

NHS CONTINUING HEALTH CARE (CHC) – NORTHERN IRELAND

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WHAT IS CONTINUING HEALTH CARE IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

Continuing healthcare is the term used in Northern Ireland for the practice of the health service meeting the cost of any adult social care need which is driven primarily by a health need.

HOW DOES CONTINUING HEALTH CARE OPERATE IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

HSC Trusts are responsible for ensuring that assessments of need are carried out, including for those with continuing health care needs. These assessments will identify either a primary need for continuing healthcare, which is provided free of charge, or a primary need for social care. If the decision is that it is a social care need which will be met in a residential care or nursing home setting, the law requires the relevant HSC Trust to levy a means-tested charge.

Where the social care needs can be met in the person's own home, many of the available services may be paid for by the HSC Trust, with no charge to the individual. However, trusts can *choose* to charge for services, and as the Northern Ireland Law Centre states:

'There is no specific legislation regulating the imposition of charges for domiciliary services. This, coupled with the lack of a clear policy statement or any comprehensive guidance on charging, has resulted in inconsistencies in the manner in which trusts throughout Northern Ireland approach charging for such services.'

HOW IS NEED ASSESSED?

Due to Northern Ireland having a fully integrated system, the assessment process covers both health and social care needs. Individuals are assessed using the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT), which is the standardised, multi-professional assessment tool providing a framework for holistic, person-centred assessment. A Nursing Needs Assessment Tool (NNAT) is applied when required. As mentioned above, the assessment will identify whether the primary need is for health care, or for social care.

The distinction between health and social care is complex and requires a careful appraisal of each individual case. Within the integrated system in Northern Ireland, it is clinicians, together with other health and social

Northern Ireland benefits from a fully integrated system of health and social care.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) is responsible for commissioning health and social care services for the local population, while Health and Social Care Trusts (HSC Trusts) are responsible for delivering the required services.

This summary sheet is designed to give a general overview of the system.

care professionals, who are responsible for assessing the needs of the individual and for making decisions about appropriate long-term care.

HPSS (HEALTH & PERSONAL SOCIAL SERVICES) PAYMENTS FOR NURSING CARE

Payments for nursing care were introduced in October 2002 following a recommendation from a Royal Commission on Long Term Care. The purpose is to address the anomaly whereby nursing care was free in a person's own home, a residential home or a hospital, but within a nursing home the residents (prior to October 2002) were required to pay for it.

If the assessment identifies that nursing home care is appropriate and the individual is responsible for meeting the full costs of their nursing home care, then the relevant HSC Trust is responsible for making a payment of £100 per week to cover the cost of providing the nursing care. This payment is made directly by the HSC Trust to the nursing home provider.

MATTERS ARISING

In 2014, Age NI published a report titled 'The Denial of NHS Continuing Healthcare in Northern Ireland' claiming that older people were being denied access to assessments for continuing healthcare, largely due to the lack of clear guidance.

Alongside the report, the Department of Health has continued to receive queries from individuals and their families, and Members of the Legislative Assembly on behalf of their constituents and other stakeholders about eligibility for continuing healthcare.

In view of this, the Department carried out a comprehensive review to examine the application of continuing healthcare across the HSC Trusts. This involved analysing existing practice across each HSC Trust, reviewing continuing healthcare queries received directly by the Department, engaging with a range of key stakeholders including representatives from the Commissioner for Older People (COPNI) and Age NI, and examining continuing healthcare policy and practice across England, Scotland and Wales.

Ongoing Consultation

The result of this review was an open consultation in respect of the current continuing healthcare policy in Northern Ireland focusing on four options:

- Option 1: Do Nothing
- Option 2: Introduce a Continuing Healthcare Decision Support Tool Model (as is the case in England & Wales)
- Option 3: Introduce a Single Eligibility Criteria Question (as is the case in Scotland)
- Option 4: Develop Standalone Guidance and assessment checklist specific to the HSC System in Northern Ireland.

The consultation closed on the 15 Sep 2017 and at the time of writing, a response report has not yet been published.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-single-assessment-tool-and-guidance>

[HTTPS://CONSULTATIONS.NIDIRECT.GOV.UK/DOH-ELDERLY-AND-COMMUNITY-CARE-UNIT/CONTINUING-HEALTHCARE-IN-NORTHERN-IRELAND/](https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/doh-elderly-and-community-care-unit/continuing-healthcare-in-northern-ireland/)

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