

How to give feedback or make a complaint about your NHS care in Northern Ireland

A guide for bereaved
parents

We are very sorry that your baby has died.

The Sands National Helpline provides a safe, confidential place for anyone who has been affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby before, during or shortly after birth.

Whether your baby died long ago or recently, we are here for you.

The telephone helpline is free to call from landlines and mobiles on 0808 164 3332.

You can also email the team at helpline@sands.org.uk.

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1. Introduction

Your experiences are important. By sharing them, you can show where improvements are needed and help make care safer. But parents at Sands have told us that they don't always know where to start.

This guide talks about:

- Deciding if you want to give feedback or make a complaint about your care.
- Getting ready to give feedback or make a complaint.
- Different options for sharing feedback.
- Making a complaint.
- Getting the right support.

If you need help at any stage, you can speak to the [Patient and Client Council](#).

2. Deciding if you want to give feedback or make a complaint

There are different reasons why people might give feedback or make a complaint.

Feedback - Feedback can be either positive or negative. Providing feedback is a less formal process, so you may not get a meaningful response.

Complaints - The NHS complaints process is more formal, and this means you should get an answer to your complaint.

Thinking about why you want to share your experience and what you want to happen will help you decide which approach is the best for you. You do not have to choose between providing feedback and making a complaint, you can do both.

3. Getting ready to share your experience

Planning what you want to talk about

Planning what you want to talk about will help you focus on the parts of your experience that are important to you.

Your feedback or complaint can be about any part (or parts) of your own or your baby's care, including:

- during pregnancy
- during the birth or delivery
- after the birth or delivery
- after your baby died (this could include bereavement care, the hospital review process, mental health care, and any other support).

Making written notes

Having detailed written notes can make it easier to write or talk about your experience. You can make notes about:

- What happened.
- Who was involved (include names if you remember them).
- When and where things happened.
- How this has affected you (for example, changes to your physical or emotional health or financial situation).
- What you would like to happen.

Getting your medical records

You might want to see the record that the hospital has made about your care. Your hospital records should say what care was given, when, and who was involved. They might also include hospital letters and results from tests and scans. The information you want may be in different records.

Information about care given in pregnancy is in the mother's or birthing person's medical record. Only they can ask to see them. Fathers and partners can only see these records if the mother or birthing person agrees.

A baby who is born alive will have their own medical record. Either of the baby's parents can ask for their baby's medical records. A baby who dies before they are born will not have their own medical record.

You can get a copy of these records by asking writing a letter or email. You might also be asked to fill out a form. More information on accessing your medical records is [here](#).

The hospital will not usually charge you a copy of your medical records. If they intend to charge you they will make you aware of the fee.

It can take up to 28 days to receive them. In complex cases this can be extended to three months from the date of your letter/email.

If you need help to understand your notes, speak to a trusted midwife or doctor or the [Patient and Client Council](#).

Making a subject access request

You can also ask for copies of any other information the hospital has about you. This is known as a 'subject access request'. [Get more information about how to make a subject access request](#).

4. Options for giving feedback

The table below shows different options for contacting staff, managers or support services to share your feedback. It is up to you who you contact. It could be the person you feel most comfortable approaching. Or it might be the person you feel is best placed to act on your feedback, for example if your feedback is about the hospital review you could get in touch with your key contact.

Who to contact	How
The midwives or doctors involved in your care	You might already have an email address or telephone number for a doctor or midwife you feel comfortable talking to.
Your key contact from the hospital review (sometimes this is called the Perinatal Mortality Review Tool or 'PMRT')	After your baby died, you should have been given the contact details for a key contact who will support you through the review of your care.
The Head of Midwifery and Neonatal Services	You can email or write a letter addressed directly to the Head of Midwifery and Neonatal Services in your area.
Your hospital's Feedback and Complaints Officer	This role can have different names depending on the hospital. Your hospital's website should have information about how to contact their complaints team.

Your local Health and Social Care Trust

You can contact your local Trust by phone, email or in writing. [Get more information about how to contact your Trust.](#)

Online feedback forms

The hospital's maternity feedback webpage
Most hospitals have a webpage where you can give feedback on maternity care. Some maternity services have feedback services especially for bereaved parents. To find your local service, search for the name of your hospital and 'give feedback maternity care'.

Care Opinion, an independent feedback platform

<https://www.careopinion.org.uk/info/current-work-ni>

5. Making a complaint

Anyone who provides NHS services must have a complaints process. This section describes complaints against hospitals and maternity units.

You can also complain directly to the Northern Ireland Government about healthcare, the email is complaints@health-ni.gov.uk

Time limits

You should make a complaint within 12 months of the incident you want to complain about.

In Northern Ireland there is a time limit on how long the whole complaint process will take. You should have a full response to your complaint within 20 days, or an explanation of why the complaint will take longer. If you have not heard from the hospital within 20 days, you can ask the [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman \(NIPSO\)](#) for help.

What you should include in your complaint

You can make your complaint by talking to someone in person or on the phone (**a verbal complaint**) or by writing it down in an email or letter (**a written complaint**). Or you can do both, for example speak to someone then follow it up with a written complaint.

In any written or verbal complaint, you should:

- Explain clearly that you are making a formal complaint.
- Describe what happened, including who was involved and when and where things happened.
- Explain how this has affected you (for example, changes to your physical or emotional health or financial situation).
- Tell them what you would like to happen as a result of your complaint.
- Ask what the next steps will be.
- Make a record of the person or service you contacted, when (date and time), and how (e.g. by email, letter or by speaking to them).

If you are making a written complaint:

- Keep copies of any emails or letters you send.

If you are making a verbal complaint:

- Note down the name of the person you speak to and what they said.
- Check they are writing down what you talk about.
- Ask when you will receive a copy of the written notes they have made of your conversation.
- If you don't get a copy of the notes by the time they said you would, you can contact them and ask for it.

People or services you can contact to make a complaint

Which people or services you contact to make your complaint will depend on:

- Who you feel most comfortable talking to.
- What you are complaining about.
- What you want to happen.

Below, we have listed some people and organisations you might want to contact with your complaint. Please read this information carefully to help you decide the best option for you.

For help getting the contact details you need, speak to the [Patient and Client Council](#).

The midwives, nurses or doctors involved in your care

Some parents find that a conversation with the people who looked after them is a good first step. It might give them the answers they need and reassure them that their concerns have been taken seriously.

You could contact your:

- community midwife
- bereavement midwife
- named obstetrician (the doctor who was responsible for your care during pregnancy and around the time of the birth)
- named neonatologist (a doctor who specialises in caring for newborn babies)
- neonatal nurse

A manager or other senior member of hospital staff

You might feel more comfortable making your complaint to a manager or other senior member of hospital staff who was not involved in your care. Or you might decide to speak to a manager or other senior member of staff because you are not happy with the response you got from the midwives, nurses or doctors involved in your care.

You might want to share your complaint with one or more senior staff members, including:

- The Chief Executive (most NHS Trusts list the Chief Executive's email and postal address on their website)
- The Head of Midwifery
- The Director of Women's Services
- The Director of Nursing
- A consultant obstetrician or neonatologist

The Feedback and Complaints Service at the hospital

You can make a formal verbal complaint by speaking to your hospital's Feedback and Complaints Service. [The contact details for each Trust](#) can be found here.

Complaining about an individual doctor, midwife or nurse

If you are worried about the skills or safety of a doctor or midwife, you can make a complaint directly to their professional regulator. Professional regulators set the standards that doctors and midwives have to meet in their work.

- To complain about a doctor, you need to [contact the General Medical Council \(GMC\)](#).
- To complain about a midwife or nurse, you need to [contact the Nursing and Midwifery Council \(NMC\)](#).

Complaining to your local Health and Social Care Trust

If you want to complain about the policies, treatments or services at your hospital, you can complain to your [local Health and Social Care Trust](#), which is responsible for planning and funding care in your area.

If you are taking legal action

If you are taking legal action against a healthcare provider, you should talk to your solicitor before complaining. A hospital you are suing does not have to respond to your complaint. It will be up to them if they respond to your complaint.

6. If you are not happy with the complaints process and want to speak to someone else

The complaints process may have given you the answers and outcomes you wanted. If not, you may want to continue looking for answers.

Once the complaints process has finished, raising further concerns with the hospital may be more difficult. You might find that they are slow to respond or do not respond at all.

If you want to speak to someone else about your complaint, you can contact:

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO)

The Ombudsman's role is to investigate unresolved complaints. They are independent of the NHS and government. You can contact the Ombudsman when the complaints process with your local Trust has ended. The Ombudsman will not accept your complaint until this time. the [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman \(NIPSO\)](#).

Your local elected representative.

You can also contact your local elected representative, such as your MLA, to ask them to raise your concerns. You could also ask your member of parliament (MP) in Westminster. Elective representatives often have a good understanding of what's happening in their local Trust or Health board. While they can't have start an investigation, they can raise issues on your behalf or apply pressure to Trusts and Health boards. You can use the [They Work For You website](#) to find out who your MP is and how to contact them.

7. Support and more information

We hope you have found the information in this guide useful.

If you would like support or more information, please look at the list below.

Where to go for support and information

Your local Maternity Services Liaison Committees (MSLC)

Your local MSLC can help make sure your feedback or concerns reach the right people at the hospital. You can find your MSLC by:

- using your local hospital website.
- asking a midwife
- asking on the MSLC Leaders and Members Facebook group

The Patient Client Council (PCC)

In Northern Ireland, you can access the [Patient and Client Council](#). They are independent of the health service, and a key part of their role is to help people who want to make a complaint about the healthcare they have received.

Action against Medical Accidents (AvMA)

AvMA is a UK charity that provides free, independent advice and support to people affected by medical accidents. They have helpful guides for making a complaint.

[Find out more about AVMA.](#)

Citizens Advice

An independent charity offering free support to people facing a range of problems in the UK **Citizens Advice offers guidance on taking legal action and making a complaint about care.**

[Find out more about Citizens Advice.](#)

The Regulatory and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA)

The RQIA does not deal with complaints directly. However, you [can tell them about the poor care you received](#). Doing so may help prevent the same thing from happening to others.

Sands can support you online and over the phone, too. For more information visit: sands.org.uk/Support.



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