

ACTION UPDATE Update 2: GP Access

Fold 3

Groundswell's Action Updates

Groundswell's Peer Advocates support homeless people to attend over 1,400 health appointments a year. Each month our **Action Updates** highlight a topic which homeless people have told us is important and offer practical advice around the issue. The guidance and quotes are based on what our Peer Advocates see first hand when working with homeless people to improve health.

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- Help to make health appointments
 - Go with you to your health appointments
 - Pay for your travel fares if needed.
- Find out more at: www.groundswell.org.uk
Call our office on: 03000 039 600.
Email us at: info@groundswell.org.uk



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Key facts on GPs

- Having good access to your GP is key to getting the right NHS health care.
- GPs have been told by the Care Quality Commission that homeless people should be able to register without a permanent address or ID.
- If a GP refuses to register you they have to give "reasonable grounds" in writing and should not discriminate against homeless people.
- 'GP' stands for 'General Practitioner' - these are doctors based in local communities who you should go to at the first sign of any health problem.



Fold 2

GP Access—Groundswell's Experience
14% of Groundswell's Peer Advocacy appointments this year were to visit GP's – only one of these appointments didn't end up happening. Check out our Peer Advocates Top Tips to get the most from your GP:

- **Know your rights.** Know what your entitlement is.
- **Be prepared.** Write a list of things you want to talk about before your appointment so you can make sure everything is covered.
- **Consider taking someone with you.** This could be a trusted friend or family member, a Groundswell Peer Advocate or a support worker.
- **Specialist services.** Look for services for homeless people in your area. Specialist GP's for homeless people are likely to be more flexible.
- **Be on time!** If you're late you might not be seen—so leave plenty of time to travel to your appointment.
- **Keep at it!** If you don't get all the answers then book another appointment.
- **Remember 'they' are only human!** NHS staff have a difficult job so do your best to make life easier for them!

Groundswell

Groundswell exists to enable homeless and vulnerable people to take more control of their lives, have a greater influence on services and to play a full role in our community.

Homeless Health Peer Advocacy

Groundswell works to improve the health of homeless people. Peer Advocates, who have been homeless themselves, can go with you to physical health appointments to help you to get the best service from the NHS. Practically we can offer you:

ACTION UPDATE!

Update 2: GP Access

"Keep calm and know your rights!"

Access to a GP is key to receiving good treatment with the NHS. Your GP should be co-ordinating your treatment and making sure you are referred on to any necessary health care services - but we know that homeless people often find it hard to get the treatment they need. Here are some of the reasons:

Problem — Too many homeless people are turned away from GP surgeries.

A survey from Homeless Link in 2014 found that 7% of participants were refused access to a GP or dentist in the last year and 35% had been to A and E in the last six months—if GP's were easier to access, more expensive emergency treatment would be less necessary.

Your Rights - GP's need to have "reasonable grounds" to refuse to register new patients.

These are:

- The GP is full
- You live too far away
- You have previously been banned from the GP

If a GP will not accept you they should explain their reasons to you in writing and the local Clinical Commissioning Group should support you to find a GP.

"A lot of our clients are sofa surfing and can't give out the other persons address."

"It's a lot easier using a surgery that deals with homelessness as they're more understanding dealing with chaotic people. The problem is if you're not in the catchment area you can't use the surgery you wanted."

Problem - The registration process with a GP can be hard for homeless people e.g. providing ID and proof of address can be difficult.

Your Rights - GP's can ask you for documentation but if you are homeless **you should not be required to provide it**. The Care Quality Commission has told all GP's that they should be able to register homeless people who are unable to provide ID. The address of a friend, a day centre or even the GP's surgery itself can be used instead.

Problem — GP surgeries aren't always welcoming places—staff attitudes sometimes put people off.

Your Rights—It's illegal for GP surgeries to discriminate in their treatment of patients—this includes negative behavior towards people because they are homeless. GP's have complaints procedures and you should use these if you are unhappy with the service. You can change your GP without giving a reason. Remember—receptionists do a tough job so don't take it personally if they seem unfriendly!

Problem — Registering with a GP when you move to a new area can be a struggle.

Your Rights - If you move you can request to stay registered with your existing GP surgery. If you do need to change, your old GP should be willing to treat you for up to 30 days after you move. If you normally see your GP at least once a week, or are in a health crisis, they should keep treating you until you are registered at another practice. If you think you may be in an area for a short time only, you have the right to register as a temporary patient in a local surgery for up to three months.

Problem—People who have come to the UK from abroad are often not sure of their rights with a GP.

Your Rights—Immigration status should have **NO** impact on your ability to receive treatment from a local GP. Even people in this country illegally are entitled to register and receive treatment from a GP.

Accessing your GP – a win win for everyone!

Homeless people use hospital services 4 times more than the general public. If access to GPs was easier, people could get treatment before their conditions got bad enough to need hospital treatment. That's not just good for people's health but it saves the NHS a lot of money. **The average cost of a GP visit is £45 - for A&E its £113. If you are admitted to hospital it's an average of £1779!**



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