

Summary on a Page: April 2010

NHS Commissioning: A Guide for the Third Sector



What is it?

The guide has been produced to help third sector organisations understand the NHS structure and commissioning environment, as well as the potential roles and opportunities for third sector organisations and social enterprises to engage with NHS commissioners and contribute to improved health and well-being services and outcomes in England.

What does it say?

The guide explains how the NHS and its commissioning environment is structured; how third sector organisations and social enterprises can engage with NHS commissioners; as well as the tendering process and NHS funding routes.

The Department of Health (DH) has overall responsibility for health and social care policy for England. Under the DH sit ten Strategic Health Authorities which link the DH and local NHS. They provide strategic leadership for the region and monitor performance of local Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). PCTs have three roles: to engage with the local population to improve health and wellbeing; to commission services across all health service sectors; and to directly provide services. Most services have traditionally been delivered by PCTs and NHS Trusts, but the diversity of providers is expanding and some services are now delivered by non-NHS providers and local authorities.

PCTs lead in tendering and placing contracts and have overall accountability for healthcare commissioning. Local authorities are responsible for commissioning social care for their population. Children's Trusts bring together all local services for children and young people. PCTs may choose to contract with a lead provider to deliver care who may then sub-contract elements of this care to other providers. As well as NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts, third sector or independent sector providers can be lead providers of care.


There are a number of mechanisms for setting national and local level priorities, for example: the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs); Local Area Agreements (LAAs); NHS performance indicators; and the Director of Public Health Report. All are useful for helping third sector organisations understand government priorities so that they can engage with commissioners; receive early notice of tendering opportunities; and influence commissioning priorities. Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) and The Compact describe how the Government already attempts to engage with the Third Sector.

Competitive procurement approaches can vary and the NHS uses different forms of contracts. There are a number of general criteria for organisations seeking to tender for the delivery of public services and the guide details resources available for supporting organisations assess these criteria.

Any implications?

- There are several actions that third sector organisations can take to engage with NHS commissioners. Essentially, you should “get to know your local commissioners” to help you shape priorities and potential services and identify joint working opportunities. Collaboration is important and joining a local network will aid regular communication with commissioners. Increasingly, commissioners value engagement with third sector organisations because it can help them to achieve competencies under World Class Commissioning objectives.
- Interestingly, the guide suggests that PCTs may still consider grant funding to support or contribute to some third sector activities.

Key links:

-  Read the full guide: [The NHS commissioning environment: A guide for organisations in the Third Sector](#)
-  Visit the [Supply2Health portal](#) to view all opportunities for clinical service provision by the NHS in England
-  Find out about current NHS priorities in [The operating framework for the NHS in England 2010/11](#)