

LINK

**MAKE IT
HAPPEN!**

Help build a better health and social care service

Local Involvement Networks (LINks) explained

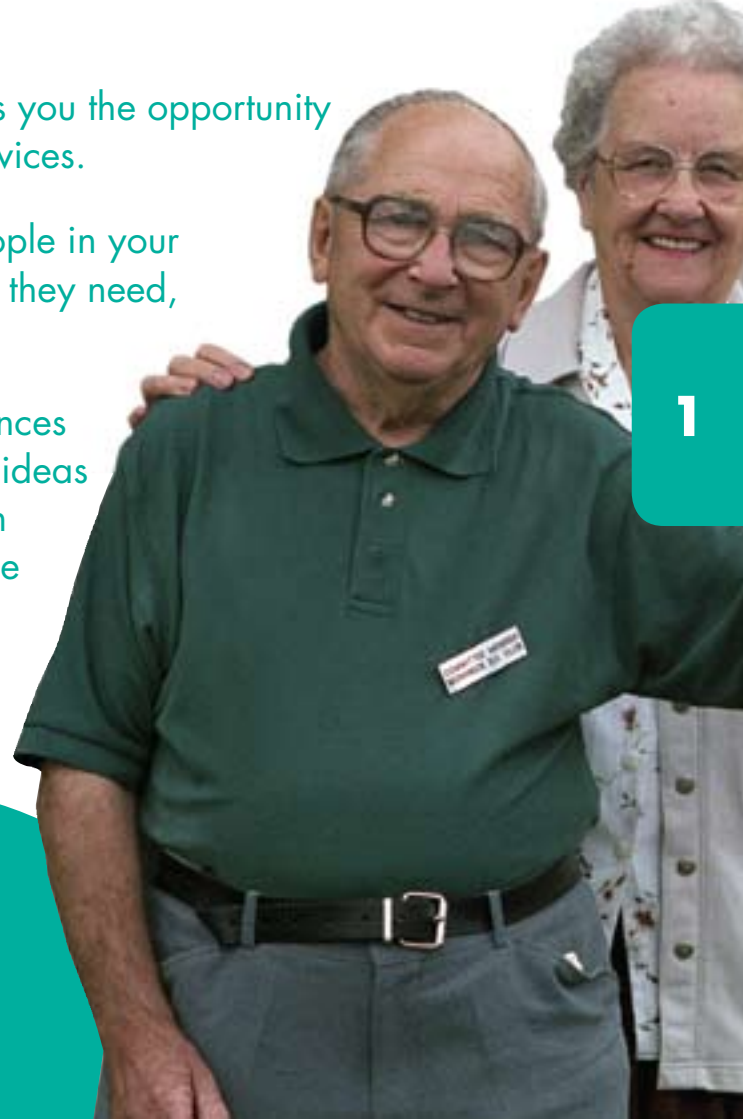


Your Local Involvement Network (LiNk) gives you the opportunity to influence local health and social care services.

It has been set up to help make sure the people in your area get the health and social care services they need, and anyone can get involved.

Your LiNk wants to hear about your experiences of health and social care services and your ideas for improvements or changes. Your LiNk can help bring about changes – whether they are big or small.

This document explains more about LiNks and how you can make your voice heard by getting involved.



What is a LINK?

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A LINK is made up of individuals and community groups who work together to improve local health and social care services.

The job of your LINK is to find out what people like and dislike about local services, and to work with the people who plan and run them to help make them better.

This may involve talking directly to health and social care staff about a service that is not being

offered, or suggesting ways that an existing service could be made better.

LINKs also have powers to help them do their job and to make sure that changes happen.

The more people that get involved in your LINK, the stronger and more influential it becomes.

What does your LINK do?

Your LINK can:

- ask local people what they think of local health and social care
- give people a chance to suggest ideas to care professionals that may help improve services
- look into specific issues of concern to the community
- make recommendations to the people who plan and run services and expect a response with a specific period of time
- ask for information about services and expect answers within a specified amount of time
- carry out visits, when necessary, to see if services are working well (visits are carried out under safeguards)
- refer issues to the local council Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee if it seems that action is not being taken

LINks at work: an example

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A number of people raise the issue of GP opening hours with a LINk. GPs at the local surgery say they want to open during the evening and at weekends but they have limited resources.

The LINk offers to help the surgery staff find out the hours that will best suit local people by asking the community for their views. It also asks LINks in other areas how they have dealt with the same issue.

The LINk's research finds that people who work would prefer more early morning appointments, so they can see a GP but not be late for work.

As a result, the GPs decide that the surgery will close one afternoon a week so that they can open for more early morning appointments. They also start a call-back service, so people can have quick telephone consultations.

Who can join?



Anyone – carers, service users, community leaders, patient representatives ... everyone's views matter.

Groups can also join – charities, faith groups, residents' associations, youth councils, black and minority ethnic organisations, business federations ... anyone who wants to make sure that the needs of their community are listened to.

Each and everyone's views will be taken seriously by your LINk.

Why get involved?

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LINKs are relevant to you and your family. By becoming involved you can:

- get attention for neglected issues or ideas
- influence those who make decisions about new or existing health and care services
- help the community speak with a stronger local voice
- help services provide better care





How much time will it take?

It is easy to get involved and it is up to you how and when you participate. Your LINK provides different ways for you to make your views count.

You can just comment on issues when contacted by your LINK, or you can get more involved – by raising awareness of an issue or by helping to find solutions (for example, by meeting providers or being part of a working group).

It's up to you how and when

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- Take a few minutes to answer a survey
- Attend an occasional meeting on an issue that interests you
- Get involved in an online group looking at a specific issue
- Become an 'authorised representative' who goes to services to see how they are run

Who runs a LINK

Your LINK is independent and is run by the people who belong to it.

Your council has been given money to fund your LINK and has employed an organisation to advise and support it.

However it is up to your LINK to decide how the money is spent, how it is run and what priorities to concentrate on.

How your LINk is supported

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The organisation that supports your LINk does a number of things such as:

- telling the community about the LINk, what it is doing and how to get involved
- providing office support and helping the LINk to develop clear systems
- holding the LINk's budget and recording what the LINk does
- helping find out local people's views

Getting started

To find out what is happening in your area, contact your local borough or county council.

LINks and the law

LINks can:

- ask health and social care commissioners for information about their services and expect a response
- make recommendations and expect a response from commissioners
- refer matters to the local council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- enter specific services and view the care provided

More information

To find out more, visit:

www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks



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