



Patient Participation Group toolkit

healthwatch
Cambridgeshire

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Peterborough

About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is your independent health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care.

We listen to feedback from people, both good and bad, about local services and share what you 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 you find trustworthy and reliable information and advice about services in your area.

The role of Patient Participation Groups

Effective Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) play a key role in patient participation and public involvement as they aim to improve local services for local people in the following ways:

- allow people to get involved with their surgery and help them use resources more efficiently.
- give a surgery important insight into what its patients want and need and provide an important forum for learning from patient experience.
- encourage and empower patients to take more responsibility for their own health.

As a result of this activity, a strong PPG can improve the overall satisfaction of patients.

Every surgery should have a PPG, but how that PPG works, what it does, and who gets involved is up to each individual surgery.

This toolkit

There are several resources available to help set up and develop PPGs, as well as to help PPGs think creatively about patient involvement.

Here, we highlight some of those resources, particularly around getting started, increasing membership, and thinking about what a PPG can do. We have also highlighted ways that we can work together with PPGs to improve health services across the region.



Getting started

All GP surgeries should have a Patient Participation Group. The surgery and the PPG decide together how the PPG is set up and what it does. PPGs can meet virtually, in person, or a combination of both. They should be representative of the patient population.

PPGs can work on a variety of aims and projects but, ultimately, they should allow practice staff and patients to work together to help a surgery meet the needs of the people it serves.

A guide to setting up a PPG

The first goal when setting up a PPG is to establish a shared understanding with the practice about the purpose and role of the PPG and how it fits with the practice.

Defining clear terms of reference and role descriptions will help PPG members and practice staff to explain why the PPG exists and what it does.

There are plenty of helpful sources with information and ideas available to help you set up and run a PPG:

The Patients Association

The Patients Association is an independent charity campaigning for improvements in health and social care for patients. It is free to access and has a toolkit, templates and videos explaining how to set up, run and increase membership.

[What are PPGs?](#)

[Setting up PPGs](#)

[Building your PPG](#)

[A PPG's first meeting](#)

[Tips for successful groups](#)



NHS England and the National Association for Patient Participation

The online resource guide to Building Better Participation provides goals and recommendations in four areas:

- Getting PPGs in place
- Helping PPGs work well
- Knowing and working with patients
- Influencing beyond the GP practice

[For Patients – National Association for Patient Participation](#)

Additional resources

Useful information sheets:

[Terms of Reference template: INVOLVE Terms of Reference Template](#)

[Guide to engaging with young people: The NHS Youth Forum Top Tips](#)



What is a virtual group?

A virtual group consists of patients who prefer to engage with the Patient Participation Group by email rather than by attending meetings. Information such as practice newsletters, minutes of the Patient Participation Group meetings and surveys are shared electronically with them. Virtual groups allow people to have a 'light touch' involvement whilst being kept informed, give their views and participate if they can't attend face-to-face meetings on a regular basis, are caring for someone and unable to leave them, or are working. In this way, they can still provide support for the PPG on topics in which they have an interest.

These are some of the benefits of having a virtual group. However, it's worth bearing in mind that some people may not have access to technology and therefore finding alternative ways to engage with them is important to ensure that all voices are heard.



Increasing membership

A PPG will benefit from being as representative of the patient population as possible. There are many guides available with advice about how to increase recruitment, but the key is to get out there and ask people to join. With a clear idea of how your PPG will work and what it will try to do, you can promote your PPG in the waiting room, on prescription slips, with local voluntary organisations, and online. You may also wish to recruit through the surgery's Facebook and other social media channels.

Representing the patient population can be tricky, especially trying to find a date, time and place everyone can meet. Many PPGs are turning to virtual engagement, either as a standalone group, or in addition to a group that meets in person.

Make sure any information about your PPG is up to date on your practice website. Old reports or out of date email addresses can put people off.



Recruitment advice from Community Works

- 1. Keep your message positive.** 'Help us build a fantastic centre', 'come and meet other patients and carers', 'get your voice heard and write into the newsletter/ attend a meeting' etc are better than negative messages like 'without you we will close down' or 'dissatisfied? Come and tell us why?'
- 2. Keep your message simple.** In posters and flyers, include the main purpose of group, time / location and contact. Try to save detail for conversation. Use images to suggest things rather than lengthy paragraphs.
- 3. Spread your message far and wide.** Use shops, pharmacies, post offices, newsletters, community pages, websites, Facebook, radio, local events, other groups and meetings, services which reach large numbers in the community e.g. schools, churches, practice notice boards. Try to get a member of staff in the practice to be a PPG champion, someone who is happy to talk to interested people and take contact details.

What can a PPG do?

A GP contract requires each surgery to have a PPG, but what that PPG does is up to the PPG itself.

Here are a few ways PPGs can support their practice:

- Get involved in different activities to collect patient and carer feedback about services.
- Coordinate health education and awareness activities.
- Check that things like the practice website is up to date and makes sense to patients.

Examples from other PPG groups projects are:

- Establishing a scheme to help transport elderly and disabled patients to and from the practice.
- Helping to introduce counselling and bereavement support services.
- Supporting provision of information services on general health and well-being, as well as wider issues impacting the local community, such as fuel poverty.
- Working with the practice to set up health education initiatives around obesity, coping with long term conditions, seasonal health issues.
- Supporting the smooth running of seasonal flu and covid clinics.

PPGs role in providing the patient perspective:

1. Conducting patient surveys or collecting feedback in the waiting room.
2. Advising the practice and patients of new systems and treatments.
3. Sharing good practice by networking with other PPGs.
4. Networking with [Healthwatch Health and Care forums](#) and independent [Partnerships Boards](#).
5. Sitting on recruitment panels for new staff, including GPs.
6. Lobbying to improve a whole range of health services.

What can Healthwatch do to help?

- Provide support to increase membership, including using social media and online resources.
- Provide information and resources to support your practice through our regular e-newsletters and on our websites, for example the work we have done on providing accessible information for disabled people.
- Help PPGs praise or raise concerns about local services, based on the experiences of patients and carers.
- Help people in your GP surgery find health and social care services near to them through our free Information and signposting service. We can put people in touch with organisations that could help them and advise them what to do if they have a concern.

At Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, we want to hear about the experiences people have with local health and social care services. We are working on different ways to make this easier; one option is to have a designated member of each PPG talk to Healthwatch about issues (good and bad) that the PPG is hearing about. That designated member could become a Healthwatch Community Listener volunteer, with access to the support and development opportunities we offer all of our volunteers.

Useful links on our website:

[Report: Giving GP websites a check-up](#)

[Healthwatch Community Listener volunteer](#)

Join a Healthwatch Health & Care Forum or Partnership Board

A representative from the PPG can join one of our four Healthwatch Health and Care forum:

- Cambridge & South Cambs
- Fenland & East
- Huntingdonshire
- Peterborough

Each Forum is held every two months to talk about different topics. Local health and care decision makers are invited along to answer your questions.

A representative can also join one of the five Partnership Boards:

- Carers
- Learning Disability – includes autism services
- Older People's
- Physical Disability
- Sensory Impairment

People with lived experience help improve how health and care services support older people, disabled people and carers. And the Partnership Boards provide a platform to tell NHS and local authority decision makers what is working and where care needs to be better.



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