

## **NHS Eligibility Criteria for Non-Emergency Patient Transport**

### **Healthwatch Worcestershire Consultation Response**

**November 2021**

#### **Background**

In August 2021, NHS England and NHS Improvement published the outcome of a review into non-emergency patient transport services (NEPTS). The review's final report sets out a new national framework for NEPTS, with the aim of ensuring that services are consistently responsive, fair and sustainable.

Following the publication of the review report, NHS England and NHS Improvement are running a consultation on the proposed updated national eligibility criteria for non-emergency patient transport.

#### **HWW Consultation Response - Points for Consideration**

The review of the criteria and clarification of eligibility for patient transport is welcome, as difficulty accessing patient transport is an issue that has been previously raised with Healthwatch Worcestershire. We hope this will provide greater clarity and ensure that those who require transport to hospital will be able to access it. However, we would like NHSE and NHSI to consider the following issues when implementing the new national framework and eligibility criteria:

##### **i. Location of services**

- Currently the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service only covers journeys to and from hospital. There is no provision for transport to appointments in other settings. This is an increasing issue as more services are moved to community settings as part of service integration and more localised delivery plans. We have been contacted by people who are in need of transport to appointments within community settings / local health centres, as they are unable to use the patient transport service.
- Availability of transport and length of journey time is an issue that patients and carers have often raised with us in relation to planning location and centralisation of services. It will be important that consideration is given to this when implementing the new criteria locally, in particular in relation to changes being implemented as part of the local review into the Future of Acute Hospital Services in Worcestershire. This will see patients increasingly travelling across the county to access hospital services, rather than visiting the hospital closest to them.

## **ii. Scope of eligibility based of treatment type**

- While the updated eligibility criteria provides more clarity and hopefully therefore consistency, with the exception of the inclusion of patients travelling for in-centre haemodialysis, the availability of patient transport has not been expanded to enable more patients who may require the service to access it.
- The criteria does not make a specific reference to patients travelling for Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy. Concerns have been raised with Healthwatch Worcestershire about the implications of the relocation of the chemotherapy unit within Worcestershire from Redditch to Kidderminster. We have received feedback from patients about the difficulties and impact of travelling to and from chemotherapy sessions, implications of increased travel time and the difficulties they have had in organising or providing their own transport.

## **iii. Escorts and Carers**

- The eligibility criteria states that carers or escorts can travel with a patient if their skills and / or support is needed and they need the support of someone who knows them well. We would hope that this would be flexible to encompass the different reasons individuals may need support. The guidance refers to the need for support to use the transport, rather than the appointment. Consideration may also be needed about whether the patient requires support to attend the appointment they are travelling to and if their carer or escort would be unable to travel to this if they are not able to accompany them. This is a consideration in terms of health inequalities in circumstances where carers may not have access to their own transport.

## **iv. Assessing availability of alternative transport and finance**

- Criteria F explains eligibility to provide patient transport if there is no alternative transport available or wider medical needs and treatment or discharge would be missed or delayed as a consequence. However, how this is interpreted, defined and assessed locally may still vary, for example when identifying if the patient has someone who could take them or if they have the ability to book and pay for their own taxi. Local areas are also being given the ability to add a threshold to the requirement for patients to fund taxi travel themselves. We will therefore be looking at how this will be decided and implemented in Worcestershire.
- The eligibility criteria places emphasis on reinforcing the message that those with less significant mobility needs should travel independently, including via family or friend. We are concerned that this suggests tightening or reducing the allocation of patient transport, that this may be potentially difficult to assess and have a greater impact on those who experience health inequalities, as they may be less likely to have a friend or relative who is able to transport them or afford alternatives such as taxis.

## **v. Navigating and understanding patient transport systems**

- There will still be different routes that patients will have to use to arrange patient transport. If they do not meet the criteria for Non-Emergency Patient Transport, they may need to use alternatives including the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme, community transport schemes or use the mobility component of their Disability Living Allowance.

We are pleased that the framework specifies that the provider of the NEPTS will provide information about alternatives and signpost to providers, however this is still potentially difficult for patients to understand, navigate and organise. We have received a number of enquiries from people who are unsure about how to organise patient transport and who they need to contact to do so.

Information and guidance about eligibility for NEPTS and alternative routes needs to be clear, accessible and widely promoted to ensure all patients can access the transport and service they need.

## **vi. Reliance on Community Transport**

- There will be many people who will not meet the eligibility criteria for patient transport and require transport from community providers. There is variability in Worcestershire across the county in terms of the availability and consistency of the community transport offer. These services rely on volunteers and their availability and ability to fulfil certain requirements and may not have sustainable funding to offer these services in the future.

## **vii. Use of technology**

- The Non-Emergency Patient Transport review report sets out plans to improve the use of technology to enhance coordination of appointments and communication to patients waiting for journeys. It will be important to consider that many patients who use patient transport may not have access or be able to use the new technology developed and therefore that alternatives will be available.