

National Healthcare Charter  
**you and your  
health service**



your service  
your say

What you can expect from your health service  
and what you can do to help

*people caring for people*

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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, regardless of 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 1948).

**Charter** - a Statement of Commitment by the HSE on healthcare expectations and responsibilities. Outlining what service users can and should expect every time that they use health services and what service users can do to help deliver safer and more effective health services in Ireland.

**Expectations** - what service users expect to experience when they use health services in Ireland.

**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 a procedure, treatment and all Irish health and social care services.

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

# Introduction

The Department of Health together with the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2008 committed to the development of a Health Service Charter.

The National Healthcare 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, many of whom also assisted in the development of the *National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Services 2008-2013*.

It is part of a series of quality improvement initiatives designed to involve service users in influencing the quality of healthcare in Ireland. The HSE is actively inviting service users to get involved on patient forums and quality improvement initiatives and invites service users to contact the National Advocacy Unit, HSE to find out about how they can become involved in improving the quality of healthcare in Ireland (see pg 16 for further details).

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

*You and Your Health Service* is a Statement of Commitment by the HSE describing what service users can expect when using health services in Ireland, and what they can do to help Irish health services to deliver more effective and safe services. It 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 through wide consultation with the Irish public.

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 recognises 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 and 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.

## Foreword

The National Healthcare Charter – *You and Your Health Service*, is the work of a diverse and dedicated group of people with a common goal – aiming to inform and empower individuals, families and communities to actively look after their own health and to influence the quality of healthcare in Ireland.

The document was widely consulted on. As part of the process detailed and valuable feedback was received and welcomed from the Oversight Group for the Implementation of the National Strategy, from service users, staff, the voluntary and statutory sector, the management team of the HSE, the Department of Health, the Health Services National Partnership Forum and regulatory bodies.

*You and Your Health Service* will be used to support the implementation of the National Standards for Safer Better Healthcare as developed by the Health Information and Quality Authority. Implementation of *You and Your Health Service*, will be monitored through gathering of patient feedback on their experience of services as described in this document. This will enable the HSE to improve the quality of care for you the service user and to demonstrate it is delivering person-centred care and support.

Detailed implementation plans are currently being developed in partnership with service users and the HSE. A programme of awareness raising, promotional materials and communications for service users will be available on the HSE website [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) and in all HSE provided services across the country.

*You and Your Health Service* will be reviewed annually to ensure that the content of the document is in line with new policy changes or developments in healthcare. Feedback in relation to this document is always welcome and can be sent to [yoursay@hse.ie](mailto:yoursay@hse.ie) (see pg 16 for further details).

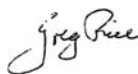
We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who gave their time so generously in developing this document and especially all of those who submitted very detailed feedback during the consultation period.

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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Dr. Philip Crowley  
Director of Quality & Patient Safety, HSE



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Greg Price  
Director of Advocacy, HSE

# National Healthcare Charter

## *You and Your Health Service*

*You and Your Health Service* is a statement of commitment by the HSE describing what you can expect when and wherever you use health services in Ireland, and what you can do to help Irish health services to deliver more effective and safe services.

	<i>What you can expect</i>	<i>What you can do to help</i>
Access	Our services are organised to ensure equity of access to public health and social care services.	Keep appointments and let us know if you cannot attend, let us know if you have any special needs such as alternative methods of communication.
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.	Treat staff and other patients with dignity, respect and consideration.
Safe and Effective Services	We provide services with competence, skill and care in a safe environment, delivered by trusted professionals.	Support us to deliver safe and effective services, e.g. if you think that a member of a healthcare team has forgotten to wash their hands, give them a gentle reminder.
Communication and Information	We listen carefully and communicate openly and honestly, and provide clear, comprehensive and understandable health information and advice.	Help us to promote clear communication and information, if there is something that you do not understand, let us know and we will explain better.
Participation	We involve people and their families and carers in shared decision making about their healthcare. We take account of people's preferences and values.	Ask questions and become more actively involved in decision making about your care.
Privacy	We will do our best to ensure that you have adequate personal space and privacy when you use our health services. We maintain strict confidentiality of personal information.	Support health services to safeguard patient confidentiality and privacy.
Improving Health	Our services promote health, prevent disease and support and empower those with chronic conditions to self-manage their condition.	Learn more about what you can do to improve your health, ask your healthcare provider for information about healthy living and about what support services are available in your community, ask your healthcare professional to help you to set goals for improving your health.
Accountability	We welcome your complaints and feedback about care and services, we will investigate your complaints and work to address your concerns.	Your feedback matters – tell us about your experience so that we can have your concerns addressed.



Our services are organised to ensure that you have equity of access to public health and social care services.

### **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

- Care that is appropriate, timely and based on need, not the ability to pay.
- To be registered with a general practitioner (GP) and be able to change GP easily if necessary.
- Emergency medical treatment from your GP and/or your emergency department should you need it.
- A referral to a consultant when your GP thinks it necessary, and be referred for a second opinion if it is required or requested.
- Admittance to a public hospital as a public or a private patient.
- Reasonable access to the most appropriate public health services regardless of physical, sensory or intellectual ability.
- To be transferred to another public health and social care facility if a recommended medical treatment is not available at the health and social care facility first attended by you.
- Clear information on appointment dates, times and locations.
- Any waiting period for an appointment, test or a treatment will be kept as short as possible.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

**Ways that you can help health services to be more accessible:**

#### **Waiting times:**

- Ensure to ask your healthcare professional how long you may expect to wait before receiving certain kinds of appointments, test or treatments.

#### **Using health services appropriately:**

- Only use emergency services in a real emergency.

#### **Appointments:**

- Please be on time for all appointments. If late, please phone ahead to let staff know.
- Ask your healthcare professional how long you may expect to wait before receiving certain kinds of appointments, test or treatments.
- If a member of staff (such as a public health nurse) is due to visit your home, please make sure you are there at the agreed time.
- If a member of staff phones you to arrange an appointment, please keep it unless you are contacted 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.
- If you have any special requirements, such as alternative methods of communication, please let healthcare services know in advance of visits where possible.

#### **Contact details:**

- Make sure that your GP surgery, dental surgery or any hospital or healthcare service 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 as soon as possible.

## Dignity and respect



We will treat you, your family and carers with dignity, respect and compassion. We respect diversity of culture, beliefs and values in line with clinical decision making. Please treat staff with dignity respect and consideration.

### **WHAT 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 is 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.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

#### ***Ways that you can help promote dignity and respect in all healthcare services:***

- Please treat healthcare staff politely and with respect and consideration. Physical, racial, sexual or other kinds of harassment or abuse are unacceptable.
- 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.



## Safe and effective services



We will provide services with competence, skill and care in a safe environment, delivered by trusted professionals for everybody. Support us in the delivery of safe and effective services. If you think that a member of a healthcare team has forgotten to wash their hands, please give them a gentle reminder.

### **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

- Services that are provided with professional care, skill and competence.
- Informed and clinically appropriate care.
- That there will be continuity of care and smooth transitions between services which are involved in your care.
- That when you are referred from one part of the health service to another service or team, 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 coordinated.
- Healthcare professionals to do everything that they can to control your pain.
- Our services have processes in place to ensure safe healthcare is reliably delivered irrespective of the healthcare setting and healthcare-associated infection is prevented.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

#### ***Ways that you can help promote 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 a member of your family receive the best care possible you should always:
  - ask questions;
  - talk to your healthcare 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.
- Please discuss with your doctor or pharmacist, before you decide to change or stop your medication, particularly if your prescription says that you should continue to take it.
- 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.

## Safe and effective services (continued)



- 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, consult further with the hospital or relevant service.

### **Help prevent the spread of infection:**

- Hand washing is the best way to prevent germs spreading. Wash your hands after coughing/ sneezing, after going to the toilet, after touching anything wet (e.g. ooze from your wounds, urine from your catheter, your blood stained dressings) and before mealtimes.
- If you can't get to a sink to wash your hands, ask your healthcare staff to provide you with a means to clean your hands (e.g. basin of water and soap/wipes/alcohol hand rub) so that you can keep your hands clean.
- Avoid touching any wounds or the area around drips, drains or catheters.
- Ask your doctor or nurse why you have a drip or catheter and how you can help prevent it getting infected. Let staff know if the area around the drip becomes sore or red or if the bandage falls off or looks wet or dirty.
- Understand that taking antibiotics will not help if you are diagnosed with a virus.
- If you have diarrhoea and are on an antibiotic or have recently been on one – let your doctor know.

- If you are given a prescription for antibiotics to take at home, it is very important to take all your antibiotics as prescribed (i.e. finish the course) even if you begin to feel better.
- Do not keep antibiotics at home for future use and do not share them with other people.
- 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 available on [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

### **When 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 or 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.

## Communication and information



We will listen to you carefully and communicate openly and honestly, and provide clear, comprehensive and understandable health information and advice.

### **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

- Open and appropriate communication throughout your care:
  - about what is wrong and what the treatment or care aims to do;
  - concerning the results of any proposed treatment and medication, including the possible risks and alternatives;
  - regarding the type of continuing healthcare you may need, including medication, continuing care in hospital, timely and appropriate referrals, convalescence or rehabilitation;
  - regarding what discharge arrangements are in place and, when appropriate, what end-of-life care you will receive;
  - especially when plans change or if something goes wrong.

### **You should be given:**

- The opportunity to ask questions and to receive answers that you can understand.
- Advice on how to ask questions and how to make the most of consultations and obtain information about diagnosis, treatment and care from members of the healthcare team.
- Information in a language that you can understand.
- Access to interpretative services where possible.
- Staff should always introduce themselves wear name badges or have name plates on their desks
- The name and role of everyone who cares for you, and the name of who is in charge of your care.
- Relevant information leaflets to help you understand your illness and/or how you can prevent infection (e.g. information on IV lines).

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

- How to look after yourself and prevent further illness.
- The services and sources of help (such as further information and self-help groups) that are available.
- Support in managing a chronic (long-term) condition.
- The estimated waiting times for a health provider's services and, where known, information about alternative service providers.
- What you can expect to happen to you on the day of any intervention such as a CT scan or ultrasound.
- The estimated cost of a health provider's services before you receive the treatment, where relevant and possible.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

#### **Ways that you can support improved communication:**

- If there is something that you do not understand about a condition or treatment, let your healthcare professional know. Never be afraid to ask.
- 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 provide the healthcare team with 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.
- See pg 11 for questions to ask your healthcare provider.

# Participation



We will involve you and your family and carers in decision making about your healthcare and will take account of your preferences and values.

## WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

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

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

### Ways that you can support participation:

- Prepare a list of questions, concerns and symptoms to discuss with your GP or healthcare 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 information?
  - 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 do not have this treatment?
  - What should I look out for?
  - What can I do to help myself?
  - When should I come back to see you?
- Ask what the treatment plan is before discharge and for it to be explained to you.
- Make sure you get the results of any tests or procedures.
- If having surgery, clarify with your surgeon that everyone is clear about exactly what is going to be done.



## Privacy



We will do our best to ensure that you have adequate personal space and privacy when you use our health services. We maintain strict confidentiality of personal information.

### **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

- To obtain and inspect a copy of your health information.
- Your personal health information will be stored securely and not disclosed to others without your consent. Your personal health information will only be accessed by those who need it for patient care.
- To be facilitated to complain if you are unhappy with how health services have used or protected your health information.
- To be given enough personal space when being examined, receiving treatment and when discussing your condition and treatment.
- That your healthcare records may be accessed for audit purposes to provide assurance to the HSE about the quality of service provision.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

#### ***Ways that you can support the health service in safeguarding patient confidentiality:***

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

## Improving health



Our services are designed to promote your health, prevent disease and support and empower those with chronic conditions to self-manage their condition.

### **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT**

- Information and advice on how to stay as healthy as possible, and the necessary support and encouragement to do so.
- Information, advice and support 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.
- Information on rehabilitation programmes where available and appropriate.
- The prevention of healthcare infection to be a priority for all healthcare services and providers.

### **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP**

#### ***Ways that you can support the health service to improve your health:***

- Learn more about what you can do to improve your health, ask your healthcare provider for information about healthy living and about the support services in your community, ask your healthcare professional to help you to set goals to improve your health.
- Look after your own health and have a healthy lifestyle. This could mean:
  - taking more exercise;
  - eating a healthy diet;
  - managing weight;
  - stopping smoking;
  - not drinking too much alcohol;
  - not using drugs.
- Seek information and advice from any 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.
- Monitor your health and report any changes to your healthcare team.
- Seek assistance from support groups and people living with similar conditions.
- Talk to your healthcare team about self-management when living with a long-term condition.
- Help stop the spread of infection: wash and dry your hands before preparing and or eating food.
- 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.

## Accountability



We will welcome your complaints and feedback about your care and experience of services. We will investigate your complaints and work to address your concerns.

### WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

- To comment on the care you have received.
- Information about how to give feedback about your experience of care, whether it was positive or negative.
- To have your concerns dealt with properly and in a timely manner.
- To receive feedback in relation to what changes or improvements have been made in response to your complaint or feedback.
- If you are unhappy with the way in which your complaint was dealt with, you can request a review from the National Advocacy Unit of the HSE. They will appoint a review officer to examine your request for review.



### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

#### Your feedback matters

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;
- Going to 'Tell Us' on the home page of [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)
- Going to [www.healthcomplaints.ie](http://www.healthcomplaints.ie)

#### National Healthcare Charter

If you have any comments or suggestions about the *National Healthcare Charter: You and Your Health Service*, contact us:

National Advocacy Unit, HSE  
Quality & Patient Safety Directorate  
Health Service Executive, Oak House  
Millennium Park, Naas, Co. Kildare

Tel: (045) 880 400  
Email: [yoursay@hse.ie](mailto:yoursay@hse.ie)  
[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)

# Help save a life

## ***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, 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).

## ***First Aid***

Did you know that over 6,000 people die from cardiac arrest every year, before reaching hospital; that's 18 people every day? If you were the first person on the scene of one of the cardiac arrests would you know what to do? Make a difference today, find out about doing a first aid course in your local area, and learn about first aid. Help save a life.

## ***Stroke***

Learn about the signs and symptoms of stroke, F.A.S.T. Face Arms Speech Time Help a stroke victim access emergency services in time and help save a life. See [www.stroke.ie/FASTCamaign](http://www.stroke.ie/FASTCamaign)

## ***QUIT smoking***

1-in-2 smokers will die of a tobacco related disease, can you live with that, QUIT

## **For more information visit:**

- [www.quit.ie](http://www.quit.ie) or
- [www.facebook.com/HSEquit](https://www.facebook.com/HSEquit) or
- call the National Smokers' Quitline: 1850 201 203

## ***Safety in children***

Make sure that your home is a safer place for young children. See [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) for the child safety resources

## ***Road safety***

Slow down and drive carefully, never, ever drink and drive, help save a life, see [www.rsa.ie](http://www.rsa.ie)

## ***Prevent falls in older people***

Find out about how to prevent falls in older people see [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)



## Finding out about health services

### **Contact the HSE:**

Contact your local health area 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)

Call-save: 1850 24 1850  
(Monday to Saturday 8.00am to 8.00pm)

### **Citizens Information:**

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 also 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)

Lo-call: 1890 777 121  
Tel: +353 (0)21 452 1600  
(Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 9.00pm)

### **Get involved!**

**Find out about how you can get involved in improving health services in Ireland.**

The HSE is actively inviting service users to get involved on patient forums and quality improvement initiatives. To find out more contact:

National Advocacy Unit, HSE  
Quality & Patient Safety Directorate,  
Health Service Executive, Oak House,  
Millennium Park, Naas, Co. Kildare

**Tel: (045) 880 400**  
**Email: [yoursay@hse.ie](mailto:yoursay@hse.ie)**  
**[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)**