



Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

# How we can help MPs and your constituents



**We can help MPs deal with complaints from constituents about the NHS in England, UK government departments and other UK public organisations.**

## **Who we are**

We were set up by Parliament to provide an independent service to handle complaints about the NHS in England, UK government departments and other UK public organisations. We are not part of government or the NHS in England. We are neither a regulator nor a consumer champion.

## **Our role**

We are the final stage for complaints that haven't been resolved through the organisation's own complaints process.

We make our decisions independently and impartially.

Our service is free to use.

## **How your role as an MP links with ours**

When PHSO was set up in 1967, a temporary measure was introduced so that MPs could filter complaints that did not fall within our remit.

This was a requirement known as the "MP filter", which aimed to prevent the newly established body from being swamped with complaints. This was due to be phased out after five years but still remains in place nearly 60 years later.

Unlike NHS complaints, PHSO can only consider complaints about UK government departments and some other UK public organisations if we are asked to do so by MPs.



## Our vision

Our vision is to be an exemplary public services ombudsman by providing an independent, impartial and fair complaints resolution service, while using casework to help raise standards and improve public services.

## Our service

If someone believes an organisation has not acted properly or fairly, or has provided a poor service, they should first complain to the organisation concerned.

This is so that the organisation has a chance to put things right.

If they are still unhappy about the outcome of their complaint after the organisation has responded, they can ask us to look into it.

If we decide we can't help, we will explain why.

If we decide we can look at a complaint in detail, we:

- listen carefully to both sides
- collect facts to establish what has happened
- weigh up the evidence.

Then we make a final decision on the complaint. We may decide that the organisation has done the right thing to resolve a complaint. If we come to this conclusion we will explain why.

If we decide an organisation has got things wrong, we explain why and ask them to take action to put things right.

Our recommendations may include things people have told us are important to them. For example, we may recommend an organisation explains how it got things wrong, apologises and clearly sets out how it will learn from the complaint and make changes to improve its service. In some circumstances we may also recommend a financial remedy.

We were set up primarily to put things right for individuals who have suffered hardship or injustice. But we also share findings from casework with Parliament to help it hold organisations that provide public services to account. These findings are shared more widely to help others promote improvements in public services.

# Helping constituents use our service

These **three key checks** will help you give your constituents initial guidance:

**① Has your constituent completed the complaints process of the organisation in question?**

People can ask us to look into their complaint if they are unhappy with the organisation's final response. Occasionally we get involved before that stage if an organisation is clearly not making progress with the complaint within a reasonable timescale.

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**② Is the complaint being brought to us in time?**

Generally we only consider complaints which someone has brought to you within a year of their first becoming aware that they wanted to complain. There may be some exceptions to this, such as a delay following a bereavement.

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**③ Is the complaint about an organisation we can investigate?**

We can only consider complaints where we have been given the ability to do so by Parliament. This means we can consider complaints about the NHS in England, UK government departments and other UK public organisations.

You can also use our online complaint checker:

<https://complaintform.ombudsman.org.uk/complaintchecker>

Here are some examples of cases about organisations in, and not in, our jurisdiction:

- ✓ Complaints about the NHS in England
- ✗ Complaints about the NHS in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales
- ✓ Complaints about benefits, immigration or tax from across the UK
- ✗ Complaints about public sector housing or local councils

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has responsibility for social care issues.

We work with the LGSCO on complaints about both health and social care provision.

The Housing Ombudsman Service looks into complaints about housing organisations.

Our website [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk) has a list of the organisations we can investigate, and details of other ombudsman services which may cover areas we don't.





## Bringing a complaint to us



### Complaints about UK government departments and other public organisations

We can only take on a constituent's complaint if they refer it to us through an MP.

Guidance notes and a form are available on our website.



### Complaints about the NHS in England

If a constituent has a complaint about NHS services, their MP can ask us to investigate or they can ask us directly.

Guidance notes and a form are available on our website. We also have an online form which people can use to submit their complaint to us.

People can also make complaints to us over the phone. It helps to read the appropriate guidance notes before calling us, as this indicates what information we will ask for during the conversation.

## Our relationship with Parliament

We are accountable to Parliament and our work is scrutinised by the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC). We present our Annual Report and Accounts to Parliament, which form the basis for an annual scrutiny session by PACAC. Our accounts are audited by the National Audit Office.

PACAC may hold its own hearings on these reports and other committees of the House may also do so.

In the very rare cases when an organisation does not accept our recommendations, we can ask PACAC to support us in holding the organisation to account.

## Sharing insight to improve public services

We share learning and insight from the complaints we investigate to drive improvements in public services. For example, we reported on recurrent failings in the way X-rays and scans are reported on and followed up across NHS services. We highlighted the importance of treating digital infrastructure as a patient safety issue to prevent failings from happening again.

Following our report, the Department of Health and Social Care published the Digital Clinical Safety Strategy, which outlines the case for improved digital clinical safety and commits to a new model for digital training across the NHS. In February 2023, the House of Commons called for further improvements to the digitisation of the NHS, to help the NHS provide a safer service for patients.

Such cases highlight the value that complaints can make in bringing about public service improvements.

## **If you want to direct a constituent to us:**

- Visit [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)
- Call 0345 015 4033
- Email [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk)
- Write to Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Citygate, 51 Mosley Street, Manchester M2 3HQ

## **If you want to contact us directly as an MP:**

- Visit [www.ombudsman.org.uk/making-complaint/information-mps](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/making-complaint/information-mps)
- Call the MP hotline 0300 061 4953
- For general enquiries, email [MP@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:MP@ombudsman.org.uk)
- For public affairs enquiries, email [publicaffairs@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@ombudsman.org.uk)
- Write to Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Citygate, 51 Mosley Street, Manchester M2 3HQ

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