

November 2017

'My right to access healthcare' card Guidance

These notes aim to provide information about the 'My right to access healthcare' card to individuals and organisations in London who work with adults who are experiencing homelessness.

The card is designed to help adults who are homeless to register and receive treatment at London GP practices.

Cards have been delivered to shelters, day centres, food banks, drop in centres and other organisations across London. Organisations that have received cards are asked to help ensure the cards reach people who are homeless. This can be people who are sleeping rough, people who live in hostels, people who are chronically insecurely housed or are sleeping on sofas with friends or family. The cards can be displayed by organisations for people to pick up or can be directly distributed by staff.

This note lists a number of NHS websites. The NHS Choices website has a translation facility for people whose English is limited. People working with those whose English is limited may also want to use local translation and interpretation services to explain the card.

Background

- Registering with a GP practice can be difficult for people who are homeless
- In line with previous research, people who are experiencing homelessness in London have told us that that being asked to provide proof of ID and address can be a key barrier to accessing GP practices. <https://www.healthylondon.org/latest/publications/more-than-a-statistic>
- The 'My right to access healthcare' card was created by [Groundswell](http://groundswell.org.uk/)¹ and Healthy London Partnership's [London Homeless Health Programme](https://www.healthylondon.org/homeless)² and supported by [Healthwatch](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk/)³ to help people to register with GP practices
- The card is designed to be carried by adults who are homeless and can be used to remind GP receptionists and other practice staff of the national patient registration guidance
- The guidance is called Primary Medical Care Policy and Guidance Manual and the information can be found in Chapter 4.
- The guidance states that people do not need fixed address or identification to register in a GP practice in England
- The document can be found at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/primary-medical-care-policy-and-guidance-manual-pgm/>
- All GP practices in London have been emailed images of the card to help make GP receptionists and other practice staff aware of it
- For more information about the 'My right to access healthcare' card please email lhhp@nhs.net

¹ <http://groundswell.org.uk/>

² <https://www.healthylondon.org/homeless>

³ <http://www.healthwatch.co.uk/>

Registering and receiving treatment in a GP practice

Everyone has the right to register with a GP practice in England. As stated on the 'My right to access healthcare' card:

- You do not need a fixed address
- You do not need identification
- Your immigration status does not matter

However, there are some practical reasons why GP practices can ask all patients for documents. One example is to make sure that the practice is able to get the correct records from your last doctor's practice. Another reason is to check and record on your NHS records whether you have to pay for community or hospital services.

So you may be asked for some documents but if you don't have them the practice cannot say no to registering you.

Please also remember:

- GP registration is free of charge
- Registration with a GP practice can generally be done on the same day. A 'new patient check' appointment will usually be offered. This might not happen straight away as it depends when the next appointment is available. If someone has an immediate clinical need the practice is required to arrange for that person to see a nurse or a doctor as quickly as possible and have the 'new patient check' later
- The only circumstances where a practice can say no to registering someone is if their list is full or they decide that it isn't clinically appropriate for the person to be registered with their practice. However, if someone is in immediate need of medical help, all practices must provide this and continue to provide cover for the following 14 days
- The national registration guidance says 'Where necessary, (e.g. homeless patients), the practice may use the practice address to register them if they wish. If possible, practices should try to ensure they have a way of contacting the patient if they need to (for example with test results).

Resources

An online training course for GP receptionists and practice managers in London is available. It covers the specific issues faced by adult patients who are homeless; best practice in supporting and treating them and service access rights and engagement. You can go to our homeless health e-learning page to watch the film and complete the short course of questions.⁴ We have produced a homelessness and health resource pack to help signpost NHS staff and commissioners to a range of resources that can support their work with adults who are homeless.⁵

⁴ <https://www.healthylondon.org/homeless/e-learning>

⁵ <https://www.healthylondon.org/homeless/homelessness-resource-pack>

These resources have been developed by the London Homeless Health Programme to support **adults** who are homeless. The NHS Primary Medical Care Policy and Guidance Manual provides some additional detailed information at section 4.12 about safeguarding children.⁶ Practices must follow these additional requirements when registering and providing services to children, as well as complying with the Pan-London Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedures⁷ and the London Child Protection Procedures.⁸

How adults who are experiencing homelessness can use the card

- Carry the card on them when they go to register with a GP practice.
- If the GP practice asks to see identification, proof of address or asks about their immigration status and they cannot provide documentation, explain why they do not have this.
- Show the card to staff at the practice and explain that they do not need this documentation.
- Call Healthwatch on the number on the card if they still have problems registering. Healthwatch's national phone number is 03000 68 3000 and people will be transferred to their local branch.

What is a GP practice?

- A general practitioner (GP) is a medical doctor who treats acute and chronic illnesses and provides preventive care and health education to patients in the community. In other countries they are sometimes called Family Doctors
- GP practices are staffed by doctors and nurses. Often they have other clinical staff as well
- At a GP practice people can receive treatment and have some tests done
- Unless it is a medical emergency, a GP practice is the best place to go to see a doctor.

⁶ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/primary-medical-care-policy-and-guidance-manual-pgm/>

⁷ <https://londonadass.org.uk/safeguarding/review-of-the-pan-london-policy-and-procedures/>

⁸ <http://www.londoncp.co.uk>

Other places to go for medical help



Call NHS 111 if you urgently need medical help or advice but it's not a life-threatening situation. You can also call NHS 111 if you're not sure which NHS service you need.



Call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured and their life is at risk.



Visit a walk-in centre, minor injuries unit or urgent care centre if you have a minor illness or injury (cuts, sprains or rashes) and it can't wait until your GP surgery is open.



Ask your local Pharmacist for advice – your pharmacist can give you advice for many common minor illnesses, such as diarrhoea, minor infections, headache, travel advice or sore throats.



Make an appointment with your GP if you are feeling unwell and it is not an emergency.

For detailed information please visit the NHS Choices website:

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/Pages/NHSServices.aspx>

London Homeless Health Programme, Healthy London Partnership

Groundswell
Out of homelessness

healthwatch