

# Your part in the annual health check 2008/09

A step-by-step guide for local authorities, strategic health authorities, local involvement networks (LINKs), overview and scrutiny committees, local safeguarding children boards and foundation trusts' boards of governors





## Tell us how you think your local trust is performing

The Healthcare Commission keeps a check on local healthcare organisations and provides information that is of interest to patients and the public about their local health services – safety and cleanliness, dignity and respect, standards of care, keeping people healthy, waiting to be seen, and good management.

By checking trusts' performance and providing information, we aim to help trusts to improve their services.

From April 2009, trusts will again be gearing up for the declaration part of the annual health check. We need your comments to make sure that we get the full picture about their performance in 2008/09.

Last year we invited patient and public involvement forums, overview and scrutiny committees, strategic health authorities (SHAs), local safeguarding children boards and foundation trusts' boards of governors to comment and they responded well. We really appreciate the hard work that went into providing commentaries that produced so much useful intelligence. One way we used this information was to influence our decision on which trusts were inspected as part of our core standards assessment.

For 2008/09 we are also inviting local involvement networks (LINKs) to tell us how you think your local trust is performing against the standards set by Government, and to give us the views and experiences of people in your community. We are determined to put the interests of patients and the public at the heart of our work, so your feedback is very important to us.

As in previous years, where you have sent comments to trusts for inclusion in their declaration, these must be included – word for word – in the declarations they submit to us. But if you are invited to comment and say no, neither you nor the trust will be penalised.

We recognise that LINKs will be at different stages of establishment across the country and that not all will be able to contribute to the annual health check to the same degree. Therefore we have put in place options that recognise this and they are set out under heading 2 of this document.

## 1. Getting ready

The Government published *Standards for Better Health* in July 2004, which set out 24 core standards. These core standards describe a minimum level of service, which patients have the right to expect. We are again asking trusts to tell us how they have performed against the core standards this year through a declaration, which must be submitted by midday on 1 May 2009. As part of this process, trusts are responsible for inviting 'third parties' to comment on their performance. Third parties include local authorities, SHAs, LINks, overview and scrutiny committees, local safeguarding children boards and foundation trusts' boards of governors.

Your local trust should contact you in early 2009 to agree a timetable for including your comments in their declaration. You may also want to start discussing what you might say, so you are prepared.

You can comment on your trust's performance against any of these standards. You do not have to comment on all of them. Your comments should relate to your group's views on the performance of the trust during the period from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009. You are not expected to sign off or comment directly on the declaration given to us by your local trust.

If you agree to comment, you may want to set up regular meetings with your members as soon as possible, so that you have enough time to seek the views of others in your community. You may also want to contact the other third parties in your area, so that you can discuss your respective roles, exchange views about local trusts and coordinate your efforts.

You may find it useful to share your draft comments with your trust or with a regional assessor from the Healthcare Commission. You don't have to take their feedback into account, but working together may benefit everyone involved.





## 2. LINKs

On 1 April 2008, new government legislation introduced local involvement networks (LINKs), which aim to give local people a greater say in the way that health and social care services are commissioned and provided. Each local authority has until the end of September 2008 to appoint a LINK 'host' to support the set up and running of their LINK.

LINKs effectively replace the former patient and public involvement forums but, in this first year, we recognise that not all LINKs will be able to contribute to the annual health check to the same extent that third parties have done in previous years. In order to ensure your comments are included in the annual health check there are three options:

a) Where a LINK lead / host has been identified, we advise that the LINK submits its comments to the trust for inclusion in the declaration.

OR

b) The LINK lead / host can coordinate the comments of up to ten voluntary organisations and submit these to the trust for inclusion in the declaration.

OR

c) The LINK lead / host can coordinate the comments of up to ten voluntary organisations and submit these comments via the engage website (<https://engage.healthcarecommission.org.uk>). Please note LINK users will need to register to log in to the feedback forms through the 'contact us' section of the website. Comments must be submitted by 1 May 2009.

Options a) and b) will enable us to include your comments with the trust's declaration when we publish it on our website. Unfortunately, we will not be able to publish comments submitted via the engage website (option c). They will, however, still be used to cross-check the declarations submitted by the relevant trusts.

We would also encourage overview and scrutiny committees and foundation trusts' boards of governors to contact their local authority to offer to work with the emerging LINKs to identify the best way of feeding in their comments.

Further details are included in our LINKs guide to working with the Healthcare Commission, which can be found at <https://engage.healthcarecommission.org.uk/static/handbook>

### 3. What's new in 2008/09

Primary care trusts (PCTs) currently have two functions: as commissioners (purchasers) and as providers of care. For 2008/09, the annual health check will reflect this by providing separate assessments on the provider and commissioning functions of PCTs. When drafting your commentary for PCTs it may be useful to consider these two separate functions.

### 4. How will your comments make a difference?

Your comments, if submitted through your trust's declaration, will be made publicly available. You could make a difference to your local health services just by putting your views on record.

Your comments (including those submitted via the engage website if the LINK has chosen option c) will be taken into account when we make our final assessments of how trusts have performed in 2008/09.

They are more likely to influence our assessments if they are supported by facts.

### 5. Submitting your comments

There is no standard template for giving your comments to trusts – use a format that works best for you. Consider allowing the chair of your group to 'sign off' your comments. This could help you to finalise them more quickly.

It is important that trusts have enough time to include your comments in their declarations before the deadline. They must send us their declaration no later than midday on 1 May 2009 and we will check that they have included your comments.

They should also send you a copy of their declaration once they have submitted it to us so that you can check your comments.

They do not have to share the content of their declaration with you before it is submitted.

The engage website has been set up to allow comments to be sent to us throughout the year. However, if a LINK is submitting comments via the Engage website for the annual health check 2008/09 (option c), then they need to be submitted before 1 May 2009.

#### Tips to help ensure your comments make a difference

- Think about what matters most to you and the people in your community – what are the most important points you want to get across?
- Think about examples of good practice as well as problems and areas for improvement.
- Familiarise yourself with the 24 core standards and guidance relating to them. Aim to match the standards with the points you want to make.
- Try to find facts and examples to back up your comments. These may include notes of a meeting or visit to a trust, the results of a local survey, or personal stories from individuals with supporting dates and documents. Please note your comments must not include confidential or personal information and we may not be able to accept those that do.
- Do not submit the supporting information with your comments, but be prepared in case we need to clarify some aspect of your comment.

## 6. Learning from last year's annual health check

When writing your comments for this year's annual health check, please note that we use them to identify and extract 'items of information'. These might consist of several paragraphs or a single sentence and will relate to one or more core standard.

In 2008, we received 1,930 comments from third parties. We extracted and coded 8,779 items of information from these comments because they related to one or more of the standards. Each coded item was weighted 'high', 'medium' or 'low':

- 'High' meant the item had a strong association with a particular standard, was closely aligned to the criteria in our inspection guides and provided clear information to support the opinions expressed.
- 'Low' meant the item related to a small aspect of a standard, or was about one department rather than a whole trust, or had little back-up information.
- In total, 451 (5%) of the items were weighted as 'high', 5,206 (59%) as 'low' and 3,122 (36%) as 'medium' weighting.

## 7. Cross-checking and follow up

Your comments will be one of the many sources of information that will be used to check the trust's declaration. This helps to ensure our assessments are as fair and accurate as possible. We will also carry out follow-up inspections with approximately 20% of trusts – some of these trusts will be chosen at random and some will have been identified as being most at risk of not meeting the core standards.

If your local trust gets a follow-up inspection, you may be contacted by one of our regional assessors to discuss your comments. We will want to see your supporting information at this point.

### Key dates

- **Early 2009**  
Establish the deadlines for submitting comments to your trust.  
  
If you do not wish to submit any comments for the 2008/09 annual health check, it would be helpful if you could write formally to your trust advising them of this.
- **15 April 2009**  
Trusts can begin to submit their declaration to us.
- **Midday 1 May 2009**  
Deadline for trusts to submit their declaration to us.
- **22 May 2009**  
Trust declarations made public.
- **October 2009**  
Results of the annual health check published.



## 8. Find out more

Our LINKs guide to working with the Healthcare Commission gives details of how LINKs can contribute information for the annual health check in 2008/09. It is available from the engage website at:

**<https://engage.healthcarecommission.org.uk/static/handbook>**

A companion guide to working with the Commission for Social Care Inspection will be available in autumn 2008.

*The annual health check in 2008/09: Assessing and rating the NHS* gives further information about the annual health check and can be downloaded from the Healthcare Commission website at **[www.healthcarecommission.org.uk](http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk)**

We will shortly be publishing sets of criteria for NHS trusts to give them more information about the assessment of core standards for this year's annual health check. These will also be available to download from the Commission website once they are published.



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