

## Local Involvement Networks

### What LINKs Mean for: People and Communities



*“Better care through a stronger voice”*

## Background

Links will be set up in England from April 2008 to give communities a stronger voice in how their health and social care services are delivered. Independent networks of local people and groups, LINKs will find out what people want, investigate issues and use their powers to hold services to account.

## A brief history

Local health and social care services tend to improve if peoples’ views are listened to and acted on. In July 2006, the Department of Health published plans to strengthen the ability for local communities to influence the care they get through Local Involvement Networks (LINKs).

Until now, one of the ways the NHS has listened to patients has been through Patients’ Forums. Attached to local Trusts, Forums helped to improve frontline health care, but changes in the way that the NHS is structured and the increasing integration of health and social care mean that new ways of involving people are needed.

LINKs will build on the work of Forums but they will be open to anyone to join. LINKs will cover all publicly funded health and social care services in an area, no matter who provides them. They will make it easier for communities to say what they want and to talk with the people who plan and run healthcare and social care services. LINKs are part of the local accountability and scrutiny arrangements and they will have powers requiring health and social care managers to respond to them. LINKs will also be able to refer matters to Overview and Scrutiny Committees in councils that have social care responsibilities.

## Benefits of Getting Involved

- Peoples' time and effort has resulted in better services in many areas and this good foundation needs to be built on and developed.
- LINKs will provide opportunities for individuals, groups and organisations across communities to work together to make a difference.
- LINKs will create a stronger local voice. They need the expertise of people who use care services and campaigners if they are to reach their potential.
- LINKs will help councils, the NHS and social care providers to listen and respond to a wide range of views so that people, groups and organisations can influence all health and social care services in an area.
- Run by local individuals and groups, LINKs will ask what people think, investigate specific issues and use their powers to hold services to account.

## How LINKs will work

The NHS and local government are increasingly working together to decide what health and social care services should be provided and how they should be run. Local people need to shape these services whether provided in hospital, the community or in people's homes. LINKs have the potential to:

### **Provide a single approach to monitoring health and social care**

A LINK for every Local Authority with social services responsibilities will be tasked with finding out the views of people in that area and holding the Local Authority, the NHS and providers to account.

### **Provide a stronger, more independent voice**

Not run by any public or Government organisation, LINKs will be truly independent. They will be hosted and supported by a community organisation with experience of engaging a wide range of people.

### **Be more representative**

Expected to ask every section of the community for their views and experiences, LINKs will not only amplify the views of more groups and individuals in the community, they should also provide a platform to those who might not often have their voice heard.

### **Make community involvement more convenient**

Many people who receive health or social care would like to influence services but may not have the time to join groups or sit on committees. LINKs should provide more ways for more people to be heard and they will work hard to engage with people who may be easier to ignore. Communities should be provided with more opportunities – using the internet, focus groups, events and other mechanisms – to express their views. While those who want to should have the chance to get more involved (for example by giving up time to work on a specific issue or joining a group that governs the LINK).

## What will LINKs mean for you?

It is people's time and effort that has resulted in better services in many areas and this good work needs to be build on and developed. However, this means changing the system to give communities the ability to influence all health and social care services in one area. If LINKs are to realise their potential, they will need the expertise and skills of people who use health and social care services, together with people and organisations who are experienced at representing their communities. LINKs will help local people and organisations to speak with one voice and have real influence over key decision makers.

## What will LINKs cover?

- LINKs will cover most publicly funded health and social care services – no matter who provides them (NHS, council, private sector or third sector). There are some exceptions such as children's social care.
- To help them with their work, commissioners will be expected to provide LINKs with information when they request it and to respond to LINK reports and recommendations.
- As well as helping commissioners respond to LINKs, providers will also be expected to allow trained LINKs representatives to view services.
- Contracts with private, independent or third sector providers of NHS or local authority care will need to reflect these expectations.

## What is the role of a LINK?

The role of a LINK is to:

- encourage and support more people to get involved in shaping local care services; from helping to decide what services should be commissioned, to influencing the way they are run;
- actively canvas every section of the community for their views and experiences of local care services;
- provide the community with a mechanism for monitoring and reviewing local care services and the ability to hold them to account; and
- tell those who commission, run and scrutinise local care services, what local people have recommended to help improve services.

## Who makes up a LINK?

LINKs may be slightly different in each area, but are likely to be made up of:

- existing user-led organisations, community and voluntary organisations, carer groups and those who already campaign on behalf of people who use health and social care services;
- people from different parts of the community including groups which, in the past, have been 'hard to reach'; and
- people who want to get involved in different ways, either by giving their time to help lead a LINK or by regularly contributing their views.

## What are the powers of a LINK?

The legislation means that LINKs will be able to:

- enter and view specific types of premises where services and care are provided;
- ask for information and get a response within a specific timescale;
- make recommendations and get a response within a specific timescale; and
- refer matters to the local Overview and Scrutiny Committee and get a response.

## How will a LINK be set up?

Each Local Authority (with social services responsibilities) will receive funding for LINK activities. Each authority will contract with a 'Host' organisation to establish and support a LINK in the Local Authority area. The LINK will be independent of any government organisation with its own decision making and governance processes. The Host will be accountable to the LINK.

## How much money will a LINK get?

The Government is making £84 million available to fund LINKs between 2008– 2011. The amount each area receives depends on their population and factors such as levels of poverty.

## What should You be doing now?

Local authorities should be starting to raise awareness of LINKs in the local community, encouraging people and local groups to get involved in helping to plan their LINK. Many authorities have set up groups that people can join and are holding meetings to raise awareness of LINKs. If you are interested, contact your local authority to find out how you can get involved. If you or a group you belong to already know about LINKs, you can talk to others in your community about getting involved.

### **LINKs in action<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Responding to community needs**

Every three years, a PCT and a Local Authority review the health and social care needs of their community so that they provide the right services. They are keen to make sure that people take part in the review so that nothing is missed out. Through its network of local groups and individuals, the LINK is able to find out the views of different sections of the community. Through this outreach approach, the LINK discovers that access to health and social care is particularly difficult for older Asian women. The LINK is also able to help identify, through discussions with the community, the most appropriate solution. As a result, the PCT and Local Authority plan to recruit a number of community development workers to help older Asian women get better access to health and social care.

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<sup>1</sup> These examples are illustrative only.

### Care home management

Concerns have been expressed about privacy and dignity in a particular care home. Some residents are members of the LINK. The LINK talks to families and carers and to user-led groups and asks the social care regulator whether this issue has arisen elsewhere. The regulator tells the LINK that care homes must respect privacy and dignity and the LINK decides to visit the communal areas of the care home to find out peoples' experiences. Authorised people from the LINK visit the care home and by observing the way that staff relate with residents and talking to people in the communal rooms, they get a feel for the way care is provided. The LINK members discover that although the care home has a policy about safeguarding residents' clothing and possessions, this is not always put into practice. The LINK recommends that a privacy and dignity campaign for care home staff is developed and the council's social care commissioning unit and providers work together to run a campaign across all care homes in the area.

### Contact Us

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[www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk](http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk)

A simple explanation of LINKs

[www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks](http://www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks)

Lessons from nine 'Early Adopter' projects around England

<http://www.nhscentreforinvolvement.nhs.uk/docs/EAPS%20final%20report.pdf>

Information about Government policy

[www.dh.gov.uk/patientandpublicinvolvement](http://www.dh.gov.uk/patientandpublicinvolvement)