Raising a concern or complaint

About NHS or social care: talking to PALS, making a complaint, free help, and what to do next, with local help in Cambridgeshire

For patients in Cambridgeshire, and the family, friends and carers who help them. This edition adds local PALS, Healthwatch and council contacts.

Need help today? If someone is in hospital and a problem needs sorting now, contact the hospital's PALS. It can often sort things out quickly, without a formal complaint. If someone is unwell, call NHS 111, or 999 in an emergency.

Step 1: talk to PALS

- Most hospitals have a Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). It is free and confidential.
- PALS gives advice and information, and can try to sort out a problem informally, without a formal complaint. It is especially useful for urgent problems while someone is in hospital.
- PALS can also explain the NHS complaints process, and how to get independent help with it.
- To find a PALS, ask the hospital or GP surgery, call NHS 111, or search for PALS on the NHS website.

Step 2: make a complaint

- You can complain to the service itself, such as the hospital, GP surgery or dentist. Or you can complain to the organisation that pays for it, usually your local integrated care board (ICB). You cannot complain to both.
- Complain within 12 months of what happened, or of when you found out about it. This can sometimes be extended if you have a good reason for the delay.
- Complaining for someone else? If you write, include their written consent. If they cannot give it, for example because they lack mental capacity, you may still be able to complain for them.
- If more than one organisation is involved, they should work together and give you one joined-up reply.

What happens next

- Within 3 working days you should get an acknowledgement, and an offer to talk about how your complaint will be handled.
- There is no fixed deadline for the answer, but you should be kept informed if it is delayed.
- The final reply should be in writing. It should explain what they found and, where it is right to, apologise and say what is being done about it.

Free help to make a complaint

- An NHS complaints advocate can help you write your complaint and come to meetings with you, at any stage. The help is free.

- An advocate cannot make the complaint for you, or give medical or legal advice.
- To find one, search online for NHS complaints advocacy and the name of your area, or ask your local Healthwatch.

My complaint notes

The patient's name, date of birth and NHS number:

Where it happened, and the dates:

What happened, in the order it happened:

Who was involved (names or job titles):

How it affected the patient, or me:

What I would like to happen now:

Who I have contacted, and when:

If you are still not happy

- NHS care: you can take your complaint to the Public Service Ombudsman (it used to be called the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman). It makes final decisions on complaints about the NHS in England that have not been resolved. Call 0345 015 4033, Monday to Thursday 9am to 4pm, Friday 8.30am to 12pm.
- Adult social care, from the council or care you pay for yourself: complain to the council or care provider first. If you are still unhappy, or have had no answer within a reasonable time (usually up to 16 weeks), you can go to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. It is free. Call 0300 061 0614.
- The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman normally cannot look at a problem you first knew about more than 12 months ago.

Other ways to be heard

- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) checks health and care services. It cannot take up a complaint for you, but you can tell it about care you have had. What people tell it helps it decide when, where and what to inspect.
- Your local Healthwatch wants to hear about health and care, good or bad, to help services improve.

Local help in Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire has two councils for adult social care. Cambridgeshire County Council covers Cambridge, Ely, Huntingdon, St Neots, March, Wisbech and the villages. Peterborough City Council covers Peterborough. Each line says which area it is for. Some NHS and charity services cover both.

Hospital patient advice (PALS). Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge: 01223 216756, Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm. Royal Papworth Hospital: 01223 638896, working days 9am to 3pm. Hinchingbrooke Hospital, Huntingdon: 01480 428964. Peterborough City Hospital: 01733 673405.

Healthwatch. Tell them about your health or care, good or bad, to help services improve. Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Healthwatch Peterborough: 0330 355 1285, Monday to Thursday 9am to 4pm, Friday 9am to 3.30pm.

Cambridgeshire County Council adult social care. For people in the Cambridgeshire County Council area. Call 0345 045 5202, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Out of hours, if someone is in danger or cannot stay safely at home, call 01733 234 724. cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Peterborough City Council adult social care. For people in Peterborough. Call 01733 747474 and ask for Adult Social Care, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. You can also email adultsocialcare@peterborough.gov.uk. Out of hours and at weekends, for emergencies, call 01733 234724. peterborough.gov.uk

Local contacts checked 16 November 2026. Services can change, so check before you rely on one.

More free guides

Looking after someone? Our free guide to your rights as a carer: mobilephysiotherapist.co.uk/carers-rights/cambridgeshire.
Coming home from hospital? Our free hospital checklist: mobilephysiotherapist.co.uk/after-hospital-checklist/cambridgeshire.

General information, not legal advice. Prepared by Mobile Physiotherapist UK from NHS England, NHS, ombudsman and CQC guidance. Sources checked 17 November 2026. Free to print, copy and share. Local contacts checked 16 November 2026.