

Healthwatch Hackney's position on 'self-care'

Healthwatch Hackney has drafted the following information and position statement on the concept of 'self-care'. Please give us your comments and feedback by emailing info@healthwatchhackney.co.uk or calling [020 7923 8358](tel:02079238358).

Background

1. 'Self-care' takes many forms. It means eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, socialising or treating yourself with over the counter medicines when you have a cold. NHS England and the Self-Care Forum run a self-care week every November. They define self-care as: *'Actions that individuals take for themselves, on behalf of and with others in order to develop, protect, maintain and improve their health, wellbeing or wellness'*.
2. Health and care leaders want patients to 'self-care' more to ease pressure on hospital services. They want people to have healthier life-styles to reduce the risk of them getting ill later in life and needing hospital treatment and social care support.
3. Current patient 'self-care' initiatives are driven by a need to cut costs. They are a major plank of NHS England transformation plans which seek a significant increase in 'prevention' and self-care. But 'self-care' and prevention initiatives cannot be a quick fix. Most public health officials say a radical shift of this kind will only happen over a 'generation' rather than in the next five years.
4. 'Self-care' has always been part of our health care. But in the past, the NHS has mainly focused on treating illness rather than prevention. Common sense tells us self-care and prevention is better than cure.
5. Healthwatch Hackney exists to improve local health and services by making sure residents' views are heard and acted upon. We know some residents are much better placed than others to make healthier life-style choices and embrace 'self-care'. For example, a person with mental health needs living in sub-standard temporary accommodation is likely to struggle to fund over-the-counter medicines or a monthly gym membership. Residents who rely on food banks who are 'sanctioned' by the Job Centre will also find it much harder to eat healthily.
6. Any local health policy or service change promoting self-care must address health and social inequality. Through Healthwatch Hackney's work, we know some residents find it easy to navigate and access health and care services because of their social, economic and cultural advantages. Others do not. We also know that people who struggle to navigate the system have much poorer health outcomes.
7. As the NHS and its partners move to a position of cutting budgets and expecting patients to 'do more for themselves', Healthwatch Hackney will put the case for people with differing characteristics including class, disability, gender, ethnicity,

cultural, carers status and sexual orientation, to have equal access to services and support to 'self-care'.

We have developed the following draft position statement on 'self-care' and would like your views before we submit the statement for sign off at the January Healthwatch Hackney board meeting.

Healthwatch Hackney draft position statement on 'self-care'

Healthwatch Hackney supports moves to help people take better care of their health and wellbeing.

'Self-care' means having a healthier diet, making time to exercise or being able to better understand what services and support are available.

Everyone can take more steps to be healthier. However, 'self-care' policies and services must not further disadvantage vulnerable residents nor entirely shift the burden onto patients to stay well and self-treat.

Health and social care services should identify and appropriately signpost patients and residents who need more help to adopt healthier life-styles or exercise 'self-care'.

Some people will need additional support to access opportunities to manage and improve their wellbeing.

For 'self-care' to work for everyone, it must empower residents to have equal access to 'self-care' opportunities.

'Self-care' should not mean limiting people's access to health and social care services when they need them.

'Self-care' policies must ensure *all people whatever their circumstances* can undertake self-care that works for them