**Use of NHS Numbers**

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# Introduction

## Policy statement

The purpose of this document is to outline the requirement for the use of NHS numbers. The NHS number is a unique identifier, enabling the sharing of patient information in a safe, efficient and accurate manner between health and social care organisations. All patients registered with the NHS in England, Wales and the Isle of Man have an NHS number.

Effective patient care is heavily reliant on the information held about them. Using the NHS number helps to identify the person and reduces the risk of confusion between patients’ healthcare records. It will enable records to be kept up to date with accurate information whilst permitting the appropriate archiving and destruction of paper health records.

## Status

The organisation aims to design and implement policies and procedures that meet the diverse needs of our service and workforce, ensuring that none are placed at a disadvantage over others, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. Consideration has been given to the impact this policy might have regarding the individual protected characteristics of those to whom it applies.

This document and any procedures contained within it are non-contractual and may be modified or withdrawn at any time. For the avoidance of doubt, it does not form part of your contract of employment. Furthermore, this document applies to all employees of the organisation and other individuals performing functions in relation to the organisation such as agency workers, locums and contractors.

# Guidance

## About the NHS number

The NHS number is a unique 10-digit number developed to support patient identification. The first nine digits are the identifier and the tenth is a check digit used to confirm the number’s validity. The number will be displayed in a 3-3-4 format, e.g., 123 456 7890.

NHS numbers are managed within the Personal Demographics Service (PDS) and are valid for life, except in the cases of adoption, gender reassignment or to protect the identity of an individual.

There are multiple ways in which NHS numbers are allocated. For detailed information, see the [PDS allocation of numbers guidance](https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/personal-demographics-service-pds/).

## Use of the NHS number

The NHS number should be present in all active patient records, and the Health and Social Care (Safety and Quality) Act 2015 places a legal obligation on this organisation to share information (including the NHS number). Therefore, it is essential that the NHS number is present on all patient identifiable information, be it paper or electronic.

## Significance of the NHS number

The [benefits](https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/the-nhs-number/#purpose-of-the-nhs-number) of using the NHS number in general practice is that it will:

* Accurately link the patient to their record
* Allow patients to access their medical record via the NHS App
* Help to resolve common demographic issues such as the incorrect spelling of patient names, first and second name reversal, name changes or change of address when the patient has failed to inform their practice, etc.
* Allow care professionals to retrieve key information about patients using a consistent identifier
* Overcome any confusion within handwritten documents when the handwriting is not clear
* Enable the transfer of patient records electronically using GP2GP
* Enable referrals using the NHS e-Referral Service
* Help the Electronic Prescription Service to send electronic prescriptions from GP surgeries to pharmacies
* Identify patients in all contact with other health and social care providers
* Enable patient information to be shared safely within and across organisational boundaries
* Support research and planning
* Support interoperability and secure record sharing

## Tracing the NHS number

The PDS helps staff to identify patients and match them to their health records. The PDS is an electronic database of NHS patient demographic details, including their unique NHS numbers. Only authorised administrative staff can access the PDS database.

Patients can trace their NHS number online using [this service](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/online-services/find-nhs-number/).

## Resolving issues with NHS numbers

The [National Back Office](https://digital.nhs.uk/services/national-back-office-for-the-personal-demographics-service/management-of-nhs-numbers-and-pds-records) (NBO) for the PDS provides a national data quality service and is ultimately responsible for resolving issues with demographic records held by the PDS.

The PDS NBO can help with the management of NHS numbers including:

* NHS number allocations
* Duplicate NHS numbers
* Confused records
* Incorrect demographic data

The NBO can be contact by using the [Service Desk Portal](https://www.support.digitalservices.nhs.uk/csm) or by calling 0300 303 5035.

Additional guidance for dealing with NHS number issues can be found on the [Primary Care Support England (PCSE) website](https://pcse.england.nhs.uk/help/patient-registrations/patient-records-duplicates-and-confusions/).

# Summary

The NHS number is a unique and consistent identifier used in health and social care. It is a mechanism used for ensuring that patient records are linked to the right person, reducing risk and confusion. Staff are to ensure that all correspondence for patients at this organisation includes the correct NHS number.