens Information Centre To find your nearest office, look in your local phone book or go to the Citizens Information Board website, [www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie).

### Consider donating blood, organs, tissues or bone marrow:

Every year, hundreds of lives are saved with the help of donated blood, organs, tissues and bone marrow. You could save or improve the lives of several other people if you become a donor.

- To become a blood donor, visit the National Blood Transfusion Service website, [www.giveblood.ie](http://www.giveblood.ie);
- To become an organ or tissue donor after you die, put your name on the Organ Donor Register. You should also discuss your wishes with the people close to you, and carry a donor card.

For more information, or if you have a question about this topic, contact the Citizens Information Phone Service on lo-call **1890 777 121** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 9pm).





**For further information please contact:**

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