

Stronger voice, better care

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) explained



A Local Involvement Network (LINK) has been set up in every area of England to help people influence or change the way their local NHS and social care services are delivered.

This document explains more about LINKs and how you can make your voice heard by getting involved.



What is a LINK?

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A LINK is made up of individuals and community groups who work together to improve local health and social care services.

The job of a LINK is to find out what people like and dislike about local services, and to work with the people who plan and run them to help make them better.

This may involve talking directly to health and social care professionals about a service that is not being offered, or suggesting ways that an existing service could be made better.

LINKs also have powers to help them do their job and to make sure that changes happen.

What does it do?

A LINK can:

- ask local people what they think of local health and social care
- give people a chance to suggest ideas to care professionals that may help improve services
- look into specific issues of concern to the community (like a dirty hospital), make recommendations to the people who plan and run services, and expect a response
- ask for information about services and get answers within a specified amount of time
- carry out spot checks, when necessary, to see if services are working well (checks are carried out under safeguards)
- refer issues to the local council Overview and Scrutiny Committee if it seems that action is not being taken

LINks at work: an example

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A number of people raise the issue of GP opening hours with a LINK. GPs at the local surgery say they want to open during the evening and at weekends but they have limited resources.

The LINK offers to help the surgery staff find out the hours that will best suit local people by asking the community for their views. It also asks LINKs in other areas how they have dealt with the same issue.

The LINK's research finds that people who work would prefer more early morning appointments, so they can see a GP but not be late for work.

As a result, the GPs decide that the surgery will close one afternoon a week so that they can open for more early morning appointments. They also start a call-back service, so people can have quick telephone consultations.

Who can join?



Anyone – carers, service users, community leaders, patient representatives ... everyone's views matter.

Groups can also join – charities, faith groups, residents' associations, youth councils, black and minority ethnic organisations, business federations ... anyone who wants to make sure that the needs of their community are listened to.

Why get involved?

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There are a number of benefits to becoming involved in a LINK. These include:

- getting attention for neglected issues or ideas
- influencing those who make decisions about new or existing health and care services
- helping the community speak with a stronger local voice
- helping services provide better care





How much time will it take?

It's up to you how and when you get involved. Your LINK should provide different ways for you to make your views count.

You can just comment on issues when contacted by your LINK, or you can get more involved – by raising awareness of an issue or by helping to find solutions (for example, by meeting providers or being part of a working group).

It's up to you how and when

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- Take a few minutes to answer a survey
- Attend an occasional meeting on an issue that interests you
- Get involved in an online group looking at a specific issue
- Become an 'authorised representative' who goes to services to see how they are run

How a LINK is run

There is no set structure for a LINK, and it is unlikely that any two LINKs will be run in the same way. A LINK will only work if it is owned by, and involves, the whole community.

Local councils have been given money to fund LINKs, but each LINK will decide how best to operate and what priorities to concentrate on.

Every local council has employed an independent organisation to set up, advise and support the LINK for its area.

Most LINKs should be up and running by September 2008.

Support for LINKs

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The role of organisations employed to support LINKs can include:

- telling the community about a LINK and encouraging people to get involved
- advising the LINK
- providing office support and helping the LINK to develop clear systems
- managing the LINK's budget and recording its activities
- letting the community know about what the LINK is doing and asking for their views
- reporting the LINK's progress to Government

Getting started

To find out what is happening in your area, contact your local borough or county council.

LINKs and the law

LINKs can:

- ask health and social care commissioners for information about their services and expect a response
- make recommendations and expect a response from commissioners
- refer matters to the local council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- enter specific services and view the care provided

More information

To find out more, visit:

www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks



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288751 1p 5k July 08 (FMP)

Produced by COI for the Department of Health

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