

Extending legal rights to have personal health budgets and integrated personal budgets

Healthwatch Birmingham welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Health and Social Care Consultation on '*extending legal rights to have personal health budgets and integrated personal budgets*'. Our key role is to make sure that patients, the public, service users, and carers (PPSuC) are at the heart of service improvement in health and social care. In line with our role, we have focused our comments on:

- whether the proposals will improve the quality of care and lead to services that are responsive to the needs of patients and service users

We welcome the Department of Health and Social Care's plan to extend legal rights to have personal health budgets and integrated personal budgets to more groups other than only those receiving NHS continuing healthcare or children continuing care. The premise that underpins personal health budgets is good as it offers choice to people and gives them control over their life. However, the effectiveness of personal budgets depends on how they are implemented and the principles that govern their implementation. As such it is important to consider the following issues:

- Are personal budgets/direct payments better suited to conditions that are stable and predictable rather than more complex conditions where needs change regularly.
- Will direct payments offer new groups the flexibility to choose or will it limit choice;
- Will all individuals be able to successfully use personal budgets/direct payments and how will the government ensure that they still have access to much needed services such as day centres etc.
- What support will be in place to ensure that personal budgets/direct payments do not transfer burdens to individuals and their families?

In the past three months Healthwatch Birmingham has been investigating people's experiences of using direct payments and prepayments cards in Birmingham. We gathered feedback and comments from service users and professionals with experience of direct payments to find out more about their experiences. We interviewed five carers, four service users, four third-sector managers, two teams of third-sector caseworkers, and four Birmingham City Council employees who are knowledgeable about direct payments. Some of the people we spoke to were happy



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with direct payments, indicating that these are flexible and the paperwork is straightforward. Others, however, indicated that there are barriers to using direct payments as a means to increase personalisation of care. In summary, the feedback we heard about accessing and managing direct payments raised the following points:

- Many people, including service providers, have not heard about or do not understand direct payments.
- It is difficult to access social workers to obtain timely assessments and other advice.
- There is a lack of informed, shared decision-making.
- In some cases, direct payments burden families and carers with extra responsibilities.

Other concerns raised were around services that individuals accessing direct payments can pay for. For instance, those interviewed were unhappy that they could not pay for Disclosure and Barring Service checks which potentially puts the service user at risk. Others raised concerns around untimely payments which leads to the loss of good care support. Rising costs were also another issue that was raised, in particular that personal budgets are unable to cover these rising costs.

We believe that these issues need to be considered as these plans, to roll out personal budgets to new groups, take shape. Service users and their families should not find themselves topping up inadequate direct payments. Similarly, individuals need to be made aware of all the services available to them. There is also need to consider whether the nature of the condition of the different groups personal budgets are being rolled out to will impact how their ability to access services and costs over time.

Yours Sincerely,



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