

From the Director of Primary Care
Ms Louise McMahon



To: General Medical Practitioners
General Dental Practitioners
Community Pharmacists
General Ophthalmic Services

Strategic Planning and Performance Group
12-22 Linenhall Street
BELFAST
BT2 8BS

Tel: 0300 555 0115

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Ref: Health and Social Care Model Complaints Handling Procedure

Dear Colleague

On 1 July 2025 the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) published new complaints standards for managing complaints by the Health and Social Care (HSC) sector in Northern Ireland. The HSC [Model Complaints Handling Procedures | NIPSO](#) is a statutory requirement and replaces the Department of Health's HSC Complaints Procedure Directions and Guidance. All HSC providers are required to implement the new statutory HSC MCHP from **1 January 2026**.

As part of your contract with SPPG, Family Practitioner Service (FPS) providers are required to implement the requirements of and comply with the HSC MCHP regarding all complaints received about your HSC contracted services from **1 January 2026**.

The HSC MCHP is a two-stage procedure with dedicated timeframes:

1. Stage 1 - Frontline Response – a complaint is resolved or a response provided within 5 working days (with a possible extension of a further 5 working days)
2. Stage 2 – Investigation – a complaint is acknowledged within 3 working days and resolved or a response provided within 20 working days (with a possible extension of a further 20 working days).

At the end of Stage 2, organisations are statutorily required to signpost the complainant to NIPSO.

All complaints must be recorded and routinely reported in line with the requirements of the HSC MCHP. The MCHP details a set of data which must be recorded as a minimum. Organisations must have a process in place for the internal reporting of complaints information including analysis of complaints trends to support and inform management of any required service area(s) improvement.

To comply with the MCHP organisations must also externally publish complaints information on an annual basis. In these circumstances, SPPG will continue to publish complaints data on behalf of FPS.

In preparation for implementation a set of [Training Resources | NIPSO](#) are currently available on NIPSO's website. A series of best practice guides and eLearning modules on focused areas of best practice complaints handling are currently being developed by NIPSO and will be available in the coming months.

Supplementary guidance for FPS on the MCHP; how it directly affects FPS in the management of complaints; and SPPG's role as honest broker is currently being drafted by NIPSO and will be issued to all FPS as soon as it becomes available.

We would ask that you and your staff familiarise yourselves with the HSC MCHP and available training videos in advance of the supplementary guidance.

SPPG will continue its role as honest broker under the MCHP regarding FPS complaints. Complainants and practitioners will be able to request SPPG act in this role. The requirement for both parties to agree SPPG act as honest broker remains.

As you are aware under the extant HSC Complaints Procedure, **which remains in place until 31 December 2025**, FPS are required to provide SPPG with anonymised copies of all written complaints received and their responses, within 3 working days of the response being issued. SPPG will be in contact with organisations shortly in regard to what information will need to be reported.

SPPG will continue to work with NIPSO to provide any further guidance required as necessary. However, if you have any questions regarding the HSC MCHP, please contact SPPG or NIPSO's Complaints Standards team at joanna.felo@nipso.org.uk

Yours sincerely



Ms Louise McMahon
Director of Primary Care
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