

# Finding an NHS dentist in Peterborough and Wisbech

Enter and View visits to Dental Access Centres  
between September – November 2018



**healthwatch**  
Cambridgeshire

**healthwatch**  
Peterborough



## About us

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Our job is to make sure that those who run local health and care services understand and act on what really matters to people.

We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved. We share what people tell us with those with the power to make change happen. We encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area.



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## Key Findings

As a result of our visits to Dental Access Centres run by Dental Healthcare, part of Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust, and conversations with people, we found the following:

- Due to the lack of routine and urgent dental appointments in Peterborough and Wisbech NHS dental practices, people are going to the Dental Access Centres for help.
- The number of people being turned away without treatment from the dental access centres is substantial and increasing.
- People do not know that formally registering with an NHS dental practice is no longer a possibility since April 2006.
- People appreciate the high quality of care and the caring nature of staff at the Dental Access Centres.
- There are not enough NHS dentists or dental nurses regionally and there are significant problems with recruitment.
- Poor transport links make it hard for some people to access dental health care in the Fenland area.

With regard to the wider provision of dental healthcare for children in Peterborough and Fenland, we found that:

- Children have no priority for either routine or emergency appointments, unless they have additional needs and disabilities.
- There is not enough preventative oral health education.
- The number of children having multiple tooth extractions is increasing.



## Recommendations

We recommend that NHS England:

1. Continue to work with partners and gather public views in regard of the proposed changes to both urgent and routine dental care.
2. Review the need for dental services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and commission activity in line with demand.
3. Ensure that information about dentists on the NHS Choices website is up to date and accurate.
4. Direct dentists to take steps to increase dental care for children.

We recommend that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Public Health Team and Public Health England:

5. Commission an oral health campaign across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough targeting children and families.

We recommend that Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust:

6. Review accessibility of information in both Dental Access Centres to ensure this complies with the NHS England Accessible Information Standard.
7. Review availability of interpreting and translation services and maximise use of NHS England's newly commissioned service.

Healthwatch will support the work undertaken to progress these recommendations and to continue to collect feedback and inform commissioners of where people, especially children, are having difficulties accessing both routine and urgent dental care.



## About the visits

The services we visited were:

- **Dental Healthcare Peterborough,  
5 Midgate, Peterborough, PE1 1TN**  
Visited on 24 and 28 September 2018
- **Wisbech Dental Access Centre,  
1-4 Church Mews, Wisbech, PE13 1HL**  
Visited on 29 October and 2 November 2018.

These services are provided by Dental Healthcare, which is part of Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) NHS Trust.

CCS NHS Trust is commissioned by NHS England to provide urgent dental care, including out of hours' services, from its Dental Access Centres for all patients requiring an urgent appointment. This includes pain relief, tooth extraction or a temporary filling. These services are available on a first come first served basis to those who need it.





## Why we visited

We visited these Dental Access Centres to hear about people's experiences of trying to find NHS dental healthcare.

This is because people had reported problems to us regarding finding information about dentists and booking an NHS dentist appointment, particularly in an emergency.

The lack of local routine appointments means that people often go to the Dental Access Centres for help; however, this service cannot always see people as the demand exceeds the commissioned capacity.

CCS NHS Trust's Dental Healthcare staff told us that many people are having trouble getting urgent dental care at high street dental practices. Dental Access Centres provide follow up care and respond to people's needs for tooth extractions. However, they said that what patients really need is to be able to access an NHS dentist who will follow through their treatment until they are dentally fit. This is not possible in many cases, so patients have nowhere else to turn.

We spoke to NHS England to let them know we were hearing that people were finding it too hard to get an NHS appointment. Our visits are helping inform NHS England of how these dental services are working. NHS England are procuring a new out of hours' dental service in Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and Norfolk.

## What we did

We undertook four visits to the two Dental Access Centres with the highest number of patients who were turned away for treatment. We are aware that other Dental Access Centres in the area, in Cambridge and Huntingdon, are also having to turn away patients needing treatment; however, numbers of patients being turned away in Peterborough and Wisbech are considerably higher.

These visits were carried out using our statutory power to Enter and View. This is Healthwatch's legal right to visit places that provide publicly funded health or adult social care services to see and hear how people experience those services.

Each visit is carried out by a team of trained volunteer Authorised Representatives, supported by Healthwatch staff. Our Authorised Representatives are the only people who can undertake a visit using our power to Enter and View local health and care services. For these visits, we were helped by our Authorised Representatives Jean Hobbs, Jenny Egbe and Jo Smith.

We used a questionnaire to understand people's experiences.

We also spoke to some of the staff about their work and experiences of the present dental services.



# Peterborough Dental Access Centre

This surgery is in the centre of the city and can be reached by bus. There is a train station with a service to and from Huntingdon. There is no parking at this surgery; however, public car parks are close by. There is a taxi drop off point directly outside.

The surgery is clearly signed and has opening and closing times on the front door. There are automatic opening doors and plenty of space for wheelchair and pram access. There is a welcome sign above the reception desk in different languages.

Anyone can access Dental Access Centre urgent appointments on a first come, first served basis. CCS NHS Trust also provides a community dental service from these premises for people with additional needs or disabilities, who are seen until deemed dentally fit.

Often a dentist will work half a day on each service. If there are spaces in either, they will be used to deliver more capacity for urgent cases. Information on display in the waiting area includes:

- The quality and safety outcomes of the surgery (safety, effectiveness, care, responsiveness and leadership).
- Information on oral health in children with autism.
- Folders of information about the Dental Access Centre service.
- Examples of patients' comments.
- A box for patients' feedback.

We observed that there was no other health promotion information.

The Peterborough Dental Access Centre is open from Monday to Friday every week for urgent treatment by appointment, with emergency out of hours' treatment available on alternate weekends. At present there are three hours available for emergency out of hours' care on Saturday and on Sunday, every other weekend.

This Dental Access Centre is currently awaiting the outcome of a recent procurement to determine the future provider of the weekend out of hours' emergency dental service. NHS 111 makes the out of hours' appointments at weekends and this will continue in the new service.

Weekday appointments are given on a first come, first served basis. We were told by staff that emergency appointments for that day are normally booked within an hour of opening. Staff told us that if there are no appointments available for that day, patients are given a leaflet which advises them that they can:

- Try another Dental Access Centre.
- Call back the next day.
- Call NHS 111 for out of hours' care.
- Contact NHS England if they cannot get a dentist or care.

We observed people coming in to try and get an urgent appointment but then being turned away. They were given all other Dental Access Centre information and NHS 111 options and advised about pain relief over the weekend. Sometimes this made them very upset and angry because they were in pain.

We observed that the phone system in the mornings were extremely busy.



## What people told us

We spoke to 19 patients at this service. Most lived within six miles of the service.

- Eight people told us they normally saw a dentist elsewhere.
- Ten people said they were not on a dentist's list.
- Fourteen people said they had used this Dental Access Centre before. Five had not.
- Six people told us that they were not given any advice about coming to the Dental Access Centre. Many self-referred.
- Two people had used A&E in the past for a tooth issue.
- Three people told us that they were supporting someone with communication needs.

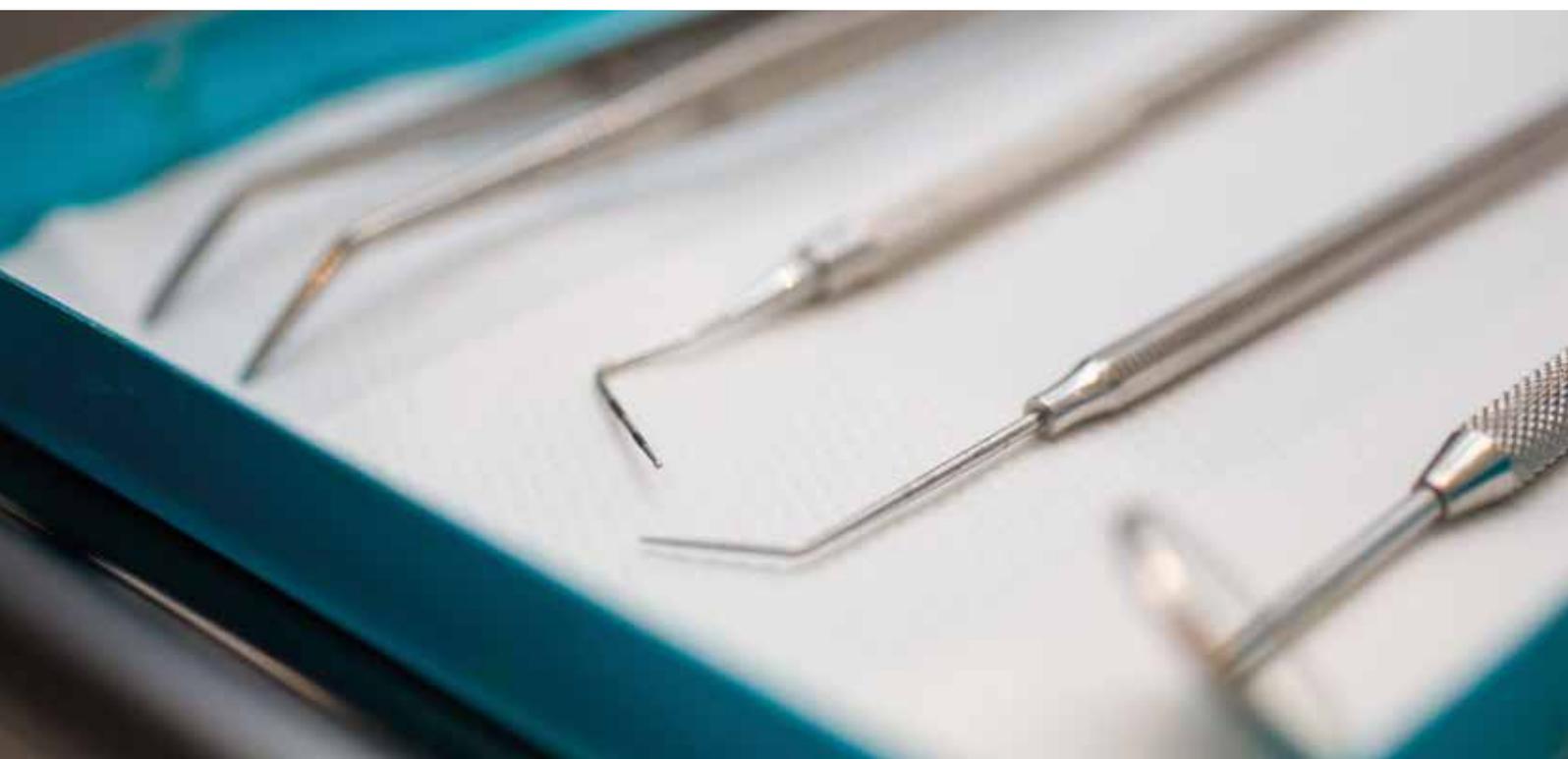
An asylum seeker caseworker who was accompanying a young male asylum seeker stated that it is very difficult to get dental appointments for asylum seekers, so they always take them to the Dental Access Centre now. They said that the care is good but there is a shortage of appointments.

We received feedback from patients about the phone system. Some people told us that they got straight through, whilst others waited up to an hour to then be told that there were no appointments. Some had tried to ring for an appointment for several days and not succeeded.

One person told us that they were "In severe pain - unable to get help anywhere, not even for pain relief. I have a small child at home and I am not getting any sleep."

Another said, "The care is good at the Dental Access Centre, it is just lack of appointments."

A list of patients turned away is kept and sent to NHS England.





## What staff told us

When we visited, we spoke to some of the staff who told us that they are incredibly busy. Many patients they see do not receive routine dental care.

Staff told us that:

- Children have received little previous treatment, no oral health education, and many have lots of decay.
- There are some local dental practices which seem to send more patients to the Dental Access Centre than others.
- Patients can be given, for example, antibiotics initially, but are not then offered follow-up treatment by NHS dental practices.
- There is difficulty recruiting dentists regionally. All dentists require a performer number. Dentists trained in the UK do not appear to have to wait for this. Overseas dentists seem to need to wait over six months to obtain their number. A private company is responsible for the dentist registration system.
- Dentists who trained in the UK seem to want to practice near to their training school, e.g. London. London does not have recruitment problems.
- Due to demand being higher than commissioned activity, many people are being turned away from the Peterborough Dental Access Centre. The figures from September 2018 show that over 12 days, 339 people were turned away.
- Lack of appointments are worse at times when dentists are ill or on holiday.
- It is not always possible to find a locum dentist to cover.
- Patients do not tend to travel to other Dental Access Centres. They are not sure the reason for this, possibly expense or poor travel links to Wisbech.



## Wisbech Dental Access Centre

The Wisbech Dental Access Centre is situated in the town centre. There is one disabled parking bay available close by. There are also a number of public car parks situated within walking distance of the practice. The Wisbech Dental Access Centre is smaller in size than the service in Peterborough.

Anyone can access Dental Access Centre urgent appointments on a first come, first served basis. CCS NHS Trust also provides a community dental service from these premises for people with additional needs or disabilities, who are seen until deemed dentally fit.

Often, a dentist will work half a day on each service. If there are spaces in either, they will be taken up with emergencies.

This service is extremely busy, regularly having to turn away patients in need of urgent care. Recent figures show that they

turned away 3,028 people between - April and September 2018. These figures are sent to NHS England.

People can phone or walk in to try to get an appointment. Some are referred from elsewhere, e.g. NHS 111 or their own dentist. Many people we spoke to had referred themselves for treatment.

Staff told us that the phones open at 8:15am and the free appointments go quickly.

The Dental Access Service is contracted to see eight patients daily at the weekend. Calls to this out of hours' service are managed by IC24 in Wisbech via the NHS 111 phone number.

Staff told us that patients do not always accept appointments as they may not, for example, have transport to get to the service.





## What people told us

We spoke to ten people. Most lived within a 15-mile radius of the Wisbech Dental Access Centre.

- Eight people self-referred to the Wisbech Dental Access Centre. The other two were referred by other healthcare professionals, who were - another dentist and NHS 111.
- Six people had pre-booked appointments and four walked in on the day.
- Two people told us they normally received treatment from another dentist.
- Eight people said that they were not registered with another dentist.
- Nine patients had visited the Dental Access Centre in the past.
- Three people were given advice to visit by NHS 111
- Four people had used A&E in the past for tooth problems. The reasons for this were for more complicated problems e.g. teeth knocked out and jaw injuries.
- Five people booked their appointments by telephone. Of these people, four of the calls were answered quickly. One person waited 25 minutes before getting through.
- Three people were supporting someone with communication needs.

One person told us, “I was really happy with NHS 111 - would not have thought about ringing them for a dental problem normally. The ‘ring-back’ later in the day to check on me was very nice.”

## What staff told us

Staff at this service told us about the difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff. They also said:

- Poor transport links make getting to the Dental Access Centre more difficult for staff and patients without cars.
- They see many non-English speaking children under four years old who have very poor teeth due to the lack of oral health education. Children are given sugary drinks and are often grazing on sugary foods.
- Demand on the service increases if a local NHS dentist is on sick leave or holiday, even as far away as Kings Lynn.



## Themes from both Dental Access Centres

Patients at both sites told us that the quality of care they received was good. One patient said, “The staff are very friendly and helpful.” Another said, “Dentists here explain what they are doing.”

Nearly four out of every five people were using the Dental Access Centres repeatedly.

### Problems getting routine or emergency dental appointments

It can be hard to get an appointment at the Dental Access Centres and they are both turning away large numbers of patients every day.

People also reported difficulties finding an NHS dentist to see them for either routine or urgent treatment.

Three in every five people we spoke to said they were not currently under the care of an NHS dentist. One person told us, “I checked online to see if he could get registered with an NHS dentist, but they all say they are full.”

Another person told us, “I am still looking for a dentist to join – I was registered with a dentist in Wisbech, but it went private and so now I just come to the Dental Access Centre when I need care.”

An asylum seeker support worker told us they had phoned several NHS dental practices for an appointment for an asylum seeker, and they were all full. It took them four to five weeks to get an appointment at the Dental Access Centre.

We heard reports of people being removed from their NHS dentist’s list following missing one booked appointment. One person said, “I was taken off my dentist’s register without notification because I missed an appointment, then had to ring several dental practices and they are all full.”

We learnt that children do not have any priority in the system, unless they have additional needs and are referred by another healthcare professional.

One person said, “My two-year old daughter has a broken tooth, but I cannot find anyone who will register her.”

### Transport links

We heard from staff and patients that poor transport links in the Fenland area can make getting to Dental Access Centres and dental practices difficult for patients without a car.

One person told us, “My dentist is over in the March area which means I need to get two buses and a taxi to get there. It is hard with children. I need treatment on my own teeth but the dentist in March is so far away.”



## Tooth extractions

CCS NHS Trust's Cambridgeshire Dental Clinical Lead and Specialist in Special Care Dentistry told us that the numbers of children having multiple tooth extractions in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are increasing.

We learnt that in 2017/18 there were 657 tooth extractions for children under general anaesthesia in Peterborough alone, with a further 116 extractions using nitrous oxide. It is notable that these children were mostly between the ages of three and 12. We were told that these were primarily due to tooth decay.

Tooth extractions can cause children health problems, including:

- Psychological problems due to facial image and bullying.
- Eating problems.
- Speech problems.
- A possible need for braces as adult teeth may come down randomly with no milk teeth to guide them.

We understand that CCS NHS Trust's Dental Healthcare Cambridgeshire, who provide oral health promotion to the community, are commissioned for 17 hours per week. This includes travelling time. They visit care homes, schools, nurseries and other groups to promote good oral health.

## Not enough language assistance for non-English speaking communities

Some people who use the Dental Access Centres cannot speak English well. The cost of translation services is high, even though some come in with family and friends to help with language. Google translate is not reliable. Some cannot read or write. The lack of English makes issues such as consent and understanding allergies difficult. Some medical information is available in the Centres for patients in different languages if needed.



## The wider impact on the NHS

### NHS 111

Our Healthwatch has been told that a significant number of people rang NHS 111 regarding dental issues between May and November 2018 across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Feedback received by Healthwatch about NHS 111 has been good, although waiting a long time initially on the phone can be a problem.

### GPs and Dental Problems

A local Peterborough GP, Dr Neil Modha, told Healthwatch: “There is clearly not adequate access to urgent dental care in our area. Primary care is often asked to manage these conditions without the expertise. There is also not enough language assistance for Eastern European people to navigate the system, so primary care tends to be a major source of support for them.”

### Accident and Emergency (A&E)

From our discussions with people, few had used A&E in the past for tooth problems. However, figures from A&E in Peterborough show there were 698 attendances from April 2017 to October 2018 for dental issues, including dental abscesses, decay and other tooth problems. This is an average of 37 people a month. It is likely that most of these people would have been better cared for by a routine or emergency dentist.





# Background Information

## Understanding the dental care system

You cannot formally register with a practice

Formal registration with an NHS dentist ended in 2006. When a person finds a dentist, they need to fill in a registration form which adds a person to the database only. This does not guarantee future access to treatment.

Patients are only a patient of the practice whilst they are in a course of treatment, which could be for example, a filling or extraction. The practice is not obliged to provide ongoing care.

NHS England tell us that practices do look after their regular patients as goodwill and to keep their numbers at a certain level. However, this means that many people do not have access to regular check-ups which allow early detection of problems.

### Paying for an appointment

NHS dental care is free for some patients, including children, pregnant women and people on certain benefits. Otherwise, you will be charged one of three fixed rates. These range from £21.60 for an assessment and simple treatment to £256.50 for the most complex treatments. Dentists should discuss the cost of any dental care that is needed as part of the initial assessment.

### Missing an appointment

Your dental practice can end your treatment plan if you miss an appointment without telling them. We believe the public are not aware of this and some patients have told us this has happened to them and they have been surprised by this.

### If you are unable to find an NHS dentist

You should contact NHS England to let them know if you have been unable to find a dentist and you want to raise your concerns about this.

email: [england.contactus@nhs.net](mailto:england.contactus@nhs.net)  
phone: 0300 311 2233

### Getting an emergency dental appointment

The NHS website advises people to contact their usual dentist in case of an emergency or call NHS 111. It advises people not to contact their GP as they cannot provide urgent dental care and to only go to A&E for serious reasons, e.g. heavy bleeding, severe pain, injury to face and mouth.

### Further information

The NHS website explains what happens when you visit an NHS dentist. You can find out more about this here: [using-the-nhs/nhs-services/dentists/how-to-find-an-nhs-dentist/](https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/dentists/how-to-find-an-nhs-dentist/)

## Planning and commissioning dental services

NHS dental services are planned and funded (commissioned) by NHS England.

Our Healthwatch has been in discussion with the people at NHS England responsible for dental services since April 2017. They told us that they are aware of the problems that people are having finding an NHS dentist and getting emergency treatment, particularly in the Wisbech and Peterborough areas.



In response to these problems, NHS England commissioners are currently developing new ideas about how NHS dental services will be provided. They are talking to dentists about how they could do things differently.

Our Healthwatch have been sending NHS England the feedback we get about NHS dentistry, so that the plans can be informed by people's experiences. This report will build on this work.

Since the visits, Healthwatch has learnt that the Chair of the Local Dental Network for East Anglia is proposing to set up a dental school. Healthwatch support this idea, as it would help significantly with attracting people to come and work in the area.

## Accessible Information

As part of our visits, we looked at the information available for people and how this compared to the requirements of the NHS England Accessible Information Standard. See Appendix 1 for more information about the Accessible Information Standard.

As part of CCS NHS Trust's action plan to meet the Accessible Information Standard, they asked AccessAble to undertake audits and develop access guides. These are available on the Trust's website for most services across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, including both Dental Access Centres.

To read the access audit for Peterborough Dental Access Centre, go to: <https://www.accessable.co.uk/venues/dental-healthcare-peterborough>

To read the access audit for Wisbech Dental Access Centre, go to: <https://www.accessable.co.uk/venues/dental-healthcare-wisbech>

### Dental Access Centre, Peterborough

We were told dental staff have disability awareness training and can supply information in different formats such as Braille and large print upon request. British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters can be booked. We saw an A4 folder in the waiting room containing clear pictures and easy read information suitable for patients with Learning Disabilities.

There was also a book containing basic dental information in different languages.

### Dental Access Centre, Wisbech

We were told by a member of staff that they do not ask patients about any preferred communication requirements but rely on referral letters from other health professionals. Patient communication methods are recorded on the patient's electronic notes.

On the day, we observed that the hearing loop was partially hidden by other literature. There were no other symbols to show a loop was available.

Staff told us that interpreters for different languages and BSL are available upon request. We could not see any signage informing patients about this service however patients are offered interpreters as a matter of course if required.



## Conclusions

More needs to be done to listen to the experiences of people during the commissioning and monitoring of dental services.

We observed significant problems for people seeking both routine and emergency dental services in both Peterborough and Fenland.

Negative impacts of poor dental health are reported. These all mean an increased cost to the NHS and the wider care system.

The issues of childhood tooth decay and prioritising preventative oral education have become very pressing indeed and needs addressing.

The dental workforce is not adequate to meet needs. We are told that NHS England are taking another look at whether the dental contracts and workforce are working to deliver good dental care.

## Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the patients who spoke to us as part of our visits to the two Dental Access Centres.

We would also like to thank staff at the Centres for their support with our visit, and for sharing their own views on the current system.

Finally, we would like to thank health staff within the wider NHS for sharing their views on dental services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.





# Appendix 1

## About the Accessible Information Standard

The Accessible Information Standard came into effect from 1 August 2016. Minor changes were made in August 2017, after a review by NHS England. Organisations that provide publicly funded care and health services need to provide information in a way that people with a sensory or learning disability can understand. They must also provide communication support where necessary, for example, a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.

Organisations must do these five things:

1. Ask you if you have any information or communication needs and find out how to meet your needs.
2. Record your needs clearly and in a set way.
3. Highlight or flag your file or notes so it is clear you have information or communication needs, and how to meet those needs.
4. Share information about your information and communication needs with other providers of NHS and adult social care. They will need your consent to do this.
5. Take steps to make sure that you get information which you can access and understand and get communication support if you need it. The Standard applies to patients and carers who need this support.

In 2017 Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough reported on people's experiences seeking communication support they needed. During this time, we have worked with providers to improve availability of accessible information<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.healthwatchcambridgeshire.co.uk/news/new-healthwatch-report-aims-improve-healthwatch-campaigns-improve-care-people-learning-and>



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